

**Review of Kevin J. Burke, *Masculinities and Other Hopeless Causes at an All-Boys Catholic School*,
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In the context of dominant narratives about the separation of church and state in Western societies, limited attention is paid to the operation of religious discourses and practices in the production of youth identities in schools. Schools that are expressly organized around a religious tradition are often assumed to be engaged in indoctrination, producing youth who are 'at-risk' or 'outsiders'. Kevin Burke's text, *Masculinities and Other Hopeless Causes at an All-Boys Catholic School*, pushes back against these homogenizing narratives by extending our understanding of the complicated ways in which one such school – St. Monica High School – discursively produces boys. The author explicates the role of official discourses related to homosexuality, women and religious devotion in (re)shaping boys' production of masculinity. At the same time, however, boys are not passive recipients of these discourses; they engage in nuanced negotiation, resistance and acquiescence as they become themselves. The book, thus, unsettles ossified knowledges about the making of gender in parochial schools.

Kevin Burke begins by situating St. Monica High School within the broader history of Catholic Education in the United States. He then reviews key findings of studies, including Connell (2002), Daly (1973), Ferguson (2001) and Pascoe (2007), to foreground critical concepts from gender, body and religious studies. Burke positions his research as a poststructural endeavour that seeks to examine multiple masculinities by taking up Foucauldian notions of power and discourse. This is a departure from Connell's structural model in which hegemonic masculinities reign supreme, as it imagines masculinities as 'perpetually reconstitutive' (p. 156) and in a constant state of making. Therefore, even as the author explicates the dominant discourses and spaces at St. Monica that frame the boys' constructions of masculinities, his theoretical grounding in critical feminist and poststructural frameworks compel him to continually remind readers that these

constructions are not stable. Burke's methodology, a combination of participant observation and autoethnography, allows him to bring into conversation his experiences of attending a rival Catholic school in the same neighbourhood during his childhood and use his personal memories as an interpretive lens. At St. Monica's, he followed four students in their senior year for a semester, collecting data using 'informal flash interviews' (p. 58). These were spontaneous conversations with students around a specific topic aimed at understanding their thinking, intention and meaning at that particular moment. In addition to attending classes, the author observed students in other spaces as well, such as the cafeteria, gym, hallways, and retreats.

The next three chapters engage with specific discourses available to, and created by, boys that shape their production of masculinities (and in relation, femininities). Burke first explores the 'fag' discourse to show its varied deployment and operation at St. Monica's. In addition to serving as a disciplinary mechanism as it did in Pascoe's (2007) study, the fag discourse at St. Monica's was utilized by both students and faculty to signal undesirability, illness and otherness. Who and what was tagged as fag, for how long and to what ends, was structured by the single-gender context of the school. And, while the threat of being fagged was always present, one could get rid of the label by tagging someone else. The fag discourse, therefore, was simultaneously permanent and impermanent.

The author then scrutinizes the construction of gender difference in the school. While boys were socialized to respect women through discursive representations of women as saints, mothers and wives, their actions that dehumanized women were often willfully ignored. Rhetorical epithets of girls as 'polluting agents' or 'dirty' were often utilized for the project of masculine bonding. These practices established bonds of homosociality and heterosexuality among boys by 'making strange of the creature that is woman' (p. 101). Women were thus, portrayed as either desexualized saints/mothers or undesirable 'abjected other[s]' (p. 106). This masculine project, however, was interrogated and resisted by boys in a specific curricular space – Kairos, a spiritual retreat for students. The author, here, critically examines the possibilities and limitations offered by this space. Kairos, which took place over six weeks during the school year, served the contradictory functions of promoting a critical engagement with gender and ensuring that alternate enactments of masculinities remained restricted within its boundaries. Through confessions and collective prayers, students (re)produced an imagined brotherhood of 'Monicamen'. This reminds us of Lesko's (1988) study, also in a Catholic school context, where she observed the critical role of rituals – 'poetics moments' (p. 117) – in providing a sense of collective identity. The book concludes with a chapter that engages with the researcher-researched relationship and positions both as desired/desiring and seduced/seducing subjects. This is to show the complex and fluid ways in which the author as well as the students made sense of their social relations in and outside of the school context.

While much research about single-gender education has been conducted in Catholic schools (Lee and Marks 1990), the nexus of gender, religion and education remains under-investigated. This book, therefore, is a welcome contribution to this under-researched intersection. It compels us to consider the role of institutionalized as well as personal religious spaces, practices and ideologies in shaping the production of masculinities and femininities. A more explicit unpacking of the interplay of religious discourses with the fag discourse at the cafeteria and the self-segregation of boys at the hockey game would have

been enlightening. In addition, an exploration of how race mediated the boys' understandings and enactments of masculinity and religiosity could have furthered the intersectional analysis. Overall, Burke masterfully weaves theory across the text and writes in an accessible style. He heeds postmodern calls for self-reflection in research by continually highlighting how his own as well as his students' lived experiences were discursively formed and socially located. The book would be a good read for students of gender, religion and education, particularly alongside Connell (2002), Lesko (1988) and Pascoe (2007).

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