



Nine Lives: Adolescent Masculinities, The Body And Violence

James Messerschmidt

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Sociologists and criminologists have long known that there is a relationship between masculinity and crime, for gender has been advanced consistently as the strongest predictor of criminal involvement. *Nine Lives*, written by one of the most respected authorities on the subject of gender and crime, provides a fascinating account of the connection among adolescent masculinities, the body, peer abuse in schools, and violence. Drawing on penetrating life-history interviews of nine white, working-class, teenage boys, James W. Messerschmidt unravels some of the mysteries of teenage violence. This book is a comparative analysis of male sex offenders, assaultive offenders, and nonviolent boys, and has implications for understanding and preventing such national tragedies as the recent school shootings in the United States. In this captivating study, Messerschmidt talks to these boys in depth about their experiences, and he learns what they actually did and experienced in their lives that resulted in sexual or assaultive violence, or nonviolence. Prior to this study there was no information or empirical research on the agency of the adolescent-male offender, or on how such agency relates to masculinity and violence/nonviolence. *Nine Lives* is also unique because of its examination of how teenage males construct, interpret, and attempt to comprehend their own lives, and the world around them. Messerschmidt addresses the following chief questions: Why do some boys engage in violence and some boys do not? And, why do those boys who engage in violence commit different types? This differential use of violence is examined as a resource for "doing masculinity" in certain situations and under specific circumstances. Although none of the boys in *Nine Lives* were involved in school shootings, their life stories--and the social processes surrounding their violence--are relevant to understanding the school killings from Moses Lake, Washington to Littleton, Colorado.

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