

**Socially Constructed Inclusivity: Eric Anderson's *Inclusive Masculinity*:
*The Changing Nature of Masculinities***

By Jon Robert Adams, Western Michigan University, USA

1 As the sub-title indicates, Eric Anderson's *Inclusive Masculinity* describes changes in the ways some men conceive of and enact their masculinity. Employing ethnographic methods and "social-feminist thinking" (14), Anderson claims that "university-attending men are rapidly running from the hegemonic type of masculinity that scholars have been describing for the past 25 years" (4). In the "acknowledgments," Anderson dedicates his volume to three of those scholars: Michael Messner, Michael Kimmel and Donald Sabo, whom he credits for having published "academically accessible, cutting edge, meaningful gender scholarship" (xi). In so doing, Anderson effectively (unwittingly?) establishes the bar for his own work. *Inclusive Masculinity* readily achieves that bar, being both "accessible" and "cutting edge," and will, in this reader's opinion, eventually exceed it by proving not only "meaningful" but also prescient.

2 To support "the premise of [*Inclusive Masculinity*]" that "esteemed versions of masculinity among university-attending men are changing" (5), Anderson adds recent ethnographies of "white, university rugby, cheerleaders and soccer players, as well as the members of a racially mixed university fraternity" (4) to his prior research on gay athletes (published, beginning 2002). Anderson conducts his studies in both Britain and the United States and, in hopes of measuring "freedom [. . .] for variable conceptions of athletic masculinity," on athletes from "both low and high quality teams" (9). Anderson fully impacts the significance of *Inclusive Masculinity* when he asserts that though he is "not alone in suggesting that the dominant form of masculinity [. . .] can change" (emphasis in original) his study is among the first to "show that things are now finally beginning to change" (emphasis added). Moreover, Anderson adds a note of hope about the future when he reminds readers that informants for his various ethnographies "account for a demographic that is likely to have significant influence in shaping the culture of masculinity in the future" (15-16).

3 Seeing his results as part of a 'cultural zeitgeist' of increasing inclusivity, or "the increasing loss of our puritan sentiment," Anderson indicates that "changes [. . .] occurring among young men are not germane to gender alone" (5). In claiming that 'the Internet has sparked a sexual revolution,' Anderson locates other cultural shifts contributing to those he notes regarding masculinity, including: "the growing percentage of people who engage in pre-marital intercourse, the social and legal permission for divorce [. . .], a lessening of the

traditional double standard for heterosexual intercourse,” and, what Anderson labels as the “most important” to his theory, “the markedly expanded social and political landscape for gays and lesbians” (5). In facilitating this expanded landscape, according to Anderson, the Internet has also been “instrumental,” decreasing the social stigma surrounding homosexuality by “exposing the forbidden fruit of homosexual sex, commodifying [sic] and normalizing it in the process.” As a result of this exposure and “combined with a strategic and political bombardment of positive cultural messages about homosexuality” media and popular venues have “sent a message that while homosexuality is okay, homophobia is not” (6)

4 To account for the new sexual revolution fomented by the Internet so described and its attendant positivity surrounding homosexuality, Anderson suggests that this particular cultural moment is one of gradually diminishing “homohysteria,” which Anderson defines as combining “a culture of homophobia, femphobia, and compulsory heterosexuality” (7). Anderson links changes in cultural attitudes about sexuality to changes in gender by alluding to his “driving theoretical hypothesis” that “homophobia directed at men has been central to the production of orthodox masculinity.” At this point, however, Anderson recognizes the problem created when traditional means of producing masculinity—homophobia directed at men—wane, and he seeks a means to explain both why the changes occur and what expectations of gender performance result from them. For Anderson, then, the academically prevalent means for defining masculinity—R.W. (now Raewyn) Connell’s 1987 definition of “hegemonic masculinity”—emerges as insufficient for describing “the complexity of what occurs as cultural homohysteria diminishes.” To rectify this shortfall, Anderson proposes “inclusive masculinity theory,” his own “new social theory” (7). In so doing, Anderson provides an incredibly useful tool for gender and cultural theorists alike, one that is sure to keep scholars reading and citing Anderson’s work for some time to come.

