

the masculinity studies reader



edited by
Rachel Adams
and David Savran

 **Blackwell**
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The Masculinity Studies Reader

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Introduction

Rachel Adams and David Savran

"A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man," wrote Simone de Beauvoir in the introduction to *The Second Sex*. Whereas de Beauvoir's solution to the problem of man as the implicit subject of the western intellectual tradition was to concentrate on woman, *The Masculinity Studies Reader* identifies a growing body of scholarship devoted to addressing this historical imbalance by locating men and masculinity as the explicit subjects of analysis. This collection assembles some of the most significant research on masculinity produced over the last century. Bringing together work in the humanities and social sciences, it serves as an introduction and a testament to the ways in which the analysis of masculinity has revitalized questions about gender across the disciplines. The importance of many of the following essays is evident in the frequency with which they have been cited and anthologized; others promise to become equally influential. Yet having compiled them here, we remain far from certain about what they mean, or what the future of masculinity studies will be. Unlike other relatively new fields such as postcolonial criticism, gender, lesbian/gay/queer studies, or critical race theory, there are no departments, programs, or jobs created exclusively for scholars of masculinity. At the same time, the sheer quantity of recent scholarship, course offerings, and conferences devoted to this topic suggests that its impact is too great to be ignored. Without knowing exactly what direction this burst of critical activity will take, we have attempted to select a group of essays that will represent some of the most important contributions to this diverse, interdisciplinary area of inquiry, from the classic writings of Freud and Fanon to very current research. In their historical scope, these pieces extend questions about the definition of masculinity as far back as classical Greece and medieval India. The goal of *The Masculinity Studies Reader* is not to resolve these questions, but to present them in an accessible manner intended to place some very heterogeneous perspectives in productive, critical dialogue.

Masculinity studies is a product of the major reconfiguration of academic disciplines that has taken place since the 1960s. Borders have been redrawn, new methodologies have emerged, and many of the old disciplines have been rethought and reconstituted. Because many of the fields represented in this anthology have long been dominated by men and masculinist perspectives, we believe that the critical analysis of masculinity must be distinguished not only by its subject matter, but a new self-consciousness about the theoretical and methodological assump-

tions underlying traditional disciplinary formations. For example, Carole Pateman explores the consequences of a political theory that assumes the citizen to be middle-class and male. Eve Sedgwick's queer rereading of Henry James proposes a corrective to a literary history that has been complicit in obscuring the homosexual themes within his work. And Anne Fausto-Sterling criticizes biology for forcing intersexed people to conform to a rigid system of sexual division.

Taking its lead from feminism, masculinity studies is thus dedicated to analyzing what has often seemed to be an implicit fact, that the vast majority of societies are patriarchal and that men have historically enjoyed more than their share of power, resources, and cultural authority. Focusing critical interrogation on men, patriarchy, and formations of masculinity, scholars in many disciplines have sought to denaturalize de Beauvoir's observation that "it goes without saying that he is a man," by demonstrating that masculinities are historically constructed, mutable, and contingent, and analyzing their many and widespread effects. Yet, as Bryce Traister emphasizes, these are demanding tasks. Because "masculinity has for so long stood as the transcendental anchor and guarantor of cultural authority and 'truth,' demonstrating its materiality, its 'constructedness,' requires an especially energetic rhetorical and critical insistence" (2000: 281).

Because it is so theoretically and methodologically diverse, the scholarship on masculinity is difficult to anthologize. Our selection includes work by critics who would describe themselves as scholars of masculinity, as well as pieces that have never before been considered from this perspective, such as Clifford Geertz's "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" or King-Kok Cheung's "The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" The purpose of such combinations is twofold: to represent the range of interdisciplinary scholarship about masculinity since the late 1980s, and also to contextualize those insights through the inclusion of older scholarship that is indisputably about men and masculinity, but does not frame itself explicitly in those terms. All of the essays in this book evince a certain eclecticism, even those that can most easily be pegged to a traditional field and seem most intent on using a single analytical framework. The range of essays suggests, moreover, that there is no consensus about masculinity studies' object of inquiry. Should it be a field devoted entirely to the analysis of men? Of patriarchy as an institution that affects men and women alike? Does the study of masculinity need to consider men at all? What is the role of the sexed body in the analysis of masculinity?

