

**Media, Masculinities and Other Interpretive Frameworks:  
Reflecting on Audience, Representation, Bodies and Mark  
Moss' *The Media and Models of Masculinity*.**

The Media and the Models of Masculinity  
Mark Moss

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**M**asculinity is not fixed, natural, or immutable. Frank mort explains that masculinity is always in process (196). Raewyn Connell argues that there are multiple masculinities functioning at any given time. These masculinities are not types but patterns of practice and meaning structured by social, historical, and cultural conditions. David Buchbinder instructs that masculinities are relational and derive from each other (as well as femininities) their meanings, practices, values and significance. And Lynne Segal asserts that they are subject to change. It has been argued by Raewyn Connell that there is a hegemonic masculinity, an ideal rather than a reality, specific to particular cultural, social and historical settings. Given this, some masculinities are subordinated, marginalized, and work to protest the hegemony and others. These masculinities overlap and are not mutually exclusive. Mark Moss concludes that there are now more variations than ever before.

Mark Moss' (2011) book *The Media and the Models of Masculinity* begins from the social-constructionist perspective of gender to provide a historical account of how various models of masculinity are "conditioned, defined, or illustrated by different media" (179). He provides examples of how hegemonic masculinity is repeatedly verified through particular models of masculinity in the media. The focus in this book is on the U.S. and Canadian social, cultural and historical context. It

is also on Anglophone heteronormative models of masculinity in the media. The examples and case studies are drawn from this milieu. By “media” Moss means television, film, literature, magazines, radio, and marketing. There is little engagement with digital media, besides a brief consideration of violence in video games (124-127).

Moss argues that the models of masculinity the media circulate have an “enormous influence” on men and boys who “mimic the dress, behavior, and mannerisms of key archetypes” (4). The media is understood as pedagogic. It teaches men and boys how to compete, how to prove themselves, what is acceptable or not, what masculinity is or is not, and the like. Moss’ position is that the media is the “single most authoritative” force in “conveying opinion” (21). Further, the media “offer a barometer of what is going on” and “define the varieties of masculine experience” (23).

Moss argues that there has been increasing variation of masculine models, even though certain historically-driven models – warrior/soldier, heroes, explorer/adventurer, rebel, athletic doer, husband/provider, among others – remain influential and continue to have ongoing appeal. Moss discusses Do-It-Yourself and adventure/outdoor television programs, cooking shows, fashion, books, hunting, militarization, advertising, James Bond, celebrities, sport radio, novels, gangster and corporate raider films, hobbies, *Fight Club* (film and novel), workplaces, desks, toys, cars, “lad” and style magazines, among many others. There is an impressive diversity to the examples. This diversity is a bit overwhelming. Perhaps less diversity and more in-depth analysis of the various discourses present in each example would have helped to generate deeper understanding of them, as would more space given over to engaging with the scholarly literature that critically investigates the same or similar examples –of which a lot is by-passed.

Moss explains how various historical periods and events have affected the models of masculinity in the media. This involves reifying some models, challenging others, and introducing new ones. War, feminism, economics, employment conditions, and commodification are

some of the key influences. Moss argues that what have come to be known as “traditional” models of masculinity in the media emerged from social and cultural conditions during the period from “1870 until just before the outbreak of World War 1” (84). This was a period when mass media such as magazines, radio, film, and literature became established as dominant sites for circulating models of masculinity. The post-World War II and post-Great Depression period saw models of masculinity significantly re-evaluated, re-worked, re-entrenched, and diversified. In addition to the previous social and cultural influences television, commodification, identity politics, urbanization, marketing, and leisure produced newer models such as the “rebel”, “slacker (dude)”, “metrosexual”, etc. Post-1950 there has been an “unleashing of possibilities” (11).

However, while there is increased diversity of the models of masculinity in the media Moss identifies that “since September 11, 2011, it has been suggested that ‘manhood’ is once again being held in ‘high esteem’. With the return of male heroes – firemen, policemen, soldiers – a renewed emphasis on ‘going back’ has been in vogue” (17). Moss explains that there tends to be a reinvigoration of traditional and “proven” macho, brawny, dominant, tough, stoic, vigorous, assertive, strong, and independent tropes when there are “real or imagined” threats (7). One particular contemporary example Moss discusses is the perceived “threat” of feminisation and commodification that has led to cries of a “crisis of masculinity”, as in Chuck Palahniuk’s novel *Fight Club* when the main character says, “We have gone soft – physically, mentally, spiritually soft. We are in danger of losing our will to fight, to sacrifice, to endure” (7). Moss writes that despite this the “boundaries of being a man have expanded ... Swaggering masculinity, infantile masculinity, and preening masculinity are all possible to exist and can all be combined at the same time” (17).

