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Mostly Straight: Sexual Fluidity among Men

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Book Review

Savin-Williams, Ritch C. 2017. *Mostly Straight: Sexual Fluidity among Men.*

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

236 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 9780674976382

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In his book *Mostly Straight: Sexual Fluidity among Men*, Savin-Williams offers an analysis of new shifts in millennial men's not-so-heterosexual sexual identities. Some "mostly straight" men admit romantic crushes on close male friends, while others attest to fantasizing about sex with other men. All the while, they maintain that their primary sexual and romantic attraction is to women. Bisexuality is not on the table for these men; they are straight—well, mostly.

Mostly Straight begins with Dillon, an easygoing jock with a metrosexual haircut and a curious, little-explored attraction to men. First recruited through another study at age twenty, Dillon's eagerness to discuss his romantic and sex life leads to repeat interview sessions over the next eight years. Throughout his twenties, Dillon commits to a mostly straight self-identity by readily seeking sex with women and acknowledging both a romantic and sexual attraction to men. Dillon has not, however, pursued the same-sex sexual intimacy, but "if the guy is attractive enough . . . You just never know" (p. 21). Dillon's story is a focal point in the book because he exemplifies mostly straight men who claim heterosexuality, but who also admit the same-sex interests. The mostly straight spectrum includes men who are curious to those who would never venture beyond admitting another man is sexy.

In addition to *exclusively* and *mostly* straight men, Savin-Williams also introduces *primarily* straight men. Primarily straight men lie somewhere between exclusively straight and mostly straight. They appreciate men's bodies, but would rather not be sexual with them. They feel deeply for their male friends but, would not say it is romantic. Primarily, straight men are flattered by gay men's attention but never imagine anything further. In other words, they are sexually liberal in their attitudes but not in their behavior (imagined or real).

For the book, Savin-Williams collected thirty-nine life history interviews in which young men relive their earliest sexual memories. For most, these memories were with the opposite sex, but for some, childhood encounters involved other boys. These same-sex interactions were not necessarily influential to their sexual development but rather were framed as youthful play. In other instances, opposite-sex sexual experiences at young ages were more formative.

Throughout, Savin-Williams positions participants on the Kinsey Scale, a sevenpoint continuum to assess sexuality. Savin-Williams contends that mostly straight men are the fastest growing and biggest nonheterosexual group. Yet, the mostly straight guy "feels his same-sex sexuality *internally* more than he lives it *externally*" (p. 2). As a result, remains largely unacknowledged publicly as a sexual identity category.

Savin-Williams also ponders the biological origins of a mostly straight identity, often bringing up the fraternal birth order effect. Elaborating more, Savin-Williams points to his previous work on men's sexual arousal measured via pupil dilation while watching pornography. Whereas exclusively straight men are most aroused by opposite-sex porn and very little by gay porn, mostly straight men show strong attraction to opposite-sex porn and moderate arousal to gay porn. These outcomes are presented as further evidence of the diversity of "straight" men's unconscious arousal patterns and lend support to a mostly straight group.

For Savin-Williams, this almost-but-not-quite category is an opportunity to reevaluate the fluidity of men's sexuality. He hopes that in establishing "mostly straight" as a sexual identity, men may feel freer to openly confess their "bromances" with friends or explore a same-sex encounter without trepidation.

Readers may be left wondering if mostly straight is a phenomenon limited to more privileged groups as many of those interviewed are white, educated emerging adolescents. Whether a more diverse sampling of mostly straight men would yield similar conclusions remains to be seen. Additionally, though age at first marriage is delayed among today's youth compared to previous generations, what happens to mostly straight identification upon heterosexual union or over the life course? To get at this question, Savin-Williams offers some explanation in appendices that early research points to the consistency of mostly straight identification over time.

An easy-to-read work, *Mostly Straight* consists of a number of substantive chapters broken up by individual interviews. The intended audience for *Mostly Straight* varies from the academically inclined to the curious reader. *Mostly Straight* is a significant addition to the growing body of scholarship on sexual fluidity and flexibility among straight men. For the inquisitive reader, a concluding chapter, "If You Believe You Are Mostly Straight," provides a checklist for questioning men—an opportunity to understand where their same-sex interests fit within the confines of heterosexuality. For the classroom, *Mostly Straight* would make a contribution to any syllabus on the topic of sexualities, masculinities, or, gender and compliments an interdisciplinary approach.