

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews 421

narrative and “learn whether sporting masculinities are as coherent as they seem to be in the literature, where they are often lumped together under the undifferentiated category of dominant or hegemonic masculinity” (p. 104).

Russell Field
University of Manitoba

ATKINSON, Michael – *Deconstructing Men & Masculinities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. 238.

Feminist scholars often point out that although men as a group tend to be dominant, men as individuals tend towards insecurity and crisis. The masculinities literature calls this a “paradox of masculinity” and argues that the social category masculinity itself is crisis filled. Since the 1980s, the literature has primarily been guided by R.W. Connell’s concept “hegemonic masculinity” that argues the socially ideal version of manhood that men are encouraged to strive for is largely impossible to achieve and attempts come with tremendous costs and usually fall short. Hence, the paradox and crisis that so many men experience. Recent years have seen challenges to the tradition inspired by Connell. *Deconstructing Men & Masculinities* by sport sociologist Michael Atkinson offers a postmodern-cultural studies perspective on masculinity crisis. Atkinson’s central argument is that the conditions of late modernity break down certainties of the past, such as the narrative of patriarchal privilege, which forces men to construct new ways of being a man in institutional spaces and social relations. A lack of certainty in old forms of patriarchy triggers crisis filled reactions to contemporary conditions. Some men, Atkinson finds, react to the new conditions by retrenching in older traditions of manhood while other men “discover innovative ways to reframe their bodies/selves as socially powerful in newly masculine manners” (p. 5). Atkinson calls this “pastiche hegemony” to signify how the new ideal is based on a creative bricolage that is responsive to changes in contemporary culture, gender relations, new social movements, the workplace, and neoliberal capitalism in order to reproduce masculine privilege. Although crisis is Atkinson’s central analytical category, he remains ambivalent about the claim that masculinity is in crisis since it “is one of perception, and not an objective, unchanging reality that has altered the life histories and experiences of all Canadian men” (p. 12). The bulk of the book is then organized around case studies that explore how different Canadian men respond to and negotiate the crisis filled conditions of late modernity. The case studies look at backyard wrestling, laddism, bugchasing, ultra-endurance running, straightedge culture, übersexuality, sport subcultures, hosers, and transhumanism. The book thus provides a kaleidoscopic view of contemporary (mostly youthful) Canadian masculinities.

Without a doubt, *Deconstructing Men & Masculinities* is an ambitious statement on contemporary Canadian masculinities and the masculinities literature. Atkinson’s pastiche hegemony has many potentially valuable insights to offer the literature. Unfortunately, the book falls short of its potential. Minor problems include typographical errors, citations missing from the bibliography, and an incorrect URL (p. 163). Others are more significant, such as when Atkinson locates the philosophical origins of libertarianism

in “seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *American* thinkers such as John Locke, David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine” (p. 191, emphasis added). A more serious concern is when Atkinson makes poorly supported claims, such as “the preponderance of evidence suggests that the salience of class in late-modern societies is declining, and that many of the more developed countries can no longer be considered class societies” (p. 167). Given the reality of wage-suppression since the 1970s, the end of the family-wage that underwrote “traditional patriarchy”, the movement of wealth upwards during neoliberal capitalism, and the importance of omnivore consumption patterns in high status lifestyles, these are large claims. However, Atkinson never provides clear, documented evidence for the declining significance of class in late modernity.

It is curious that Atkinson denies the salience of class in embodied masculine identities given that chapter’s focus on “hoser” masculinity. The hoser, Atkinson argues, is a “truly and uniquely Canadian” version of masculinity unaffected by late modernity, he “is the last bastion of traditional working-class and lower middle class masculinity” (p. 169). A discussion of the popular television show *Trailer Park Boys* (2002-2009) allows Atkinson to argue that the organization of late modernity marginalizes (i.e. affects) working class men (p. 178), which is in fact a class analysis! These working class slobs are represented as such degenerates that Atkinson argues they signify “biologically inferior men” (p. 179) who cannot be incorporated in contemporary society and deserve the punishment they receive. Moreover, the hoser appears, from Atkinson discussion, to be a signifier for working class *whiteness*. Atkinson incorporates a discussion of whiteness in his *final* chapter on “transhumanism”, a “middle- and upper-class movement” (p. 194), but not hosers. By only racializing transhumanists and not hosers, Atkinson ends up reifying a central binary of North American racial ideology: whites are affluent and racial minorities are poor. The binary constructs poor whites as racial freaks that provide the affluent whites who perform “pastiche hegemony” a sense of superiority when watching freak shows like *Trailer Park Boys*.

