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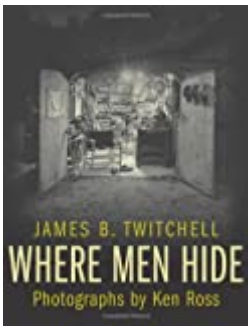

James B. Twitchell. *Where Men Hide.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 248 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-13734-8.

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Incredible Shrinking Male Habitats

Many anthropologists believe that men have always and actively sought the companionship of other men as well as places where they can express masculine solidarity. But as James Twitchell, professor of English and advertising at the University of Florida, wryly suggests in his latest book, *Where Men Hide*, the twenty-first century male–and in particular, the twenty-first century *American* male–is lonely, his impulse to "tribalize" with other men quashed by the demands of modern life. Not only are males–particularly young ones–difficult to find; the spaces they might be expected to inhabit have become progressively emptier. And so Twitchell asks the question: where have all the men and all-male spaces gone?

He works his way to an answer by seeking out former strongholds of masculinity so cherished by earlier generations of men: deer camps, boxing rings, fraternal lodges, hobby rooms and basements, garages, strip clubs, barbershops, and even megachurches to name just a few. And, bucking the very trend he studies, Twitchell does so in the company of another man: distinguished photographer Ken Ross. Together, the two men pay wistful homage to these "man caves," the one through witty description and analysis and the other through probing documentary-style photographs. As the latter's images reveal spaces ominously devoid of the men who inhabit(ed) them, the recording medium–120 mm black-and-white film–heightens the nostalgia that permeates the book as a whole. It is as though the viewer is looking at what is (becoming) outdated, but is also rapidly fading from American cultural consciousness as well.

The conversational tone and casual style that characterize this lively book both belie the fact that *Where Men Hide* is a well-researched study that draws not only from mainstream popular culture and the writer's own personal experiences, but also anthropology, sociology, history and literature. Indeed, the argument Twitchell presents in this text is based in the ideas of Robert Putnam, professor of public policy at Harvard, who, in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), suggests that the breakdown of human connectedness is the result of over-reliance on machines: cars, televisions, and especially interactive electronic devices such as computers and videogames. Communication may exist; but it is achieved through mediating in-

struments rather than face-to-face interaction. Twitchell takes Putnam's idea one step further by using it to define a gender rather than a cultural situation. He posits that the same instruments that have given rise to modern "loneliness and anxiety" (pp. 20-21) have also caused the disappearance of traditional male clusterings and the sporadic appearance of (somewhat suspect) "New Age" ones that celebrate supposedly primitive rituals of brotherhood and bonding.

As Twitchell examines the places where men congregate, he also addresses questions of how and why they also hide from interpersonal interactions. He suggests that to varying degrees and at different times, all men–and especially the American men so central to his study–demonstrate a desire or need to "[head] for the hills, [go] off to the frontier, down to the cellar or out to the golf course when the pressure [is] on" (p. 237). He offers the real-life examples of ex-Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, who built an underground hideout to escape the American authorities who sought him, and writer Henry David Thoreau, who voluntarily went to live the simple life in a tiny cabin deep in the Massachusetts woods. Twitchell asserts that part of this behavior stems from a need–which he believes exists in men as well as women–to mark off territory and define "edges of the self" (p. 236). Where men are concerned, though, the behavior may have roots in a Huck Finn-esque desire to get away from the "territorial ways of women" (p. 237): hence, part of the reason behind why males disappear into nature to hunt or fish; or retreat into a workroom or bar to be alone or fraternize with other men; or climb into reclining chairs to "hide" behind a newspaper.

More likely however, the apparent masculine need to escape various kinds of interpersonal situations more arises from deep-seated social anxiety. Males in their post-adolescent years are "forever on the edgeâ¦. They have not learned the rituals of easy conviviality, of belongingâ¦. Their sexuality is aggressive and often the cause of exile" (p. 14). As a result, when no established all-male group with its own set of codified behaviors exists, men seeking the company of other men tend to find it very difficult to connect with one another. Men need a pretext to be with other men. Speaking from his own experience, Twitchell ruefully observes that "[w]e [men] are confused â¦ about what to do" (p. 14). Women, he observes, do not seem to have the same problem. Anything can be a reason for a barely organized–but usually very successful–all-female gathering. Because of how they have been socialized, men need certain kinds of rituals and social structures that women do not to bond with each other.