The organization of this volume represents our attempt to give these heterogeneous questions a thematic structure, while resisting the lure of dividing very complex work into identitarian categories such as "black masculinity," "gay masculinity," or "working-class masculinity." This choice reflects our conviction that masculinity is the product of so many complex and shifting variables that to describe them in terms of any one additive identity would inevitably be reductive. Instead, the five parts – Eroticism, Social Sciences, Representations, Empire and Modernity, and Borders – are based on what we believe to be some of the most definitive issues and approaches to the study of masculinity. These divisions are intended as helpful topical guides rather than exclusionary categories. Their organization, which includes classic essays alongside more recent scholarship, is meant to convey the fact that each of these topics has a history, one that is often

rather more lengthy than might be expected. The five brief introductory essays are intended to suggest commonalities and lines of development within each category. However, reading the essays out of order or combining them under a different organizational rubric could yield equally productive results.

Whereas the topical categories we have selected are one way of making sense of the diverse field of masculinity studies, another way to approach the present state of the scholarship would be through its multiple genealogies. The plurality of approaches to studying masculinity at present are the product of the heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting social and intellectual movements that took place during the second half of the twentieth century. Examining the relationship among these movements can provide an initial understanding of the contours of the field and the primary debates taking place within it, many of which are considered in further detail in the introductions to individual sections.

Moreover, this collection of essays bridges a faultline between scholars of masculinity in the humanities and social sciences. Whereas previous anthologies have been oriented toward one disciplinary constellation or another, *The Masculinity Studies Reader* is structured to suggest lines of continuity and rupture among different approaches. In the most general terms, the social sciences contribute rigorous empirical research and greater attention to masculine rituals, organizations, and roles within different cultures; critics in the humanities add a more nuanced understanding of the importance of cultural representations to formations of gender, often placing greater emphasis on the domain of fantasy, imagination, and the unconscious. Rather than favoring one over the other, this collection proposes that each has something to contribute to ongoing critical conversations about masculinity.

Any historical account of the field's development must commence with the ascendancy of second-wave feminism during the 1960s and the consolidation of women's studies in the academy during the next decade. However, among the many coalitions involved in second-wave feminism there was no consensus about the status of men. Some groups, such as the New York Radical Women and The Feminists, called for complete segregation of the sexes, advocating either celibacy or lesbian separatism. By contrast, the liberal feminists of NOW (National Organization for Women), urged men and women to work together towards a sex/gender system that was less oppressive for all. As it entered universities in specialized programs and as a supplement to established disciplines such as literature and sociology, women's studies laid the groundwork for many of the approaches to masculinity represented in this volume. Both a form of political praxis and a mode of analysis, feminism impelled a new generation of politically engaged critics to study the social oppression of women and their impoverished representation in literature and the arts. Subsequent feminist scholarship began the project of historical recovery by bringing attention to unrecognized female authors, artists, and powerful political agents, as well as the previously invisible histories of the ordinary women who spent their lives as mothers, wives, servants, and workers. Likewise, the initial focus of women's studies on subjects who were white and middle class diversified to include poor women, women of color, and the subaltern women of colonized and postcolonial societies. In terms of its impact on the study of masculinity, perhaps the most important development of feminist criticism was

the shift from “woman” to “gender” as a primary object of study. A term that applies to men and women alike, gender would enable scholars to approach masculinity as a social role that, like femininity, needed to be understood and interrogated.

