

McKegney, Sam. *Carrying the Burden of Peace: Reimagining Indigenous Masculinities Through Story*. Regina: U of Regina Press, 2021. 288 pages. ISBN9780889777934. \$34.95 paperback.

It has been my privilege to read and review settler scholar Sam McKegney's *Carrying the Burden of Peace*. McKegney's study begins from the premise that Indigenous masculinities can be "rubrics for decolonial theorizing" (ix). For McKegney, masculinity does not refer to biology, or what biological Indigenous men do, but "to qualities connected in some way with maleness" (ix). Yes, some Indigenous people who identify as or with masculinity may be toxic, as is true of any demographic of people on Turtle Island, but for McKegney this is not because of any deficit in Indigenous men. Rather, it is because they are practicing ways of being male that are "inherited from settler colonialism" (ix). For McKegney, settler masculinities often work to limit the social, emotional, and political potential of men, and there is no reason to assume that an authentic Indigenous masculinity needs to be toxic.

In many ways, McKegney's work, like that of Anishinaabe scholar Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair and Onigaming writer and politician Wabanakwut "Wab" Kinew, focuses on positive depictions of what Indigenous men could be. There are obviously limitations to this positive project, but here I think it is important to remember the danger of what Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Wilfred Laurier UP, 2018) called stories of Indigenous deficiency. As Justice noted, "many of the stories about Indigenous peoples are toxic, and to my mind[,] the most corrosive of all is the story of Indigenous deficiency." Justice pointed out that such stories are often told by settlers, and they read Indigenous peoples as being in a constant state of lack "in morals, laws, culture, restraint, language, ambition, hygiene, desire, [and] love" (2). Indigenous deficiency stories focus on what is wrong with Indigenous masculinities, while McKegney asks us to consider what would happen "if Indigenous masculinities themselves were conceived as medicines?" For McKegney, if we think of Indigenous masculinities only in terms of what is wrong or toxic, we are denying "the beauty, vulnerability, and grace" inherent in many Indigenous ways of being male and, in turn, we are conceding "to settler colonialism's myopic vision of the world" (xii) which too many settlers have tried to impose on Indigenous men. McKegney wants to centre a kind of Indigenous masculinity that can be respected within Indigenous communities.

The scholarly ethics of McKegney's study is consistent with his 2008 essay "Strategies for Ethical Engagement" (*Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 20.4). His goal is to be an ally for Indigenous people. He defines an ally as "one who acknowledges the limits of her or his

knowledge, but neither cowers beneath those limits nor uses them as a crutch. An ally recognizes the responsibility to gain knowledge about the cultures and communities whose artistic creations she or he analyzes before entering the critical fray and offering public interpretations" (84). An ally, for McKegney, is someone who "acts out of a sense of responsibility to Indigenous communities in general and most pointedly to those whose creative work is under analysis" (85). We see this sense of responsibility in the carefulness McKegney takes in his close readings, his desire to understand before he offers a criticism, and his pointed silence in regard to Indigenous thinkers and artists whose views of Indigenous masculinity sit in tension with his own.

Carrying the Burden of Peace can be read as a follow-up to McKegney's 2014 *Masculindians: Conversations About Indigenous Manhood*, published by the University of Manitoba Press, a text where he deconstructs the hypermasculine stereotypes of Indigenous men as "noble savages or bloodthirsty warriors" (1). As McKegney notes in *Masculindians*,

Too often conversations about Indigenous masculinity begin from a position of presumed deficit that unwittingly accepts the perverse 'successes' of colonial policies of dispossession while obfuscating the living models of non-dominative and empowered Indigenous manhood that persists in families and communities, in teachings and stories, in minds and actions. (5).

The question that hangs underneath both *Masculindians* and *Carrying the Burden of Peace* is not if non-dominative Indigenous masculinities can be spoken of, but if settler scholars can talk about Indigenous masculinities without presuming a deficit relative to settler masculinities.

McKegney addressed his privilege in *Masculindians* by talking with Indigenous writers and theorists about what it means to be an Indigenous man. Overall, his interviews centred Indigenous men in ways that were respectful, engaging, and honouring. As a young mixed scholar (Black, Metis, and Scottish), reading *Masculindians* was a revelation. The discussions I had in undergraduate and graduate classes about Indigenous or Black masculinities before the publication of *Masculindians* focused on toxic stories of stereotypes and perceived deficits of Indigenous men. It was powerful to see so many Indigenous authors, critics, and theorists suggesting that there were kinder, gentler, and more inclusive ways of being an Indigenous man. It was just as powerful to see an ethical settler scholar who was willing to listen to what these men were saying without showing any defensiveness or fragility.

In *Carrying the Burden of Peace*, McKegney continues his project of honouring and celebrating non-dominative Indigenous masculinities. This time he is not centering interviews of Indig-

enous men, but Indigenous stories about masculinity and male identification. The scope is slightly larger, in that he is interested in works written by Indigenous men and women that address issues of masculinity, and he has a more sustained and engaged focus on queer Indigenous masculinities. He approaches these stories with the same sense of genuine care and respect that he approached the interviews in *Masculindians*, but here we also get to see his gifts as a close and careful reader of texts written by Indigenous scholars.

