



Review of John Ibson, *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), xix + 237 pp.

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Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography focuses on a central topic of men's studies and masculinities: male intimacy and friendship, and explores the decline of male intimacy and public display of affection. Interestingly, his empirical evidence comes from a rich collection of 142 photographs from the author's private collection, taken between the years 1850-1950. The male portraits, including both studio photographs and snapshots, ably illustrate the progression of display of affection and intimacy between men during that period. Through the over time changes in these rich collection of portraits, Ibson shows a rapid decline in expressing heterosexual intimacy and friendship. The book is organized in seven chapters and an epilogue. First, Ibson displays the high levels of intimacy with extensive photos mostly taken at studios from mid twentieth century. Most photos from the era display high levels of intimacy between men, some family, some colleagues and some friends. Many men are portrayed holding hands, embracing each other and sitting on each other's laps. The author identifies a gradual decline in the display of such affection between men today: this sort of intimacy displayed in the photo studios in mid-twentieth century America is replaced with homophobic spaces between men. The author pairs this decline with the parallel trend of decline in studio photography and inclusion of women into the public sphere.

Second, the author, borrowing from Roland Barthes, argues photography is a cultural performance and highlights the performance aspects of photography in many studio photos. In these group photos, men dress up as cowboys or pretend to drink, smoke, stage fights, pose with guns and rifles and stage weddings in drag. Ibson sees these photographs as performances of masculinity, during which men reinforce the traditional definitions of manhood. An important part of this performance, he identifies, is cross-dressing: many men in the pictures dress up as women and pose for stage scenes such as weddings. According to Ibson, cross-dressing is also a performance which enables men to display intimacy, which they otherwise would not be able to. For example, in Harvard's Hasty Pudding Club, in 1795, cross-dressing was a permanent part of their performance and they defined it as a way to "to cherish the feeling of friendship and patriotism"(p. 75). However, in 1915, cross-dressing was banned by the dean from all theatrical performances on the grounds that it effeminates males and threatens masculinity. However, through the rich collection of photographs, the author captures the "part of the significant web of male association"(p. 75).

Third, the author looks at war photographs throughout WW1. Through war photographs, he identifies men in military uniforms holding hands, hugging and displaying affection. With these photos, he captures the profound attachment of men to other men: the band of brothers and the bonds and friendships that war created.

Similar to the war pictures, Ibson also identifies schools as another venue for displaying male affection. In school pictures, particularly in sports teams, the author traces the evolution of display of affection and intimacy amongst men. An adult athlete told Michael Messner: "a lot of athletes are attracted to athletics because they are fighting feelings of tenderness - not necessarily gay - but they are fighting feminine qualities." However, in a society where male intimacy and affection is declining and becoming less socially acceptable, men seek less obvious ways to show intimacy and display affection.

In this book, Ibson tackles a very important sociological question of lack of display of affection and intimacy amongst men. The lack of intimacy amongst men in the contemporary American society, according to Ibson, is a relatively new development. Through a very rich collection of visual evidence, he accurately documents the decline in male intimacy in a relatively short period of time. With beautifully taken photos, he documents our recent past and the step by step changes and shows the intimate show of friendships regardless of sexual orientation are gradually replaced by composed distances between men from "hugs and kisses to empty seats between men in theatres"(p. 195). While his thesis is not new, the use of photography as evidence in cultural understanding of American men offers a unique, empirical support. Despite the richness of his photographic data, in some chapters, especially his chapter on the World War II, he resorts to using less convincing evidence from popular culture instead of his rich photos.

While the author depicts an important decline in the expression of intimacy and friendships, the argument remains predominantly on the descriptive level. He offers some concurrent changes (such as the incorporation of women into the public sphere and the decline in studio shots), but does not delve into causes of the decline in intimacy. Overall, this is a wonderful contribution to the understanding of masculinities in the United States. The next step would be to identify the causes of this decline in intimacy.

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