The introduction of European continental philosophy into the humanities opened up the possibilities of even more dramatic reconsiderations of gender. Among the most influential of those philosophical perspectives was deconstruction, which proposed that the western intellectual tradition was founded on a structure of binary oppositions that, when subjected to close analysis, would inevitably break down as a result of their own internal contradictions. Words (or signs) have no inherent meaning; rather their connotations are derived in relation to other words, and those relationships are inevitably value-laden and hierarchical. The term *man* assumed significance through its pairing with its more degraded counterpart, *woman*. The “woman” of women’s studies was suddenly open to radical interrogation, as a once relatively unified subject split into multiple and often conflicting interests. Deconstruction and related variants of poststructuralist theory questioned the stability and universality of all identity categories, positing the self as a mutable and fragmented effect of subjectivity. Influenced by poststructuralist theory, feminists came to see gender as a historically contingent construction, invariably constituted in and by its performance. Bringing together poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, the influential feminist philosopher Judith Butler argued that gender was not an essence but a performance. Describing gender as performance did not mean that it was a supplemental or voluntary aspect of identity; rather, it was a set of mandatory practices imposed from birth and repeated again and again in a doomed effort to get it right. Disengaged from the body, masculinity and femininity need not correspond to the sexed categories, man and woman. For scholars such as Butler, the transvestite who was biologically male but had learned to perform as female was the paradigmatic figure for an anti-essentialist theory of gender. Judith Halberstam, in an essay included in this collection, takes a similar approach to the analysis of female masculinity by studying biological women who perform in ways typically coded as male.

But these theoretical insights about gender have provided little pragmatic guidance for actual men. In the 1970s, the revolutionary import of the feminist insurgency in the streets, the voting booth, various professional arenas, and the academy was not lost on a generation of men who had been either actively involved with or sympathetic to the New Left. While some made it clear that they had no time for feminism, many began to hearken to the warnings and demands of their feminist comrades-in-arms. During the early 1970s, some men started to argue that sexism produces negative effects on men as well as women. Marc Feigen Fasteau, for example, wrote that because “the sexual caste system” is destructive for all, “men are beginning to seriously question the price of being thought superior.” Intending his 1975 book, *The Male Machine*, as “a complement to the feminist revolution,” he hoped that it would herald “the beginning of a whole new wave of both theory and activism” (pp. xiv–xv). And a significant number of men in fact did become involved in what could be described as the first wave of the men’s movement, starting their own consciousness-raising groups, analyzing and trying to change their roles in patriarchal institutions, and endeavoring to forge non-sexist masculinities. Although this early men’s movement was primarily a

response to feminism, its political urgency was undoubtedly heightened by the emergence of the gay liberation movement at the end of the 1960s. Most of the men in the first-wave men's movement may have identified as straight, but they were deeply influenced by the diverse antihomophobic projects of gay men. In the many progressive discourses of the early 1970s that analogize the positions of women and gay men, misogyny is seen as being indissolubly linked to homophobia. By this account, patriarchal masculinities and institutions derive their power in part through the feminization of gay men and women.

During the 1970s, writings by Joseph Pleck, Marc Fasteau, and Jack Sawyer contributed to the first wave of the men's movement, which was avowedly profeminist and dedicated to personal and institutional change. In contrast, the second wave, the so-called mythopoetic men's movement that arose during the 1980s, represents, as many of its critics have argued, something of a backlash against feminism. Organized under the aegis of poet and activist Robert Bly, whose best-selling volume *Iron John* is the movement's bible, these men believed that they have been emasculated by feminism and an effeminizing culture. By retreating into the wilderness and by exercises in spiritual interrogation, they attempted to recuperate their own innate, masculine power. This movement succeeded in gaining quite a few adherents in the early 1990s and has been the subject of considerable controversy among sociologists. On the one hand, the call for a return to nature, spirituality, and male bonding compensates for pervasive feelings of emptiness and alienation among many men, sentiments that deserve serious consideration. On the other, authors such as Bly and Sam Keene replicate the discourse of early-twentieth-century wilderness movements, which advocated escape from the unwanted burdens of women, family, and social responsibilities. Michael Kimmel's book, *The Politics of Manhood*, collects many of the most important contributions to this important debate and helps frame it in terms of the history of fraternal orders, the rise of a therapeutic culture, and the changing economic position of middle-class white men since the 1970s.

