

Thompson, E. H. (2019). *Men, masculinities, and aging: The gendered lives of older men*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 272 pp. ISBN: 1442278544

Reviewed by Roberta Sultana¹

Penned by Edward H. Thompson Jr., a well-renowned United States professor and a pioneer in the realm of men and ageing scholarship, the book '*Men, masculinities and aging: The gendered lives of older men*' is set to acquaint readers with the gendered nature of older men's lives. Before delving further into this book review, it is noteworthy that although the title of the book refers to 'older men', in the book, Thompson refers to 'aging men', 'aged men', 'old men' and 'very old men' as he elucidates that the term 'older' blends the extensive variances amid mature men and hazes the idiosyncratic life experiences of middle-aged and old men (p.9). Owing to his notable expertise in the field, Thompson manages to generate a vast collection of information on ageing masculinities. Throughout the book, the author makes constant reference to findings derived both from his own research and from the work of other scholars in the field.

Most importantly, the author gives prominence to the fact that ageing does not stop old men from being men despite that with increasing age they may decelerate, bow out from the warfare of youth, and narrow their social links. Thompson's book grounded on the critical studies of men and masculinities in conjunction with critical gerontology and intersectionality presents a theoretical framework on how men experience later and late life. Intersections of class, generations, geographies, ethnicities and masculinities are thoroughly examined and discussed. This book is divided into three sections namely; (i) Masculinities and Ageing, (ii) Health as men age and (iii) Social worlds of old men. These three sections are further sub-divided into twelve chapters.

The first section introduces and revolves around the examination of the notion of ageing masculinities in other words how old men's performance of never ageing masculinities are modified and substituted by their performance of ageing masculinities. As well, Thompson delves deeply in discussing the ways men traverse ageist relations and chip in the new arenas of the third age culture and by what method old men's daily lives disclose their adjustments to their transforming bodies. Moreover, Thompson talks about how nowadays more individuals have the opportunity to lead enriching and fulfilling lives at post-employment age and beyond. He also elaborates on how old men perform and represent a range of culturally and socially supported ageing masculinities.

¹ Roberta Sultana, University of Malta, (roberta.sultana@um.edu.mt)

While the author recognises Connell's constructs of gender order and hegemonic masculinity as an important route of reasoning apropos gender practices, in relation to men and power, and as an impetus to the extensively acknowledged account on plural masculinities, he goes on to critique the pertinence of hegemonic masculinity to old men and ageing. He asserts that the hegemonic masculinity account falls short from facilitating comprehension of how old men intentionally and unintentionally situate themselves, when personifying ageing masculinities and while resisting the cultural accounts of never-ageing masculinities.

Thompson goes on to explain that the notion of hegemonic masculinity generally disregards, maybe even condescends, old men, flinging them as "complicate and subordinate and more likely as marginalized others" (p.26). As an alternative, the scholar suggests a re-examination of "Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theories of practice and of the body as symbolic and physical capital, and his concepts of - habitus, field and capital -" to facilitate novel understandings into the denotations of ageing masculinities and to permit enhanced comprehension of ageing men's social performances (p.26).

The second section centres mainly on; the disparities amid old men's corporeal and emotive well-being comprising depression and suicide, on how later life health contests turn into masculinity contests and in what manner the most prevailing discussions on old men and their sexual health are labelled and treated as medical issues. Thereby, in light of such discourse, the author accentuates on the importance of re-examining these topics. Besides, Thompson asserts that "health, like age and gender is performative" and the health performances and inequalities that we perceive echo the men's social location together with their habitus (p.112). In this section, the author goes on to maintain that the withstanding outcomes of men's social location and the way men deal with ageing-related morbidities provides hints of understanding into how much old men's health status mirrors and shapes their masculinities. However, scant research on old men's experiences with late life limits our comprehension of old men's health, health performances and their experiences with additional morbidity in later and late life.

In the third and final section of this book, Thompson concentrates on the social worlds of old men, commencing with an appraisal of their social rapports. He underlines men's resilience and the importance of agency in late life. Thompson goes on to discuss later life intimacies and old men's sexual practices and yearnings, the likenesses and dissimilarities regarding how old heterosexual and gay men consider their sexual ageing, the escalating predominance of old men turning into primary carers to their spouse/partners, old men's experiences as grandfathers and the experiences of old men confronting later life as widowers. Thompson, ends the section on old men's social worlds by claiming that the nascent fourth age culture has started to fit in with late life predilections and old men's adaptability. In the closing stages of the book, Thompson goes back to appraise and argues why ageing masculinities are the recommended alternate route of examining old men's masculinity practices.

In conclusion, it must be said that this book is a huge contribution as Thompson manages to assemble considerable pragmatic material on old men's lived experiences. He provides a new

standpoint on men's experiences with corporeal aging, growing older in an ageist society, and on how old men steer the non-existent cultural instructions for being an ageing man. This book is definitely an informative read for all those who in one way or another are inquisitive about the topic particularly students, researchers, academics and practitioners. As this book is presented in a flowing manner it makes it less complicated for the reader to follow through especially those students who are still novice to the field of men, masculinities and ageing. Throughout the book, Thompson provides a way to inquire about customary postulations vis-à-vis ageing men and reviews what lies beneath later and late life masculinities. Ultimately, this book surely serves as an impetus for further and much merited research on men and ageing masculinities.