Stewart M. Hoover and Curtis D. Coats, **Does God Make the Man? Media, Religion, and the Crisis of Masculinity**, New York: NYU Press, 2015, 240 pp. $27.00 (paperback).

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The recent election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States urges scholars and the general public alike to examine the prevalence of gender anxiety and sexism brought to light during the 2016 election. Although there have been many strides toward gender equality, this election is a resounding knell that patriarchy is still a hegemonic force. However, the mounting evidence of continued and oppressive dominance of masculinity does not stop men from feeling threatened. In *Does God Make the Man? Media, Religion, and the Crisis of Masculinity*, authors Stewart M. Hoover and Curtis D. Coats propose that men's "traditional roles and prerogatives have been thrown into question" (p. 8) by contemporary forces. The authors focus on men's responses to these perceived threats and highlight sources of masculinity for Christian men in particular.
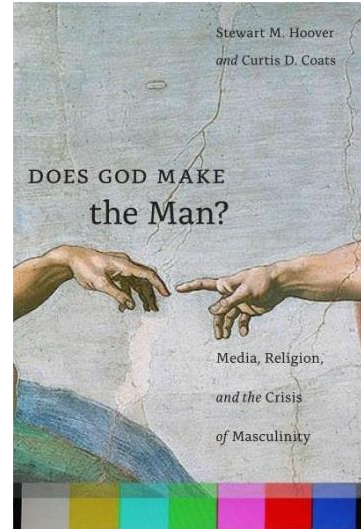
The question posed by Hoover and Coats is ultimately answered: Yes, but not on His own. The objective of the book is to explore how both faith and media "influence white, middle class heterosexual men's ideas about masculinity and their roles in their families and in public life" (p. 1). Hoover and Coats argue that the assumed positive influences of religion and the assumed negative influences of media are not wholly reflected in Christian men. The men interviewed display a more nuanced reading of gender in their religious texts and find both positive and negative images of masculinity in media. After a brief summary of the book's findings, I analyze the key contributions of this book to communication while offering critiques of its thesis and conclusions that can guide future research.

Hoover and Coats's arguments are supported by a series of semistructured interviews and focus groups with 55 Evangelical and Ecumenical Protestant men. In chapter 1, the authors unpack the role that religion, specifically Protestant Christianity, has on men's gender identities. The authors categorize the guiding principles of Christian masculinity into "provision, protection, and purpose" (p. 19). Christian men define themselves by their ability to provide and protect their families and by identifying their purpose as head of the household and as breadwinner. Many of the men interviewed lamented that there were not more teachings about masculinity in their faith despite having clear ideas of "headship" and that "men are different and should be thought of differently" (p. 61). In chapter 2, Hoover and Coats turn toward the men's interaction with media. While noting that "media are a threat" to religious teachings, most men interviewed also found "models of manhood" (p. 66) in the media they consumed. Among the frequently mentioned role models were Mel Gibson's Benjamin Martin in *The Patriot*, Stephen Collins's Reverend Eric Camden on *7th Heaven*, and Bill Cosby on *The Cosby Show*. Shows like *Friends*, *Will and Grace*, and *The*

Simpsons, which respectively relied too heavily on sexuality, highlighted homosexuality, and portrayed men as irresponsible, were considered damaging to religious ideals and families. In chapter 3, the authors unite gender, media, and religion and draw connections between definitions of masculinity and underlying social processes. They discuss how the three topics "achieve new meanings when they interact" (p. 111), complicating attempts to find direct sources of masculinity and gender roles.

Hoover and Coats conclude by arguing that religion and media do not clearly, overtly, or monolithically define masculinity, but both contribute to its formation and domination permeating contemporary culture. Hoover and Coats argue that the men found resources for defining masculinity "in broader social contexts, [which] were important, yet unstated" (p. 39). As Antonio Gramsci (1929/2002) warned, hegemony's most concerning characteristic is its invisibility. The Bible and media reflect what is always already perceived as the "natural" order and, thus, are not thought of as intentionally producing masculinity. When asked, the interviewed men could name few masculine teachings in the Bible, but clearly held ideas of the "proper" way of organizing the household and preferred gender performances. These seemingly contradictory viewpoints highlight the pervasive power of patriarchal ideals and how influences from faith and media blend into the larger cultural landscape. Thus, *Does God Make the Man?* succeeds in locating the underlying practices of patriarchy that inscribe values and beliefs while going unnoticed.