5 To define “inclusive masculinity theory,” Anderson explains first that the theory “conceptualizes what happens concerning masculinity in the cultural zeitgeists of three periods within Anglo-American societies.” He labels those periods as:

1. Moments of elevated homohysteria;
2. Diminishing cultural homohysteria; and,
3. Diminished homohysteria. (7)

At this juncture, Anderson more fully elucidates how Inclusive Masculinity will utilize the term ‘homohysteria’ as a relative measure for the cultural periods he outlines. Saying that he uses homohysteria “to describe the fear of being homosexualized,” Anderson indicates that the term “incorporates three variables”:

1. mass awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation
2. a cultural zeitgeist of disapproval of homosexuality, and the femininity that is associated with it; and,
3. the need for men to publicly align their social identities with heterosexuality in order to avoid homosexual suspicion. (7-8)

“In other words,” Anderson claims, “a homophobic culture might look disparagingly at homosexuality, but without mass cultural suspicion that one might be gay it is not a culture of homophobia” (8). Anderson asserts that levels of cultural homophobia are directly proportional to the importance of homophobia in policing masculinity.

6 Perhaps because historical beginnings and endings cannot be stipulated for the cultural zeitgeists he identifies, Anderson instead chooses to depict the periods using descriptions of the cultures themselves. For example, Anderson states that “in cultures of diminishing homophobia [zeitgeist 2, above], two dominant (but not dominating) forms of masculinity will exist: one conservative and one inclusive”. He defines “inclusive masculinity” as one in which “heterosexual men [. . .] demonstrate emotional and physically [sic] homosocial proximity,” claiming that heterosexual men “include their gay teammates, and are shown to value heterofemininity” (8). In a culture of “diminished homophobia” (zeitgeist 3, above), on the other hand, “homophobic discourse is almost entirely lost” (8) and “multiple masculinities will proliferate with less hierarchy or hegemony” (9). Anderson hopes that inclusive masculinity theory will provide athletes with “an alternative pathway to constructing their masculinity” (17), an admirable, worthwhile, and (this reader hopes), achievable goal and not just for athletes.

7 *Inclusive Masculinity* is so cogently argued and so judiciously presented that attentive, well-informed readers in the social sciences or in gender and queer studies (the fields most likely to find interest in Anderson’s text) should find few objections to the text, its methods, or its conclusions. I specify ‘attentive’ and ‘well-informed’ readers because those who are not research professionals in these fields might not notice the careful manner with which Anderson tags key terms, such as ‘masculinity’. Nearly every use of the term is preceded by a modifier such as ‘traditional’ or ‘hegemonic’ or ‘inclusive,’ and such descriptors might slow down readers with less experience in the fields and render the book a bit less accessible to a general readership. For professionals, however, the modifiers highlight Anderson’s assiduousness, create precision, and thus add to the excellence of the book.

8 Despite Anderson’s care, however, some readers may nevertheless bristle when Anderson discloses his methods and his positionality vis-à-vis his informants. He writes: I do not believe in social distance between lecturer and student. I maintain that the best teachers

are mentors, and the best mentors are friends. I therefore join my students for lunch, run with them after class, and socialize with them in my office. I even go clubbing and drinking with them. I desire to project this open attitude with them from the first day, providing them with my mobile phone number. (13) Though certainly Anderson presents this detail as a means of fully explaining how data for these analyses were gathered (and in line with precepts of ethnographic research), this reader cannot help but wonder whether the specificity—no to mention *insistence*, as when Anderson states “I maintain that remaining closeted constitutes a deeply socio-negative act” (13)—of the statement is also meant to situate Anderson within debates about ethnographic and/or anthropological methods. That said, *Inclusive Masculinity* elucidates very clearly why Anderson makes the research choices that he does, and the book speculates convincingly, in this reader’s opinion, about the benefits of those choices. Moreover, the consistency of findings across Anderson’s research groups buttresses Anderson’s contentions.

9 But perhaps the most delightful revelation in this delightful book is *Inclusive Masculinity*’s tracking of the rapidity of change in cultural attitudes about homosexuality and the performance of masculinity. Anderson follows the change from an anecdote of a gay bashing in 1995 to his statement that “this year (ostensibly 2009, when the book was published) for the first time, no incoming freshman suggested that gay men should be excluded from playing on straight teams” (12). This overwhelming reduction in homophobic sentiment confirms my own observations of the same in (the same) 15 years of University teaching. Thus the affirmation of this book is personal, hopeful, and ultimately anxiety-relieving. It’s not often that an academic study makes one feel better about being in the world, yet Eric Anderson’s *Inclusive Masculinity* does