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review of dying to be men: youth, masculinity, and social exclusion by gary t. barker

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available at: https://works.bepress.com/richard_mora/30/
turer, emphasizing the importance of fathers spending time with their children. However, the fathers visited their children only periodically and continued to hang out with friends as much as they had done prior to their children’s birth. Those who viewed themselves as independent fathers were the least involved in their children’s lives because for them fatherhood was not a salient part of their identity. The teen fathers’ inability to supply economic support and their lack of equal parenting led to (additional) tension with their children’s mothers.

Paschal’s book will be of great interest to students and scholars of masculinity and urban poverty. It moves beyond the simplistic polarizing analyses (i.e., cultural explanations vs. structural explanations) often applied to “social problems” associated with the urban poor, particularly youth, and convincingly explains “how limited resources and structural constraints, perceived career and educational opportunities, and social definitions influence and shape African-American male adolescent behaviors, perceptions, and experiences as young fathers” (p. 41).

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_Dying to Be Men_ is a thought-provoking examination of how young men residing in urban neighborhoods in the United States, Brazil, Nigeria and other African regions, and the Caribbean attempt to attain manhood. Barker, who works on violence prevention and gender equity, convincingly illustrates that some urban young men, particularly those from racial and ethnic minority groups within their societies, define manhood as the ability to work hard and provide material goods and financial stability for mates and eventually for their own families. Excluded from the economy as a result of their social marginality and poor education, many young men turn to the brutal world of gangs as means of gaining power and access to manhood. With violent masculinity as an available option and a means by which to attain manhood, an exceedingly high number of socially marginalized, low-income young men throughout the world die each year at the hands of other excluded young men. However, not all disenfranchised men turn to gang violence to enact manhood. Barker describes how some men choose alternative, humane routes to masculinity, thus, providing us with stories of “resistance and hope” (p. 155).

Relying on data collected from participatory observations over several years, in-depth interviews, action research, and case studies with heterosexual young men (ages 15 to 24), Barker addresses the following five issues which influence young men’s choice of masculinity:

* the general challenges they face while coming of age in settings of social exclusion
Barker finds that urban young men desperately want to meet the cultural demands of masculinity by working, which “is necessary for family formation, in order to be able to attract female partners and to form a family” (p. 107), but many of them are unable to secure stable employment. Such a predicament “in effect traps [underemployed and unemployed] young men in childhood or adolescence” (p. 107) and denies them the respect that comes with adult manhood. With few viable alternatives for manhood, some of these young men join gangs “to mitigate the sense of powerlessness and to be part of consumer society” (p. 57); they adopt a violent masculinity which, like the “hard worker masculinity,” may result in social status and attract women.

Still, as Barker correctly points out, the majority of urban young men do not participate in violence or in street gangs. Barker attributes their decision to stay out of gangs to the following opportunities and abilities:

* having a valued, stable relationship or multiple relationships with someone (a parent, a grandparent, a female partner) they would disappoint if they got involved with the gangs
* having access to alternative identities or some other sense of self that was positively valued by the young man and by those in his social setting, particularly the male peer group but also before young women (for example, being a good student, being a good athlete, having musical skills, having a good job)
* being able to reflect on the risks and costs associated with the violent version of masculinity promoted by gang members
* finding an alternative male peer group that provided positive reinforcement for non-gang-involved male identities. (p. 82)

Based on the experiences of the young men who have opted not to participate in the violent world of street gangs as well as on the experiences of other men Barker has worked with through his NGO, he argues that it is possible to get urban young men to consider caring and equitable versions of manhood. As evidence, he points to young men in Brazil who have developed and run various successful campaigns aimed at encouraging young men to respect women and refrain from engaging in interpersonal violence, while contending with their social marginalization.

Those interested in learning more about how marginalized young men throughout the world enact masculinity are strongly encouraged to read Dying to Be Men. Unlike works that simply document how some poor, urban men abide by violent masculinities
that arise as a result of concentrated poverty and social exclusion, this book provides readers with glimpses of how young men work to alter the gender regimes present in their social worlds.

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