



## European perspectives on men and masculinities, by Jeff Hearn and Keith Pringle with members of CROME (Critical Research on Men in Europe)

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**European perspectives on men and masculinities**, by Jeff Hearn and Keith Pringle with members of CROME (Critical Research on Men in Europe), Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 237 pp., £50.00 (hardback), ISBN-13 978-1-4039-1813-0

Over the past 20 years, academic approaches to studies of sex and gender have developed comprehensively. Insights into the performative nature of gender/s, studies of the politics of identity and the emergence of cultural geography as an intellectual home for many studies of gender in place have brought new intellectual depth to research. The ways of seeing advanced within such epistemologies undertake important academic work. They bring people and places to life and interrogate contexts that give rise to subjects of research. Research projects should also offer fresh insights into people and places and bring new life to thought. In choosing to review *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities* I committed the naive act of seeing oneself in another. I wanted to read a cultural geography book. My credentials for responding to this work, which is largely an empirical catalogue of studies on men in Europe, are not grounded in statistical acuity but in an interest in masculinity studies as a nexus between theoretical resources and the lived world. I apologise in advance for the fact that I am not a positivist and – try as I might – I am unable to love a book that does not offer contributions to socio-cultural or socio-geographical theory. This book does, however, stake out an area of empirical social research. In so doing, it also claims a field of cross-disciplinary research on men in Europe: as the data drawn together are taken from a range of academic areas. The publication of this work is a feat of logistical success and plainly attests to the influence and hard work of Jeff Hearn and Keith Pringle.

This collection has been edited and written by Hearn and Pringle, in conjunction with Critical Research on Men in Europe (CROME). CROME is a transnational network that began in 1999. It is comprised of 15 members and brings together emergent and esteemed scholars. As a model for designing and implementing social research, working in teams is critically important because it offers a broad range of skills to a given project. *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities* shows us this and also showcases the research being undertaken by CROME.

The book is an ambitious project: it surveys the positions of men and masculinities in 14 countries across Eastern, Central and Western Europe. It is structured in two parts, the first of which details the resources drawn upon in the study and is titled 'Approaches'. These resources are discussed in chapters titled Academic Research; Statistical Information; Law and Policy; and Media and Newspaper Representations. A discussion of the theoretical concepts deployed in this research would have strengthened the first half of this volume. I also feel that the employment of socio-cultural theory, rather than reference to it, would have enriched this section and offered a sense of engagement to the reader. The authors certainly cite a wealth of research, yet they do so for quantitative rather than qualitative reasons.

Part two of the book is titled 'Themes' and here the authors explore topics that recurred throughout the different approaches to studying masculinity explored in part one. These themes are: Home and Work; Social Exclusion; Violences; Health; and Configurations of Europe. While a wealth of information is presented and discussed, the reader is not encouraged to know men and masculinities in different places in particular ways, as much as they are alerted to men's existence and the conditions in which they exist. I felt rather like I was meeting half the men in Europe via speed dating, or some other kind of unnaturally hurried event. I would have appreciated a framework through which to integrate the varied and often different experiences and

living conditions of men in the nations covered. Yet rather than weaving data into overarching conceptual frames, it was presented as able to speak for itself, which it does to an extent, yet left me feeling rather unsatisfied. The final chapter in the collection, 'Configurations of Europe' was the most engaging, because it began to synthesise different perspectives and discussed contradictions and variations in the lives of men in Europe.

*European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities* speaks of a generation and a new geographical community of men. It also performs the impressive feat of bringing together an unusually broad array of academic disciplines, to consider the contemporary condition of men in Europe. Scholarship from the fields of sociology, social policy, social work, psychology, literature, media studies, ethnology, cultural studies, women's studies and gender studies is collected. This eclectic approach to research is unusual on such a scale. For this reason the work should be applauded. Yet the book does not convincingly maintain an argument as to why such an eclectic combination of research on men might be of particular value. The contribution to knowledge being made through cross-disciplinary research needs to be explicated. So too, do assumptions of the meaning of core terms deployed in the work such as 'gendering' and 'European perspectives'. Why is discussion of men's lives necessarily a discussion of gendering? What is a 'European perspective'? It is assumed that the bringing together of scholarship from across Europe constitutes a European perspective, yet the significance of this contribution to knowledge is not discussed in relation to theory. As a reader, I wanted statements in which the presence of the community being spoken for is conjured; moments where the men of Europe are made real. Qualifying discussion that explains why the authors chose not to build the book around an overall argument would also strengthen the work. In spite of these suggestions, I am sure that many scholars will find this text is a useful resource.

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**Girls in a goldfish bowl: moral regulation, ritual and the use of power amongst inner city girls**, by Rosalyn George, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2007, xxi + 155 pp., US\$39 (paperback), ISBN 978-90-8790

As an educator whose research focuses on social identities of students in urban schools and how interactions between teachers and students co-construct these identities, I was immediately taken by *Girls in a Goldfish Bowl*. This book builds upon examinations of girls' friendship groups and social networks and how peer relationships shape schooling experiences. George's work helps us better understand how friendship groups are organised, how the backgrounds and personalities of group members relate to the quality of relationships within the group, and the particular rules that enforce membership amongst multi-racial/ethnic pre-adolescent girls who attend schools in Greater London. The longitudinal nature of the study elucidated new and shifting relationships due to the way girls' experiences were documented as they transitioned from primary to secondary school.