

Christine Ramsay. *Making It Like a Man: Canadian Masculinities in Practice.* Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011. Illustrations. xxx + 341 pp. \$42.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55458-327-0.



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Published on H-Canada (May, 2012)

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I am beginning to feel that it just might be impossible to open a popular magazine, such as *Macleans*, or newspaper in Canada without confronting a headline about the latest "trouble" with men.[1] In fact, just this past weekend, in one of our own national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail*, a popular columnist posed the question—"What If Women Don't Need Guys Any More?"[2] This article—which draws on the "masculinity in crisis" rhetoric and alleges that women are now winning the gender war—has helped fuel contemporary anxieties over what it means to be a man in contemporary Canadian society. Unfortunately, situated in our postindustrial, neoliberal era, the most common response to current anxieties over the state of Canadian manhood has been to adopt a defensive posture fueled largely by an increasingly powerful neoconservative antifeminist backlash discourse which has made consistent the allegation that men (and boys) are now the "new second sex." The problem, in part, is that this historically *durable* and *persistent*—not to mention nefarious—discourse rests on outdated essentialized understandings of gender which work against the aims and goals of gender justice.[3] Fortunately, Christine Ramsay's newly edited collection, *Making It Like a Man*, which is a sophisticated researched-based exploration of gender in general and

of men and masculinities in particular, offers a much-needed corrective to this powerful and problematic discourse.

Building on several decades' worth of research on men and masculinities, *Making It Like a Man* is a collection of essays on the practice and representation of masculinities found in Canadian arts and cultures. Informed by key analytical insights found in the influential works of well-known scholars, such as sociologist Raewyn Connell (*Masculinities* [1995] and *Gender* [2009]), philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [1999] and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* [1993]), and historians Michael Roper and John Tosh (coedited collection *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* [1991]), the chapters are grounded in critical sociological, feminist, pro-feminist, queer, postcolonial, and antiracist theories. Each essay is based on original research (chapter 14 is a reprint), which explores and interrogates masculinity as it is performed and represented in various contexts through various mediums. The fifteen essays are divided into five sections: "Identity, Agency, and Manliness in the Colonial and the National"; "Emotional Geographies of Anxiety, Eros, and Impairment"; "The Minority Male"; "Capitalized, Corporatized, Compromised

Men; and "Abject Masculinities." The essays analyze various and diverse figures across Canada's arts scene. The figures include filmmakers Norma Bailey and John N. Smith; and visual artists Jeff Nachtigall, Derek Dunlop, and Blair Brennan. Some chapters also feature critiques of work produced by well-known Canadian writers, such as Barbara Gowdy, Thomas King, and Douglas Coupland.

This edited collection provides much in terms of discussion about gender and gender relations for everyone. In many cases, the chapters are very provocative. For example, take the essay penned by David Garneau, an associate professor of visual arts at the University of Regina. His chapter—"Making Art Like a Man!"—examines a number of works created by various Canadian artists who have used visual imagery to explore the complex, contradictory, and often competing meanings of manhood. In my own reading, one image from his chapter stands out; that is, the one based on Walter May's remarkable exhibit *Knockout*. May's exhibit (captured in a color image found on page 56) showed 105 scorched hammers lined up one after the other and hung by their claws on a two-by-four wooden beam, set high on a gallery wall. Here is Garneau describing and reflecting on May's exhibit: "The worn steel heads face forward: the handles hang in various lengths. Flames have blackened the wooden handles. Some are scorched: others are deeply charred, twisted, and broken. The phallic queue evokes the experience of being measured and compared. These metaphoric tools appear exposed, humiliated, they have endured trial by fire. They remind me of men in a lineup: worn out soldiers, prisoners, athletes? Are they waiting to be chosen, for a firing squad, for employment? The title [*Knockout*] suggests a violent contest in which, one by one, combatants are eliminated" (p. 56). Some inspiring heady stuff. In fact, after reading Garneau's essay and reflecting on the image drawn from May's exhibit, I was excited thinking about how students in my graduate class, which explores issues of gender, would take up and engage with such a complicated text. As far as developing productive pedagogies for postsecondary classrooms, this text will be useful; the visual imagery and the accompanying critical analysis found in *Making It Like a Man* will generate some rich and thoughtful conversation about gender and gender identity among and between students and educators.

Taken together, these essays contain and explore shared themes on men and masculinity that interrupt, disrupt, and trouble popular "normalizing" discourses, which tend to "lump" all men together. In a critical sense, *Making It Like a Man* demolishes the view that

gender is an outcome of biology or a manifestation of inner essences by showing that to "make it like a man" is not only about how the intersection of complex factors, such as race, social class, ability, and sexuality, shape men's gender identities in complex ways, but also how masculinity is situated in specific cultural and historical discourses. In this sense, the text does highly productive work by providing research-based knowledges and critical analytical insights into the practices and diverse representations of men that have not often been heard within the context of current debates over the "crisis of masculinity." In short, on a professional and personal level, I found this book to be rich in analysis and highly engaging, as a historian and an educator.

To conclude, using a multidisciplinary approach which includes drawing broadly from the arts, humanities, and the social sciences, this edited collection is on a timely theme and makes an important contribution to the growing body of work on Canadian men and masculinities. Certainly, Ramsay's edited volume will help students, educators, and others develop a more nuanced, sophisticated, and complex understanding of gender relations in general and of the politics of men and masculinities in particular. In my view, one key way this text works to help readers develop a richer, deeper, and more complex understanding of masculinity is found in the way the chapters work together to encourage readers to resist the "impulse to normalize" gender. This text just might help men (and boys) lead more rich and just lives by helping readers of all sorts and backgrounds adopt research-based knowledges, which show the impact and constraints imposed by dominant heteronormative understandings about what it means to be "a man." At this crucial moment, when a recuperative backlash masculinity politics, which aims to restore traditional notions of masculinity in men and boys, has gained some ascendancy, there is little doubt this edited collection will be highly useful to students and academics, or anyone who is interested in gender and in the broader aims of gender justice.

Notes

[1]. Cathy Guilli, "The Richer Sex," *Maclean's*, March 12, 2012, 48-51. See also, John Intini, "Are We Raising Our Boys to Be Underachieving Men?" *Maclean's*, October 15, 2010, 66-71; Hanna Rosin, "The End of Men: How Women Are Taking Control Of Everything," *Atlantic*, July/August 2010, 56-73; Donna Nebenzahl, "Boys Struggling to Find Their Way," *Vancouver Sun*, June 18, 2011, B2; and April Lewis, "Time for Men to Embrace

New Gender Roles,â *Peach Arch News* (British Columbia),
March 28, 2011, 1.

[2]. Margaret Wenté, âWhat If Women Donât Need
Guys Any More?â *Globe and Mail*, March 24, 2012, F9.

[3]. See Christopher J. Greig and Wayne Martino,
eds., *Canadian Men and Masculinities: Historical and
Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: Canadian Scholarsâ
Press), in press.

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Citation: Christopher Greig. Review of Ramsay, Christine, *Making It Like a Man: Canadian Masculinities in Practice*.
H-Canada, H-Net Reviews. May, 2012.

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