



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2015; 1(7): 395-396  
www.allresearchjournal.com  
Received: 20-04-2015  
Accepted: 23-05-2015

**Tanmoy Baghira**  
Research Scholar,  
Department of English,  
University of Kalyani &  
Assistant Professor in English,  
BCARE Institute of  
Management and Technology.

**Book review: *Masculinities in theory: An introduction*,  
by Todd W. Reeser. Chichester Malden, MA: Wiley-  
Blackwell, 2010. 238 pp. \$107.95 hardcover. ISBN:  
978-1-4051-6859-5 \$40.95 paper. ISBN: 978 -1-4051-  
6860-1**

**Tanmoy Baghira**

Todd W. Reeser, the author of *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* is an Associate Professor of French and Gender Studies at the University of Pittsburg. He has published books and journals on gender and sexuality in Renaissance literature, critical theory, and French film. In the introductory section of his book *Masculinities in Theory* Reeser has tried to give a comprehensive account why masculinity, which is so 'obvious', should be studied at all. In the later part of the introductory section he clarified the construction of the so called obviousness of masculinity. Drawing from Roland Barthes' *Elements of Semiology* Reeser points out how "the unmarked term is not simply and purely absence of meaning, but what he calls 'a significant absence.' Precisely because a term is unmarked, its silence speaks". (Reeser, 9) By studying the cross-cultural and cross temporal differences of masculinities the author has tried to put forward his conception of ever changing, unfixed and unstable nature of the construction of masculinity. The goal of this book as Reeser points out is, "to discuss how masculinity can be conceived, how it can be theorized, and how it can be studied". (Reeser, 4) The author puts forward his post-structuralist notion with language to deconstruct the signs. Post-structuralism does not believe in the metaphysics of substance or ontology for any given sign. Therefore, the author conceptualizes masculinity as unfixed, unstable and ever changing in nature. At the same time discussing masculinity from the cultural viewpoint the book tries to bring out the "tension and contradiction inherent in masculinity". (Reeser, 11) This book has been subdivided in several sections like Introduction: The Study of Masculinity; Theorizing Masculinity; Social Masculinity and Triangulation; Sexing Masculinity; Theorizing the Male Body; Masculinity in Disguise; Non-Male Masculinities; Masculinity and Racialized Subjectivities; Masculinity and the Nation; Interracial Masculinities and Unstable Time: Masculinity in History which individually discuss several theoretical, cultural and sociological traits of masculinity. This book tries to offers a clear, precise, and comprehensive introduction in the field of Masculinity Studies as well as Gender Studies. In the first chapter the book deals with the ideological as well as the sociological construction of masculinity. It focuses on the complex ideological process of the construction of masculinity in society, in language, in discourses, in images, in myths, and in mass media that it becomes 'obvious', 'naturalized' and 'unquestionable'. In the chapter Social Masculinity and Triangulation Reeser effectively deals with what Sedgwick calls "homosocial" desire. With reference to various literary evidences the author brings forth the issues of triangulation in Shakespeare's *Othello* (1622), Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Truffaut's film about a love triangle *Jules and Jim* (1962). The issues of homosociality, homosexuality and heteronormativity have been dealt critically with references to Eve Sedgwick's book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. In the later part Reeser has deconstructed the sex/gender/desire teleology. With reference to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, he has located the

**Correspondence:**  
**Tanmoy Baghira**  
Research Scholar,  
Department of English,  
University of Kalyani &  
Assistant Professor in English,  
BCARE Institute of  
Management and Technology.

patriarchal construction of desire by deconstructing the performativity of gender. Reeser opposes the binary oppositions intended to understand masculinity alongside femininity. Being a post-structuralist theorist Reeser destabilizes the traditional concept of masculinity by detaching it from male body. With reference to Judith Halberstam's ground-breaking work *Female Masculinity* (1998) Reeser points out the arbitrary relation of masculinity with male body. Thus Reeser points out,

Female masculinity may contribute to a larger cultural anxiety about what a woman is or should be, or it may evoke a threat that men will lose their supposedly natural hold on masculinity if women do not take flak for breaking out of their assigned gender. Negative responses to women who exhibit masculinity help insure men's domination over masculinity, making them its sole purveyor. (p.132)

This discussion, therefore, provides a broader understanding of masculinity in various non-male categories like female, queer, gay or lesbian. When masculinity is discussed solely in reference to sex it rejects the notion of the performativity of gender role in society. The author explains when masculinity is discussed in opposition to its relation with femininity; the patriarchal ideological construction of masculinity further reinforces itself.

In his book Reeser with reference to Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* puts forth Foucault's notion of social construction of body. He further examines how society controls, modifies and polices bodies for the sake of capitalism and patriarchy. With reference to R. W. Connell's book *Masculinities* Reeser refers to the "four 'patterns of masculinity in the current Western gender order': hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization." (Reeser, 14) but unlike Connell Reeser hardly ever tries to identify the patterns of masculinity in any social or cultural context.

The strength of *Masculinities in Theory* consists in its wide ranging discussion and author's selection of examples in this book. This book clearly brings out the chief theoretical concern of masculinity studies as an emerging discipline. It also draws forward the interdisciplinary nature of masculinity studies with reference to its relation with literature, sociology, history, cultural studies etc. The comprehensive use of language, observation of social construction of gender relationship and clarity in objectives makes this book a one of the groundbreaking work in theorizing masculinity.

Though the book is a success in its primary objectives there are a number of facts where this book falls short. This book hardly ever tries to focus on various psychological factors affecting the performances of masculinity as discussed in Rachel Arams' *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Although this book heralds the idea of ever changing and unfixed nature of masculinity but hardly ever tried to demarcate the situations affecting one's gendered performances. Though the author has referred to the complex power structures in the construction of masculinity but hardly ever tries to identify the workings of hegemony. Apart from referring Connell's concept of Hegemonic Masculinity Reeser hardly ever has tried to refer Gramsci's concept of hegemony and how it can be applied to understand the power relation in society. Another marked feature which is missing in this book is the concept of Globalization and how it has changed concept of Hegemonic Masculinity worldwide. The relationship of

capitalist market in shaping the ideological construction of masculinity is something that been left out in this book. If we compare Reeser's book with R. Adams and David Savran edited *The Masculinity Studies Reader* then we will find that The other book has dealt the topics quite comprehensively what has been left out in this book.

#### Work Cited

1. Adams, Rachel, and David Savran. *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell, Print, 2002.
2. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, Print, 2006.
3. Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, Print, 1980, 1.
4. Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press, Print, 1998.
5. Sedgwick, Eve K. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, Print, 1985.

#### Secondary Resources

1. Ashe, Fidelma. *The New Politics of Masculinity: Men, Power and Resistance*. London New York: Routledge, Print, 2007.
2. Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
3. Bordo, Susan. *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Print, 1999.
4. Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Abingdon, Oxon New York, NY: Routledge, Print, 2011.
5. Connell, Raewyn. *Masculinities*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, Print, 2005.
6. Connell RW, Messerschmidt JW. 'Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept', *Gender and Society* 2005; 19(6):829-59.
7. Gardiner, Judith K. *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New Directions*. New York: Columbia University Press, Print, 2002.
8. Haywood Chris, Mairtin Ghail. *Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research, and Social Practice*. Buckingham England Philadelphia, PA: Open University, Print, 2003.