At the same time that the first-wave men's movement was consolidating, scholars in a number of disciplines began to introduce the critique of patriarchal masculinities into their work. During the 1970s, essays in the social sciences by anthropologists such as Gayle Rubin, sociologists such as Joseph Pleck, and gay activist collectives such as the Third World Gay Revolution and the Gay Liberation Front, criticized patriarchal structures and analyzed oppressive masculinities from very different perspectives. While most of this scholarship was conceived within departmental boundaries (primarily anthropology, sociology, and history), it repeatedly acknowledges its debt to feminism in an attempt to politicize traditional disciplinary formations. Like the other intellectual insurgencies that arose in the wake of the 1960s (like women's or African American studies), these prototypes for what was to become masculinity studies were explicitly activist in intent. They were also the product of an identitarian politics that insisted upon the centrality and irreducibility of categories such as race, gender, and sexuality as a foundation both for activism and for the analysis of social, psychic, and cultural productions. Yet unlike the masculinity studies that emerged during the late 1980s, most of these critics implicitly or pointedly rejected psychoanalytical accounts of gender, preferring to understand sexual oppression in the context of economic and social history.

As many universities developed women's studies in the 1980s, and as feminist theory and methods permeated the disciplines, more and more men started to interrogate their own relationship to feminism. The 1987 collection of essays, *Men in Feminism*, pointedly set out to consider what men could contribute to academic feminism. And while the book reaches no consensus, it is symptomatic of the increasing concern and anxiety of many men sympathetic to feminism who were abashed by their own complicity with patriarchal institutions and somewhat envious of academic feminism's influence and prestige. The problem with men's entry into feminism, argued Tania Modleski in *Feminism without Women*, was that they threatened to reverse its accomplishments, returning the spotlight of critical attention to masculinity and male anxieties. Because the goals of feminism had not been fully realized, men needed to support the efforts of women rather than overemphasizing their own sensitivity, and highly performative renunciation of patriarchal authority. While some male scholars attempted, however problematically, to fashion themselves as feminists, others turned to the study of men as a corrective to feminism's nearly exclusive focus on women. For example, in the introduction to *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel praised women's studies while acknowledging that, as man, he felt alienated from its intellectual accomplishments. Because "American men have no history of themselves *as men*," he dedicated his work to the male audience that had largely been neglected by feminist discussions of gender.

Whereas Kimmel conceives of the study of men as distinct from, although often complementary to, feminism, there is a growing body of feminist scholarship that sees masculinity as a significant and necessary extension of its purview. One of the earliest and most important examples of convergence between the study of men and feminism was Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985). Intended as an intervention into a feminist scholarship devoted primarily to the study of women, *Between Men* shows why feminists should care about men and masculinities. It argues that in literature, relations between men have consistently been mediated by women who are treated as conduits for male homosocial desire, vehicles to ensure the heterosexual character of the erotic traffic between men. As a founding text of masculinity studies, it demonstrates that normative, heterosexual masculinities are structured by triangulating practices in which women mediate male relationships. At the same time, however, its analysis of erotic bonds between men and of the way the boundaries between the homosocial and the homosexual are policed also marks it as an inaugural text of lesbian/gay/queer studies. Ultimately, Sedgwick contends that the most important connection in the triangulated structure is not between man and woman, but between the two men who have no other way of expressing intimacies with one another.

As Sedgwick's work would suggest, much of the research on masculinity also derives from scholarship on sexuality originating within lesbian/gay/queer studies. Michel Foucault's groundbreaking 1976 volume, *The History of Sexuality*, challenged the universalizing claims of psychoanalysis and biology, arguing that the distinction between normative and dissident sexualities was culturally constructed and historically contingent. Sexual perversion was not a universal constant, but a category produced by the sciences of sexuality that arose in the nineteenth century as aspects of broader regimes of social control. In the 1980s,