While male interest in male-only groups has steadily declined over the last 40 years, Twitchell, along with Rutgers anthropologist Lionel Tiger,[1] believes that male interest in the "courting" of other males for "security and advancement" (p. 21) has remained consistent. Like their prehistoric ancestors who bonded with one another to survive a hostile natural environment, modern men bond with each other to help ensure their own (social and economic) survival in an insecure world. And while they may desire danger to help them define their individual manhood, that same drive causes them to seek each other out and bond despite aggressive impulses they may have towards each other.

Although the thesis of *Where Men Hide* is intriguing, it is also one that relies a great deal on an unproblematized view of male and female groupings. The males at the heart of his study–for example, those who might join the all-male Skull and Crossbones Society at Yale or a fraternal lodge like the Masons; or those who own houses and have enough leisure time to "hide" in home garages and workshops–are implicitly white and/or middle class. Twitchell's tendency to generalize populations is also evident in the "anecdotal evidence" (p. 16) he offers about women, specifically their ability to bond easily and intensely with one another over anything from books to *Sex and the City*. He ignores the fact that female bonding, like male bonding, is also inflected by race and class and reveals that his argument rests on a rather simplistic concept of gender. His assertions further suggest that he believes technology has affected male-male relationships while leaving female-female ones relatively untouched: they also contradict the basic premise–that technology has caused disconnection in all human relationships–from which he works.

With regard to the role played by females in the slow death of male-defined spaces, Twitchell argues that women–and more specifically, the women's movement–are unfairly made to take responsibility for that demise. At the same time, he does admit to the possibility that "the ramifications of the women's movement and the increasingly child-centered world of the late twentieth century have scared the hell out of many men" (p. 22). Those "ramifications"–which have played out in politics and law (e.g., in Title IX, which disallows exclusion in groups that receive government funding) as well as in the economic sphere where men and women actively compete against each other in the job market–have resulted in a gradual redistribution of roles and spaces or in "what's

mine and what's yours" (p. 239). But feminists and feminism have not caused the waning of in all-male groups; rather, it is *social change itself*. As Twitchell sees it, the women's movement is just one facet of a larger global one that effaces difference through the homogenizing forces of transnational consumer culture.

If men can no longer count on certain spaces being exclusively, then, it is not just simply because law or changing social attitudes and practices have altered–or in some cases, erased–the boundaries of the sexual landscape and the "territories" inhering in them. It is because consumerism has also helped blur the boundaries of (gendered) spaces. Thus, the home workshops formerly inhabited by men and that are now the haunts of many women have partially come because of women's increased buying power and the fact that advertisers now target them as well as men. And commercial spaces once dominated by women shoppers have increasingly become the domain of so-called metrosexuals–men concerned with "feminine" issues such as hair color, weight, clothing styles, etc. Perhaps, as Twitchell suggests, men are coming out of hiding to buy personas they can put on or take off at will. Rather than going to the lodge or club to do wear the attire they cannot wear in their work-a-day lives, they can indulge their fantasies more openly without feeling the same kinds of social pressure earlier generations of men did to keep different parts of their lives and identities separate.

With the merging and transformation of spaces at the personal, national, and transnational levels comes an apparent decrease in privileged space: "Mars has shrunk" (p. 241), Twitchell declares. However binary and at times oversimplified, the thinking that underlies this book brings to light what such "shrinkage" has left in its provocative wake: that is, traces of worlds, subcultures and rituals too long ignored and too little discussed.

Note

[1]. Lionel Tiger discusses the role and function of male homosocial bonding in two of his studies, *Men in Groups* (London: Nelson, 1969) and *The Decline of Males: The First Look at an Unexpected New World for Men and Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).