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Healing from Hate. How Young Men Get Into—and Out of—Violent Extremism

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Reviews (I)

Kimmel, M. (2018). *Healing from Hate. How Young Men Get Into—and Out of—Violent Extremism*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press - ISBN: 9780520292635.

Michael Kimmel is a worldwide leading researcher into masculinities. In *Healing from Hate*, his most recent book, he presents an empirical research with five different groups of men (and some women) who have embraced extremist movements. The aim of his book is to investigate what puts young men into extremist groups and how we could help them to get out of them. For such a job Kimmel set out on the field of research and held more than seventy in depth interviews in Germany, Sweden, USA, Canada and Great Britain; among his interviewees are ex-anti-immigrant skinheads, ex-jihadists and Islamists, ex-neo-Nazis and ex-activists.

In recent decades, Kimmel has presented empirical research on masculinity, in *Healing from Hate* Kimmel makes a study into the relationship between masculinity and extremism. It seems to be an obvious question, but in fact it is not; it has gone unnoticed by many scholars of extremist movements. The predominant theories in this field are mostly focused on themes such as ideology, economics, politics, violence, and it seems they have only marginally considered gender issues in the movement. Kimmel proposes to add to the studies of extremism an analysis of the gender, which according to the author presents a facet not yet very explored in this field: masculinity. Kimmel, as also Raewyn Connell does, dialogues very well with psychology without falling into psychologisation. Kimmel seeks to study not only the sociological aspects of the construction of masculinity, but also puts a pinch of psychology in the construction of masculinity.

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Kimmel argues that there is a gendered political psychology “because all three moments of a young extremists’ trajectory – entry, experience and exit – are deeply gendered process” (p.241). The proposal of Kimmel is very vital because masculinity is constantly tested by the social world, mainly in patriarchal societies where honor, shame and devotion are essential parts in the construction of male identity. In a hostile patriarchal world, the adherents of the extremist movement feel politically engaged, revalidated in their masculinity, united, inseparable, mutually comfort themselves through camaraderie. It is a deep masculine gendered experience in the entry, experience and exit of extremist groups.

Kimmel also proposes the "aggrieved entitlement", that explains the struggle of men to restore masculine and social ideas that no longer exist. The relationship with extremism could be a way to escape from this capitalist world, feminist (in the Global North), cold, neoliberal, where there is no longer the so-dreamed, idealized white masculinity, rich, heterosexual, respected, idolized by women and families. Engagement with the extremist movement seems a way to rebuild masculinity outside a world of hostilities and away from the loss of the garden of Eden.

In some theoretical currents the ideology appears as the bait to attract men to the extremist movements; Kimmel affirms that ideology comes much later in the life of the recruited; the real bait for recruiting and selecting young people to the movement are actually "the seductions of extremism; the visceral, emotional, psychological excitement." (p.15).

Kimmel’s book is a true page turner, presenting the very newest perspective on gender within extremism studies. In fact, he goes beyond extremism, masculinity and gender issues. He brings much wide cultural nuances, trajectory of EXIT foundations, economics, far-right politics, globalization and above all the effects of far-right politics which affects the very core of construction of young masculinities in the global North.

This book undoubtedly opens a new chapter in the study of extremism, and it will certainly be the beginning of new issues between extremist groups and the studies of masculinity. Certainly, Kimmel does not intend to make gender analysis a panacea to explain and overcome all the strands and aspects that try to explain the engagement to extremist movements.

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The book is very suitable for courses on extremism, masculinity, sociology of the gender, and very valuable for psychologists, political activists, religious leaders, policy makers, civil and community leaders, parents, teachers and social workers.

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