While making some interesting assertions about gender, media, and faith, the authors did not push on implications of these masculine identities or the underlying power struggles that characterize contemporary gender politics. In charting men from traditional leadership to a gentler, family-oriented headship, Hoover and Coats argue that feminism produces positive and liberal interpretations of masculinity. The authors applaud many of the interviewed men for adopting feminine characteristics, such as caretaker and gentleness, and expanding what it means to be a man. This conclusion is optimistic and overlooks the process of "hybridization," by which hegemonic masculinity maintains power through adaptation to perceived shortcomings. Hybridization allows for the male identity "to appear less rigid and thus conceals patriarchal domination" (Demetriou, 2001, p. 353). The authors tout the compromises that men are making, which are attributed as being in line with feminism. But these actions can also be interpreted as necessary, minor adjustments to maintain power and control.

For example, feminine characteristics, particularly ones associated with homosexuality, were demonized by interviewees. Respondent Ned described *Will and Grace* as a "stupid . . . homosexual-type" program where the main character "acts like a woman about half the time" (p. 86). While some minor incorporation of femininity was allowed, interviewees showed disdain when men acted *too* feminine, thus reinforcing traditional gender identities. Hegemonic masculinity functions as "negation of subordinate elements" (Demetriou, 2001, p. 347) such as race, gender, and sexuality. In separating masculinity from effeminate and nontraditional presentations of manhood, the interviewees reproduced and supported heteronormative and hegemonic masculinity. Based on the treatment of certain shows and the interviewees' comments, I disagree with Hoover and Coats's assertion that this demographic diverges from expectations. Although the interviewed men could not name overt teachings, both the Ecumenical and Evangelical Protestants knew what a Christian man should be and aimed to follow in Christ's teachings in leading their households and sacrificing for their families. Furthermore, the interviewed men pointed to

fairly obvious traditional masculine role models in the media, and some shunned relatively banal shows such as *Friends* for their "sexual innuendo" (p. 79). Based on hybridization and traditional gender roles, these types of responses may well be expected by the media and communication scholar.

No book can address everything, but Hoover and Coats's focus on white, heterosexual, Christian men begs the question of why *this* particular group. Other, perhaps more interesting, provocative, and poignant stories remain untold and unaddressed. Some women were given a voice, but these opinions were incorporated as wifely complements to their husbands' interviews. Interestingly, these women appeared to be the strongest supporters of traditional gender roles. The authors did not explore this topic in the interviews, nor did they delve into how women are often complicit in their own disempowerment, nor examine the role of femininity in Christianity. The authors also leave untouched how homosexual Christians and Christians of color negotiate gender, faith, and media. In highlighting only one type of Christian, Hoover and Coats leave part of the landscape uncovered and ripe for future research.

Does God Make the Man? will likely appeal to scholars interested in media, religion, gender studies, and critical studies of men. The book challenges assumptions about the relationships between gender, media, and religion and decenters the often-considered "neutral," cis-gender, heterosexual, Christian, white man. Hoover and Coats provide examples that could be used in classes themed around religion and gender (chapter 1), gender and media (chapter 2), or religion and media (chapter 3), but is unlikely to stand alone as a course text. In focusing on a particular demographic, Hoover and Coats enable avenues of future research that explore the production of femininity and homosexual masculinity through Christianity, the hybridization of masculinity in media and faith, and production-focused inquiries of how media men and women are made. *Does God Make the Man?* reminds scholars that simple relationships are usually more complicated than they first appear, especially when in conversation with competing, and often invisible, ideological forces.

References

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