

In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity. By Eric Anderson. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005, 208 pp., \$22.95 (paper).

The Metrosexual: Gender, Sexuality, and Sport. By David Coad. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008, 241 pp., \$16.95 (paper).

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The relationship between sport and hegemonic masculinity has been well documented by research since the beginning of the 1980s. Both as an institution as well as a performative phenomenon, sport has a long tradition of being seen as a place where parents could send their sons and then close their eyes, the best environment to create “real men,” creating and showcasing not only the physical prowess associated with great men, but also displaying “true” masculine virtues.

Among these values, normative heterosexuality is featured as one of the most important virtues to evaluate and measure athlete men. However, to be considered at the top of the “masculine” rank, athletes are not supposed to be merely heterosexual, but, as David Coad argues in his book, they need to “provide constant visible proof of heterosexuality” (p. 14). By the end of the twentieth century, though, things have started to change. Metrosexual men showing an interest in fashionable clothes and accessories, as well as high-profile athletes coming out and declaring their homosexuality, some during their careers and some after retirement, and similar events have started to make some cracks in the solid masculine world of sports. These cracks are now explored in two books: David Coad’s book focusing on the metrosexual phenomenon in sports, its paradoxes and its challenge to sport gender structures, and Eric Anderson’s book focusing on—and offering extremely refined data about—men who “maintain a sexual orientation, identity, and behaviors that are consistent with *their* notion of gay” (p. 6). Despite some interconnections—both deal with new masculinities in the sports world and how these have not only been affected by but are also transforming this world in terms of gender perspective and sexuality—the two books have clearly different approaches, use distinctly different languages, and focus on different masculinities.

Coad's book explores the metrosexual phenomenon and its association with the world of professional sport, both of which are subject to high levels of media coverage and scrutiny. The author exhaustively analyzes the links between these phenomena and concepts of gender and sexuality. Coad begins by offering a detailed conceptualization of the term "metrosexual," and does it in a clear and effective way. In the second chapter, he searches for the roots of the term and finds it in a 1994 article in the *Independent* by British cultural critic Mark Simpson. This article, titled "Here come the Mirror Men," "foregrounds male vanity and male narcissism as two fundamental characteristics of metrosexuality" (p. 19). Coad explores these two vectors of the metrosexual throughout his book and notes that both vanity and narcissism require looks of admiration from others. The hegemonic male whose priority is to see, desire, and chase his "prey" no longer exists: The metrosexual is the male on stage, a body to be seen, admired, and desired. The metrosexual male needs the other's gaze and he arouses the other's desires; thus, Coad argues, metrosexuality is often confused with homosexuality as both collude on the same premise—the male being desired rather than desiring and chasing women. However, Coad's point is to distinguish clearly between the two things: While homosexuality is a sexual orientation that allows plural masculine performances, metrosexuality is a *lifestyle* of men who are attracted by fashion and appearance. Following this conceptualization, Coad states that metrosexuality in the sports world is a considerable paradox, effectively assembled evidence of how in the homosocial world of sports—where boys and men are encouraged to stay together in same-sex groups for long periods of time and where heteronormativity is continually reinforced by a range of activities—the metrosexual-athlete has developed and now provided "the most important models of metrosexuality in the twenty-first century" (p. 17).

In the following chapters, the author outlines the central role that male fashion stylists, notably the Italian Giorgio Armani, have had in promoting a strong association and a reciprocal relationship between male sports stars (e.g., Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras, David Beckham, Kaka, and others) and the haute couture world. Coad shows how Armani's marketing strategy using "fashion-conscious and high-profile athletes" has been "a powerful instrument in providing a positive portrayal of metrosexuality" (p. 69). Coad provides a sequence of sixteen photos, beginning in 1977, that shows players from different parts of the world and from different kinds of sports wearing underwear, providing evidence that metrosexuality has passed the mere connection between sports stars and fashion and

has entered into the everyday life of men. Coad's book is not only worthwhile reading for all who are interested in the changing world of masculinities in sports, but also a useful resource for researchers, as the book is written in a highly rigorous academic style, with a large number of sources and, as stated earlier, well-documented information.

While Coad's book is written from an outsider's perspective, Anderson presents himself as an "insider": He is gay and has worked for many years as a sports coach. Anderson's work is based on years of research and data collection, interviewing dozens of gay athletes. At the beginning of the book, Anderson lists the many reasons he came out after many years of silence, stating that 1993 "was also the year that I came out of the closet as an openly gay distance running coach at a rather conservative high school in Southern California" (p. 2). One of the strengths of this book flows from this statement, from Anderson's deeply personal knowledge of the consequences, the suffering, of being a closeted sportsman, of the discrimination endured as an openly gay man in the homophobic sports environment, and the way he navigates in an engaging and lucid manner between the data (the interviews, the athletes' words and worlds) and the theories that both support and emerge from the data.

