This book is a product of Pascoe’s dissertation work at University of California, where she received a Ph. D. in sociology. She states that the purpose of the book is to reveal how high school students, teachers, and administrators effect and control the production of “adolescent masculinity” through language (p.4). The relationship between gender and sexuality is examined to show how they “reinforce and challenge inequality among students” (p.18). She also looks at how race affects sexuality and masculinity. Pascoe performs her research through interviews and observations, where she places an emphasis on school rituals. These rituals are analyzed to show how discourse is used in the construction of masculinity.

Pascoe states that sexuality “refers to sex acts and sexual identities” as well as the meanings produced through both of these (p.10). She uses gender and queer theory to assess how the organization of sexual life and sexual knowledge is influenced by “institutional and interactional practices” (p.11) Pascoe takes a postmodern approach to her research by analyzing traditional categories such as “male/female, masculine/feminine, and straight/gay” in a non-traditional way (p.11). These categories are examined not just to reveal their structure and function, but also to show how they are created, maintained, and dismantled.

Pascoe’s research is not of an entire culture, but of a middle class, suburban high school. The town is very similar to other middle class towns in the United States in reference to who “attended college, marriage rates, and age distribution” (p.18). Pascoe spent 1.5 years at River High, where she used the traditional methods of interviews and observations to acquire information. She interviewed students, teachers, and administrators. Her observational settings included classrooms and school rituals, such as football games, school dances and drama performances.

Pascoe looks at sexual discourse throughout chapters two and three. Chapter two primarily assesses how the institution reinforces the construction of sexuality through disciplinary practices and school rituals. Chapter three looks at
fag discourse as a temporary identity and its ability to “serve as a discourse with which boys discipline themselves and each other through joking relationships” (p.54). Being labeled a fag represents a boy’s failure or inability to perform a masculine task or the expression of a feminine quality. Through fag name calling the name caller reinforces their own masculinity and diminishes others. Pascoe also finds that fag discourse is used differently among white boys and African American boys. Different behaviors are defined as fag by the two social groups and African American boys do not use fag in name calling as much as white boys. I would like to have seen information on the relationships between fag discourse and Latino boys at River High, especially since they make up a larger percentage of the population at the school than African American boys.

Pascoe remains holistic in the respect that she looks at masculinity from the perspective of masculine boys, feminine boys, and masculine girls. The use and effects of fag discourse on Ricky, an openly gay boy at River High, are shown to be very different from heterosexual boys. He was harassed in the form of name calling and violence. Pascoe found that Ricky avoided “highly sexualized or masculinized school events” in order protect himself from violence (p.71). She found that masculine girls tended to challenge gender convictions while still having the possibility to be popular. Girls deal with “masculinity processes of repudiation and confirmation” through “capitulation, subversion, and criticism” (p.162). Masculinity in females is sometimes viewed as acceptable. This suggests that the meaning of masculinity is not universally applied. It is different for masculine boys, feminine boys, and masculine girls.

Pascoe suggests that the study of masculinity be intertwined with feminist studies of gender. Since masculinity is not universal it is crucial to “attend to the manipulation, deployment, and enactment of varieties of masculinity” (p.166). Masculinity should not just be studied from the perspective of men. Instead, it should be “a study of the creation of gendered selves and resistance to normative gender identities” (p.167). This allows gender inequality to be taken into account in masculine studies.

Pascoe ends by making recommendations for change concerning issues such as gender inequality and the protection of “gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and other non-normatively gendered students” (p.167). She suggests the implementation of organizations and other resources that could help educators and parents to foster sexual and gender equality in the educational system. Pascoe also says that educators can produce equality by enforcing legislation that protects minorities and through the use of posters, speakers, and assemblies that deter homophobia and sexism. School rituals should be reorganized so that they are not “heterosexualist, homophonic and sexist” (p.171). Pascoe places the responsibility on adults to help develop masculine identities that do not facilitate negative outcomes.
I would suggest this ethnography be used at the undergraduate and graduate level. It is easy to read and very informative. Not only is the information interesting and relevant to our society, but Pascoe’s book is a great representation of ethnographic protocol. The entire first chapter is dedicated to giving the reader enough background information to understand the concepts she will discuss. It also outlines the whole book for the reader. Pascoe follows through with her purpose and outline. She does exactly what she says she will. She concludes by making suggestions for further research and how that research could be performed.