Lastly, like many other contemporary masculinities scholars, Atkinson is critical of hegemonic masculinity. However, he paints a fairly simplistic and out-of-date image of the hegemonic masculinity literature that overlooks many of its developments. More importantly, he bases his critique on a false representation of the literature and a misuse of sources. Atkinson argues that masculinities scholars in sociology, political science, history, and gender studies reduce masculinity crisis down to “material/economic power” that he finds “lazy” (p. 24). He follows that statement by claiming: “To Johnson (2001), Gordlick-Jones (2002), and Hearn (1999), the masculinity crisis is easily understood, articulated, or negated outright on a starkly socio-economic basis” (p. 24). I could not find the Gordlick-Jones reference in the bibliography or on the Internet. The Jeff Hearn reference was a brief article from a defunct newsletter that cannot be attained through inter-library loan. Fortunately, Hearn was able to retrieve a copy of the article from the newsletter’s editor. A review of Johnson and Hearn’s articles found that neither makes the claims attributed to them. Certainly, there is no one frame through which gendered power should be theorized. But if Atkinson eschews an economic basis to gendered power, he needs to clearly delineate another basis other than the situated performances of some men. So despite the active language of “performance”, masculine power becomes an individualized and ultimately passive reaction to external conditions. *Deconstructing Men & Masculinities* is a book

with tremendous potential from a highly respected scholar, but it unfortunately appears to have prematurely gone to press.

Jeffrey Montez de Oca
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

AZOULAY, Dan – *Hearts and Minds: Canadian Romance at the Dawn of the Modern Era, 1900-1930*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011. Pp. ix, 289.

In his ambitious book, *Hearts and Minds: Canadian Romance at the Dawn of the Modern Era*, Dan Azoulay seeks to understand the romantic desires and experiences of ordinary Canadians at the dawn of the modern era. He asserts that there has been limited exploration of the history of heterosexual romance in Canada, in part because the sources for such studies are both rare – personal diaries and correspondence – and “skewed toward the elite . . . literate and well known individuals whose writings were more likely to be preserved for posterity” (p. 3). To fill this lacuna and to de-centre the elite, Azoulay uses as his primary source material “magnificent collections of letters” (p. 9), correspondence and advice columns from *Western Home Monthly* and the *Family Herald and Weekly Star*, Winnipeg and Montreal-based magazines, respectively, with extensive distribution (p. 1 and p. 9). Azoulay makes excellent use of these sources to bring us new insights into the romantic desires and tribulations of men and women of this era but, not surprisingly, his book cannot provide definitive answers to our questions about romance in the past. Nor does it fully overcome the biases of previous works on romance. As Azoulay himself admits, the men and women who made use of correspondence and advice columns were literate and English-speaking, with the money and time necessary for reading magazines and writing to either seek companionship or guidance on romance (pp. 11-12).

In his first two chapters Azoulay uses the personal columns, an “inexpensive and easily accessible method of finding a mate” (p. 10) to determine what characteristics men and women wanted in life-partners (and advertised when describing themselves). He asserts that men were very clear “about the qualities they wanted in a wife” (p. 21). First and foremost, they sought women “with the skills and dedication required to run a household: to cook, clean, sew and care for children” (p. 22). Men looked for women who were “modest or reserved” (p. 29), expressed desire for “cultured companionship” (p. 35) and opposed “vanity and superficiality” in their mates (p. 43). Azoulay asserts that it is “less clear what Canadian maidens wanted” in their romantic and marital partners. In part, this is because the modesty demanded of women required them to be less direct in stating their preferences in correspondence. It is clear, however, that women wanted men who were “industrious” and willing to work (p. 54), who would “abstain from certain vices, especially alcohol” (p. 61), who were neat and well-groomed (p. 66) and “kind and considerate” (p. 69). While Azoulay briefly refers to the notion that the husband was “head” of the house, he does little to connect this issue to women’s emphasis on industriousness, temperance and kindness. Women were clear that they did not want to be mere “household drudges”, but they must also have feared the potential violence and desertion of men. These issues deserve more contextualization.