Anderson's sociological background and his gender perspective inform his critical analysis and thinking. In each chapter, he shows the life story of one or more of his informants (gay athletes, some of whom are still in the closet and some who have come out in the previous years) and focuses on the paradoxes involved with being gay and working in one of the most homophobic environments that have ever existed: the world of high-performance sports. Anderson relates a number of enchanting stories that highlight a passion for sport and the overcoming of many obstacles to stick with the sport while living as a homosexual, whether openly or, in most cases, making determined efforts to hide this from teammates and from the gaze of the media and society. However, Anderson advises that "life is not a bed of roses": There are also sad stories of violence, prejudice, and persecution. In the "warming up" (chapter 1) the author establishes the links between sport and homophobia, presenting research that demonstrates that, among others reasons, homophobia in sports could be a means to "nullify the homoeroticism of the sporting arena" (p. 14).

From the beginning, Anderson makes clear that he uses qualitative methods to gather and analyze his data as well as grounded theory. In the following chapters, and always building from an extract of his data, the author analyzes and even untangles the relationships between sports and different sorts of masculinities, always asking why gay men like and even

love the institution that most oppresses and discriminates against them. There are no easy answers, and the author does not seek to suggest there are: After being “contaminated” by the sports virus, gay athletes find themselves in a difficult position, whether to come out or not. Some of his informants are professional players, some are high school or even college athletes, and many remain “prisoner of narrow masculine expressions” (p. 20) inside the sports world.

After reading all these bitter stories, highlighted by Anderson’s intellectual insights, someone could ask: “Where to from here?” The final chapter in this book really makes the difference. Anderson does not think it is enough to listen to the athletes, analyze the data, and offer a strong critique of the hegemonic masculinity that controls sports. Indeed, he goes on to provide gay athletes with some positive ways to “do something about It” (p. 159). He writes this chapter in a “nonacademic fashion,” aiming to be accessible to people outside the academic world. He discusses such factors as the “positive coming out experience” (“the better you are the easier coming out is,” he writes, p. 162), how to come out to your team, as well as providing scenarios, including possible dialogues a gay athlete might have after coming out. This is a sort of conclusion that is rare to see in academic books. It is valuable for both academics and non-academics who are concerned about the issue of heterosexism and gay men in sports.

In summary, both books explore how the once orthodox masculine sports world has changed and step by step is becoming more permeable to different sorts of masculine expressions. It would be impossible to write these books if the sports world were monolithic. As the cracks appear and widen, Coad and Anderson offer well-written books and up-to-date research. These books are valuable resources for all those concerned about gender and sexuality issues in sports.

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Men and Masculinities

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The book would have benefited from more of an overall conclusion of how these strands interacted and a theoretical model of those interactions resulting from this research and analysis. However, Newton provides a very valuable study that teases out the similarities and differences of various networks of men who gather together in various ways, often using aspects of male romance, to enhance their emotional lives and their relationships, which also benefits women, children, other men, and families of whatever configuration.

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Anderson, Eric. (2005). *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. 208 pp., \$19.95.

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Eric Anderson's engaging and lucidly written book, *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity*, ushers its readers into another realm of changing gender relations in sport—the mainly hidden world of gay athletes and the not-so-hidden realities of homophobia and traditional masculinities in sport subcultures. Biographically, this book can be viewed as somewhat of a sequel to Anderson's *Trailblazing: America's First Openly Gay High School Coach* (2003), which detailed the saga of his coming out of the closet as an openly gay athlete and coach in 1993. Here Anderson's account of the "awful experiences" wrought by his public confrontation with homophobia, discrimination and violence was more visceral than intellectual, more descriptive than theoretical. The context in *Trailblazing* was more personal than sociological and historical. Since the mid-1990s, however, Anderson has studied up on the intersections between homophobia and the social constructions of masculinity in sport. *In the Game* provides a well-crafted theoretical analysis of sport, masculinity, and hegemonic oppression in sport.

The book is built on in-depth interviews with sixty gay male athletes from North American high schools, colleges, and professional sports teams. Forty interview participants were out of the closet, while the remaining twenty were closeted. The men were involved with a wide range of sports and there was a modicum of racial/ethnic diversity in the sample. Anderson puts the grounded theory approach to good use, and readers will find a solid array of empirical inferences and theoretical explanations. To his methodological credit, he seldom strays far from the data and uses ample description and excerpts from the narratives to illustrate a concept or shore up a theoretical claim.