While this book demonstrates that masculinity is socially, culturally, and historically constructed the engagement with gender theory throughout the book is fleeting. The focus is on the concepts and theory of Raewyn Connell and they are taken as a given. There is no

critical evaluation of the theory Moss aligns himself with. Connell's theory and concepts enable Moss to identify and describe a diversity of Anglophone heteronormative models of masculinity in the media, as well as the social and cultural conditions that have helped produce them. Politically, I believe we need to do more. There is a need for more theoretical discussion to produce new strategies to challenge and change inequitable, unethical, and socially unjust models of gender in regards to the media. Such moves are essential if we want to shift what Lynne Segal has explained as "men's sense of entitlement (or resentment at a personal lack of it) ... along with the symbolic framings" that "continue to position women, the world over, as less powerful than men (xxxix). Moss' own point about the ongoing appeal and returns to traditional hegemonic tropes of masculinity when there is a "threat" (real or imagined) despite more variations and an "leashing of possibilities" (11) is evidence to support the need for additional strategies, and even new interpretive frameworks, theories, and concepts.

It has become increasingly apparent that we need more critical evaluation of the theory and concepts currently dominating scholarship in the field of masculinity studies. According to Victor Seidler, in this way we can begin to open up "new kinds of questions" (xxvi). Like Stephen Whitehead, I am getting the feeling that the current dominant Connell-inspired theory and concepts, while having been incredibly helpful, may now have "little more to tell us about men" (61). For example, can the Connell-inspired theoretical approach and concepts take us any further in breaking down the current gendered interpretive framework that produces particular models of masculinity in the media at the expense of others? Or are we left with repeated descriptions of the diversity of masculinities while the hegemony remains in place, with no possibilities for actual "deterritorialization" of masculinity through our analyses? I am referring here to philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his collaborator psychotherapist Felix Guattari's concept of "deterritorialization". By this they mean the decontextualization of something, to be liberated from a particular function, and then resituated to enunciate new functions, meanings, values, relationships, forms, capacities, and potentials.

Moss' work, and other research concomitant with his, is successful at identifying and making visible variation thus undermining essentialist discourses of gender and the ability of masculinity to disappear from the lens of scrutiny. Yet, maybe new strategic and theoretical steps now need to also be added to our analyses. Jennifer Germon's important book *Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea* maps how "over the last 50 years gender has become *the* interpretive framework for making sense of human bodies and subjectivities" (10)[original italics]. Germon's book inspires me to consider how it is necessary to consider in any particular study the gendered interpretive framework alongside alternative interpretive frameworks that diminish gender and its power as a symbolic and structuring device (for example, see the work of feminists Rosi Braidotti, Claire Colebrook, Elspeth Probyn, Genevieve Lloyd, Moira Gatens, Elizabeth Grosz, and Donna Haraway). What this may enable is a dilution of the power of hegemonic gendered discourses and the models they produce and keep in place. It will also allow us the opportunity to contrast the findings of analyses of media and representations of subjectivities, space, and bodies that rely on a gendered interpretive framework with the findings of analyses that deterritorialize such. The impetus to think differently about selfhood and to produce new (or even revolutionary) interpretations will come from analyses that are what Deleuze and Guattari call "lines of flight" – lines of transformation – that "blow apart strata, cut roots, and make new connections" (15).

Further, to escape gendered repression and containment of identity, space, and subjectivities it may be necessary as researchers to also explore how *we* feel and what we *do* at the intersection of media and gender (and not just others). Moss's own subjectivity is largely absent from the book and this got me thinking about the possibilities self-reflexivity brings to analyses, as Elspeth Probyn and Gayatri Spivak have argued for. Positivist tendencies still abound in research on masculinity and media. This continues to keep in place a binary epistemological system that privilege "neutrality", "objectivity", and "reason" – traditional masculine tropes – while excluding bodies, sensuousness, subjectivity, the personal, etc. – traditional feminine tropes. Our very

own research that appears in books, in journals, on radio, on television, in magazines, etc. is part of the reproduction of hegemonic masculine tropes in the media. It strikes me as crucial for male researchers like Moss (and myself) to work hard not to do this. One way may be to not reproduce the privileging of the cognitive (including the representational) at the expense of the corporeal. Mediated existence is as much corporeal and cognitive. As Elizabeth Grosz has explained, the mind and body are not separate but entwined. Michele Barrett urges us to involve bodies in our research so that our insights as, imaginative, sensual even, in that they speak to experience, which includes the senses rather than simply cognition" (19).

