

# Men and Masculinities

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**Book Review: William Marsiglio : Men on a Mission: Valuing Youth Work in Our Communities. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008. 394 pp. \$30.00**

Carl F. Auerbach

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all within the same text. David Kaczynski shares his feelings about being the brother of the infamous “Unabomber” in *Missing Parts*, ultimately suggesting that what constitutes the relationship between brothers is not necessarily restricted to the sharing of blood ties. In contrast, *Secrets and Bones* is Mikal Gilmore’s story of reunion with his estranged brother and the realization he has about the importance of those blood ties. Ethan Canin’s *American Beauty* explores his family’s seemingly dysfunctional relations and the self-assured attempt of his brother to undermine the very foundation upon which Ethan based his sense of self, while revealing the darker aspect of his own self in the process. *Doing Time* delves into the emotional toll of having a brother in jail, while almost cautiously allowing John Edgar Wideman to appreciate the transformation that his brother has undergone in this place. *You Can’t Kill the Rooster* is David Sedaris’ way of looking at the attractive nature of difference and the curious yet unquestionable bond it has created between a father and a son. Geoffrey Wolff’s *Heavy Lifting* and Tobias Wolff’s *A Brother’s Story* consider the lengths to which one brother can go to protect another, for no apparent reason other than the ties that bind family together. In addition, both James Hurst’s *The Scarlet Ibis* and Gregory Orr’s *The Accident* are attempts to deal with the guilt and pain associated with the loss of a brother, where the finger of blame has been pointed squarely at themselves.

As previously noted, it would be unfair to say that these are the only stories in this collection worthy of mention. In fact, one of the strengths of this collection is the dynamic and unresolved tension that exists not only between the “characters” in these stories but between the stories themselves. It quickly becomes clear that there is no universal meaning for the word “brother,” nor does there seem to be a nice, neat way to deal with the bundle of emotions that brotherhood can force one to engage with. The relationship that we have with our brothers—whether we share blood relations with them or not—is active in shaping our sense of self and plays an active role in how we place ourselves in the world around us. It is a relationship that can be painful as often as it is full of love—and it is a relationship that the collection of stories that makes up *Brothers* attempts to grapple with in a meaningful and poignant way.

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William Marsiglio

*Men on a Mission: Valuing Youth Work in Our Communities*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008. 394 pp. \$30.00.

**Reviewed by:** Carl F. Auerbach, *Bronx, New York*

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*Men on a Mission* is an inspiring book and an important one. It is a study of men who take it as their mission to nurture and mentor the next generation, helping them to navigate the difficult passage from youth to adulthood. My goal in this review is

to highlight some of the its major themes and the lessons it offers for those of us concerned with human development, masculinity, and social policy.

*Men on a Mission* is the story of men as mentors. It is about men such as Derek who by the age of thirteen had been shot, stabbed, watched his best friend die, and was on his way to prison or death at an early age. Were it not for the intervention of a teacher who believed in him, Derek might be dead now. Instead, he is a police officer and a youth intervention specialist, working with adolescents like his younger adolescent self, hoping to give to the next generation what was given to him.

The men are a diverse group ranging in age from nineteen to sixty-five and in educational level from high school to graduate school. Some are married, some are single, most are straight, but some are gay, and they are ethnically diverse as well. For some, it is a full-time job, for others an avocation. They work with the Boy Scouts, in or little league; they are members of Big Brothers or church organizations dedicated to service. What unifies them is not their demographics but rather that they share the same mission, to mentor the next generation.

The mentoring movement is a response to the conditions created at the beginning of the twentieth century by the social forces of urbanization and industrialization. It was during this period that the United States made the difficult and complex transition from a primarily rural and agricultural society to the urban and industrial one that it is today. In agricultural societies, there was no need to create opportunities for men to relate to boys. Because men lived where they worked, contact happened naturally and organically—on the farm, as part of the apprentice system, or as a regular part of village life. However, when men left the farm and went to work in factories or offices, this system became a thing of the past.

The situation became even worse when the changing nature of work impoverished the inner cities. Families became more fragile and fragmented, and many boys were raised in mother-headed households. Neighborhoods lost their coherence, as the “old heads” who might have mentored the younger generation were displaced by the “new heads” who earned their living by criminal activities.

The mentoring movement is an attempt to reconnect men with boys (and with girls, too, although this movement is somewhat more recent).

Why do men want to be mentors? In part, because they want a more meaningful life, to move beyond gratifying their immediate needs, and connect with the larger society. Marsiglio uses Ericson’s term “generativity” for this need. In addition, many of the men had a more personal motive. When they were young themselves, they received help and support from an older mentor, and they want to give something back by passing on what they had learned to the next generation.

Mentoring challenged the men in many ways, both personally and socially. They had to learn to listen and to pay attention to the feelings of the young people they worked with. They had to look beyond the surface bravado, anger, and withdrawal to the deeper hurts and vulnerabilities. In addition, they had to get down to the kid’s level. In some cases, this was physical—sitting on the floor so as to be at eye level with young children or wrestling with preteens on the football field. In other cases,

the movement was psychological—taking seriously the small concerns that are a child’s life or listening to rap music at the age of sixty years. Equally challenging to traditional masculinity is having to experience the loss of status from work that is low paying and time-consuming, often regarded as “women’s work.”

However, with these challenges came rewards; in helping the boys grow, the men grew themselves. As they came to matter to someone and make a difference in someone’s life, their sense of their own value increased. They acquired the valuable relational skills of listening and of being sensitive to emotion, which allowed them to function better in other areas of their lives. In addition, particularly interesting, in teaching the boys positive values, they developed and reinforced their own values, such as the man who stopped hanging out in clubs where he would not want his protégées to hang out.

Marsiglio’s work has broader implications for the study of human development in general and for men and masculinity in particular. In analyzing the men’s stories, Marsiglio used a life-course perspective on human development. Rather than describe how the mentors fixed the boys’ specific problems, he analyzed how the entire developmental trajectory was transformed from positive to negative. Another important feature of his analysis is that it showed how the men and the boys’ lives mutually influenced each other, so that the intersection of the mentor’s and the mentee’s lives benefited each of them. Both these ideas are particularly valuable as we think about individual lives and social policy.

A final important idea, particularly relevant to this journal, is that mentoring can be a way of being a man. The male role need not consist of continually striving to earn more money, or competing to be the best at something, or climbing ever higher in the status hierarchy. It can be as simple as working to nurture the next generation. This idea constitutes a challenge to traditional masculinity, and it is a worthwhile challenge.

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Adrian Howe Abingdon

*Sex, Violence and Crime: Foucault and the ‘Man’ Question*. Routledge-Cavendish.

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**Reviewed by:** Malcolm Cowburn, *Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield*

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This is a critical, passionate, and committed book that takes issue with the invisibility—or as the author would prefer “erasure” of men—from criminological and public policy discourse in relation to sexual violence. It is part of a well-established critical intellectual tradition that has highlighted the *gendered* nature of much interpersonal violence (e.g., Brownmiller 1975; Kelly 1988; Messerschmidt 1993; Hearn 1998; Gavey 2005).

Using the work of Foucault and Gramsci as key theoretical guides, Howe problematizes the manner in which criminology constructs sex crimes and people who sexually harm others in a way that ignores that it is mostly men who perpetrate acts