In *Carrying the Burden of Peace*, McKegney expands his project by taking seriously the works of Indigenous women on masculinity. The scope of McKegney's work is impressive. He discusses Indigenous fiction and non-fiction, Indigenous poetry and prose, and Indigenous film and new media. His Works Cited page alone could be a roadmap for any aspiring scholar, settler or Indigenous, who wants to engage with the field. Moreover, I admire McKegney's citational practices. There can be a tendency for settlers to cite Indigenous scholars in the footnotes, while centering the ideas of the author in the main text. In this case, McKegney engages in meaningful dialogue with the critics he is working with, and in doing so he models his allyship. The citational practices echo the roles and responsibilities of non-dominative masculinities that McKegney praises within Indigenous communities. In doing so, he reminds us that male settler scholars can engage in ethically informed discussions within Indigenous studies. McKegney uses his gifts as a storyteller and a close and careful reader of diverse media to take on the burden of responsibly describing the representations of Indigenous masculinities.

For McKegney, Indigenous masculinity is about the process of learning how to ethically take up the roles and responsibilities of men and male-identified Indigenous people within Indigenous communities. McKegney imagines a world with "vibrant possibilities of complexity" for Indigenous men who choose to embrace "non-dominative, and empowered masculinities tempered – or, better, enlivened – by consent" (xx). Masculinities based on consent are categorically different from ones based on force. In a patriarchal worldview, masculinity is stunted by consent, since those who are 'real men' ought to dominate others rather than consult or collaborate with them. In contrast, a non-dominative view of masculinity sees the individual man as embedded within a community and in a state of perpetual negotiation with the men and women around him to produce and maintain peace and harmony in the group. Being a man in this paradigm is about us and our needs, and men prove that they are 'real men' by becoming what the community needs them to be while using their gifts for

the good of those around them.

Building on his conversations with elders, McKegney sees roles and responsibilities as key to understanding how men can attain an honoured place within their communities. For McKegney, such roles and responsibilities need not be restrictive. They can be “sites of creative negotiation between the needs of networks and the gifts and talents of individuals within them” (5). McKegney articulates non-dominative ways of being male as embedded in Indigenous cultures. For McKegney, the goal of settler colonialism was not so much to make Indigenous men in the image of the colonizer “but to unmake and eliminate them in the service of settler appetites for land and property” (47). The goal of settler colonialism continues to be the disintegration of Indigenous communities in that “it pressures Indigenous men, like Indigenous women and others, to become what they are not” (49). McKegney, in sum, offers us a path to decolonial masculinities.

While I love this vision, I worry that it is a bit utopian. McKegney focuses a little too much on what individual men can choose to do to become better and not enough on the structural issues facing Indigenous men that prevent them from taking on dynamic and ethical roles and responsibilities that aid their communities. In Canada, Indigenous men have shorter life spans, are less likely to graduate from high school, never mind go to university, and are more likely to be in a gang than settler men. The solution cannot be as simple as telling young Indigenous men to take up roles and responsibilities that honour themselves and their place within the community. Part of what is needed, especially for urban Indigenous men, are elders, mentors, and programs that will help them heal from toxic settler masculinities while, at the same time, they slowly learn how to use their talents to help their communities. Slowness is essential here. Men need to (re)learn new habits, have space to fail, and (re)learn again. So much of contemporary masculinity today is about speed, about becoming a better man now, now, very now. It just does not work that way. Roles and responsibilities take time to learn, time to practice, and time to master. You cannot learn how to be an Indigenous man by reading a book, going away to a weekend retreat, or getting in the best shape of your life. Literature and storytelling will be part of this resurgence, for sure, but they cannot be the entire thing. Some of these issues are structural, and they need structural solutions.

In this way, my one note for this book is a note for the field of Indigenous masculinity studies. The range of McKegney’s book sits in tension with the work he does to situate his theorizing within a Haudenosaunee way of knowing. In the same way that masculinity studies have focused on pluralities, it seems to me that

it is time to focus on how different ways of being Indigenous lead to different ways of being an Indigenous man. There are real similarities, for example, between a Haudenosaunee way of being male and a Métis way of being male. But there are differences and those differences matter. As the field of Indigenous masculinity studies continues to grow, I would like to see more authors writing book-length studies thinking about Masculinity from a particular First Nation's community perspective with the same kind of care and ethical attention as McKegney has given in *Carrying the Burden of Peace*.

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Anny Morissette, *The Secret Struggles of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Leaders: Political Resistance from the Margins*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield (Lexington Books), 2021. 232 pages. ISBN 978-1-7936-4570-8. \$100 hardback.

In the anthropological tradition, Anny Morissette takes the reader through the looking glass and into the history of an Indigenous community struggling to grapple with the processes of colonization. *The Secret Struggles of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Leaders* is an exhaustive chronological account of leadership in the Anishinaabe community Kitigan Zibi from the mid-nineteenth century to contemporary times. As a non-Indigenous academic conducting research in Kitigan Zibi, Morissette provides a sympathetic perspective on a struggle that all Indigenous communities face in balancing tradition with modernity. Yet, at times, Morissette's non-indigeneity is apparent, such as when she refers to Anishinaabe ceremonial regalia as a 'costume', which in effect demonstrates the immense challenge all non-Indigenous academics inherit when representing Indigenous history, customs, and values in their research.

As the title suggests, *The Secret Struggles* is about the trials and tribulations of Anishinaabe leadership in the community of Kitigan Zibi. The main premise of the book is that "interstitial leadership emerges from the cracks of a formal system and the crevices of a traditional system under reconstruction." (p. 15) Morissette borrows the concept of interstitial leadership from such scholars as Homi Bhabha and Kimberly Springer and their work on development of identity among Black people and women, respectively. Morissette then builds