Research during the last several decades of the twentieth century showed that homosexuality is part of traditionally male-dominated institutional hierarchies such as the military, sport, or the Catholic Church. Before the 1990s, normative institutional practices, prevailing cultural assumptions, homophobia, and the threat of stigma and ostracism kept most gay and lesbian voices silenced. Today, "don't

ask, don't tell" policies are in place that, ironically, while tacitly recognizing the presence of gay men in their respective ranks, maintain the muzzled status quo. Under past and current political and cultural conditions, therefore, it should come as no surprise that the voices of gay male athletes have rarely been heard, let alone taken seriously as fodder for systematic social scientific research. *In the Game* provides the most extensive outpouring of gay male athletes' narratives and experiences to date, and if they listen, both gay and straight male readers—whether they are athletes or geeks, scholars or recreational readers—will learn a good deal about themselves and the ways that manhood gets defined within sport and the larger gender order.

Anderson's writing is as direct and engaging as academic prose can get, making this book a gateway to insight for seasoned scholars as well as college students. He succinctly summarizes hegemony theory and deploys a powerful array of concepts to explain intricate interfaces among gender identity, homophobia, and sexual politics in sport. The book is unhampered by the abstruse, esoteric discourse of so many sport sociologists who have difficulty communicating with one another, let alone other academics, students, and people outside universities. Anderson dishes out insights and scholarly interpretations without getting lost in academic shop talk. The controversial content and fast-paced writing will make this book an attention grabber and discussion starter among undergraduates.

Anderson brings to life how taken-for-granted constructions of heterosexual masculinity and homophobia within the locker-room culture surround both gay and straight athletes. His interview participants are classic "outsiders within;" that is, gay outsiders within an overtly hypermasculine, heterosexual cultural domain. They talk clearly and openly about their experiences in high school, intercollegiate, and professional sports. The chapter on gay men's experiences in professional sport is particularly compelling, both because of the centrality of professional sports in the dominant culture and the rarity of any kind of insider discussions about the existence of homosexuality at this level of sport. Readers will find stories about prejudice and acceptance, varying degrees of stigma and homophobic censure, and coming-out experiences that were often liberating and positive.

An uncanny awareness resonates in, or perhaps behind, the voices of Anderson's interview participants. It is obvious that these gay men's narratives are located in their personal experiences with homophobia, the pressures to conform to "orthodox masculinity," to posture as a heterosexual, and to aspire to success in sport. And yet, straight readers will also find personal relevance in many of the gay male interviewees' insights and stories. Straight male athletes, especially in combative team sports, often experience pressures to lash out or ridicule gay or effeminate males, whether they really feel angry and condescending or not. Straight male athletes will also recognize the locker-room pressures to prove their heterosexuality and virility by behaving badly and exploitatively toward women. Straight male athletes also know they have to put up the tough, macho front for coaches and fans to establish their credibility and status within the male pecking order. And they are at least vaguely aware that

performing the on-the-make heterosexual and homophobic role can be a strategy for climbing a status ladder that stretches from waterboys and cheerleaders at the bottom to the head coaches and the men at the top who recruit, offer scholarships, sign contracts, and pay the big salaries. Indeed, Anderson's analysis sheds plenty of light on how the pressures to conform to "orthodox masculinity" in sport can shape *both* gay and straight male athletes' choices, gender identities, and behaviors.

As Ross Runfola and I wrote in *Jock: Sports and Male Identity* (1980):

While homosexual behavior has always been a part of western patriarchal society, it has been largely a covert phenomenon. One function of the secrecy surrounding it has been to preserve the tenets of traditional masculinity and patriarchal ideology. Though this ideology has been attacked by feminists, it has remained relatively unchallenged by males themselves.

Anderson's book is thus doubly transgressive and instructive. His critical analysis of sport and the gender order is built solidly on the narratives and life histories of gay male athletes themselves.

The author's research led him to discover that the oppressive gender politics and angry homophobia that pounded him to the pavement when he came out of the closet in the early 1990s is not so pervasive in today's sport circles. He found that the relationships between gays and sports are changing. His analysis of interview data showed that a variety of factors can influence the acceptance of a homosexual athlete within a sport setting. He shows how the leadership of a coach can powerfully shape a team's attitudes and behaviors. Friendship ties within a team may also keep a total backlash from developing. And the degree of heterosexual conformity can vary depending on the type and origin of the sport itself; e.g., football has different cultural roots and masculine norms than tennis or swimming.

In chapter ten, Anderson moves from the descriptive to the prescriptive. He identifies a variety of strategies for closeted gay men to come out within the current culture of homophobia in sport in ways that invite understanding and empathy rather than annihilation. Here readers will find a very different kind of game plan which, until the publication of this groundbreaking book, was nowhere to be found in the men's locker room.

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