While I am on the topic of bodies, in this book they do tend to come across as blank slates to be written on, directed, and influenced – tabula rasa. As Moss writes, the media influence men and boys behavior, comportment, body image, and practices. Yet, following Susan Bordo, Elizabeth Grosz, Mopira Gatens, Raewyn Connell, and Susan Hekman close attention needs to be paid to how bodies are active, resistant, and productive – lived. Given this, it's worth chasing up how the intersection of media, spaces, and bodies literally "matter". Materialities also provide the protocols for reading, that is, they also guide and control the way the meaning emerges, including those connoted by models of masculinity in the media.

Moss' emphasis on the influence of the media on boys and men is consistent throughout the book. However, more supporting evidence for the extent of the pedagogic role of the media would have been helpful. Moss appears to be working with assumptions drawn from a media effect paradigm. By "media effect paradigm" I follow David Gauntlett in understanding this as an paradigm which assumes a predominantly uni-directional effect which is the result of exposure to a particular type of media or representation. In particular, chapter seven in Moss' book, entitled "Masculinity, Media, and Aggression", privileges of this paradigm. In this chapter, Moss considers examples of UFC bouts, aggressive music lyrics, violence in video games, war films and military imagery, sport, as well as movies such as *Gladiator* and *Fight Club*. His

considerations give the impression that media instruct and influence boys to be destructive, aggressive, hyper-masculine, and violent (123). However, as Gauntlett points out, there is a considerable body of research that contests such an interpretation and shows that media does not simply cause violence and aggression among boys and men but rather the causes of violence and aggression are primarily rooted in socio-economic and cultural inequities.

While Moss' focus is on the production of the models of masculinity in the media it's worth pausing and deliberating on consumption, especially when claims are made in regards to the influence of models of masculinity in the media on men's comportment, fashion, tastes, values, practices, spaces, etc. Production and consumption are entwined. They work together. Understanding and practices emerge from the "inbetween" of production and consumption. Young people who have grown up in a heavily mediated environment are particularly aware of this. Studies by David Buckingham and Sara Bragg show that from a very early age they have a healthy skepticism about media and critical reading skills. Boys and men are not only influenced or directed by the media but re-articulate, reproduce, re-interpret, contest, accept, discard, rework, and re-imagine media representations and the mediums. And especially in regards to digital media they are what Axel Bruns calls, "producers" – a hybrid of production and consumption. While this is particularly the case in regards to digital media – the internet, social network services, podcasting, video hosting sites, software, video games, blogging, mobile phones have changed the mediated ecology – it also takes place in regards to traditional mass media e.g. niche magazines, self-published books, independent film production, community television production and radio, etc. This is not to say that the models of masculinity Moss identifies in the media don't have influence or the media don't try to define masculinity. He is correct. We do live in a mediated culture. However, there are also the processes of the consumption of media to consider as part of that mediated culture when making any claims about influence.

This book primarily provides me with an array of examples of models of Anglophone heteronormative models of masculinities in the U.S. and Canadian mass media. The book left me with an appreciation for how historical, social, and cultural factors produce particular models. The social-construction of masculinities was confirmed, as was the argument that the mass media is a key site where some men carve out homosocial spaces to perpetuate and verify certain models e.g. sport radio. An important point that stayed with me throughout the reading was the resilience of some traditional tropes of masculinity despite them being “long past their veracity” (4). I found the examples hold the promise of further analyses, both theoretically and politically. Also, I found that the emphasis the book places on the Anglophone heteronormative U.S. and Canadian masculine milieu and the examples drawn from it could push us to consider alternative interpretations being brought to bear on them. If you are positioned differently in terms of sexuality, race, (trans)nationality, (dis)ability, class, gender, ethnicity, etc. you will be in tension, challenge, and contradict readings in this book. I am sure Moss would agree there is more work to be done at exploring such intersections.

To conclude, after reading this book I was left with the impression that it may be time to begin asking new kinds of questions when exploring the intersection of media, space, bodies, gender, boys, and men. For example, questions exploring materialities and not just the representational, more consideration on how men and boys consume and produce media and in what spaces, increased attention to self-reflexivity in our studies of masculinity and media, and the mobilisation of new theoretical concepts and interpretive frameworks that may enable us to identify and produce through our analyses moments of deterritorialization and lines of flight.

**Clifton Evers**

**University of Nottingham Ningbo China**



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