Nevertheless, *The Baba and the Comrade* is an important scholarly contribution to our knowledge of the Bolshevik revolution, as it wrestled with the relations between class and gender in the first, fledgling, socialist state.

ROGER MARKWICK  
The University of Newcastle


At a time when there is widespread concern about boys’ behaviour and well-being, and their effect on others, it is useful to have boys voices brought into the public domain. The authors are to be congratulated for their efforts in searching out this diverse range of views. From the “Over 600 boys and girls, young men and women” that were involved, they have selected (and edited) quotes and writings on important areas for boys: identity, bodies, school, family, drugs, friendships, sport, relationships, and risk taking. The variety is limited somewhat by the editing: the boys’ comments are noticeably polite and well phrased, there are few “fucks” and no really bad language. The publishers deserve credit too for the format and layout of the book. Judging by the reactions of the boys we showed it to, the style is cool enough to at least be picked up and flipped through. But it is doubtful that any of the originators really expected that boys would buy this book themselves. The publishers’ categories on the cover nominate Lifestyle and Parenting. Since the chances of boys picking it up in the Lifestyle section of Angus and Robertson is slight, the way boys will be expected to read the book will be by parents and teachers giving it to them. This indirect approach is the usual channel for lifestyle information for young males. Young blue collar men read *Women’s Day* and *Women’s Weekly* magazines more often than they read *Penthouse*. They don’t buy the women’s magazines of course, they pick them up at their girlfriends or in waiting areas. But they do read them.

“Young males” is probably a more accurate description of the voices in the book. While there are a few 12 year olds, the bulk of the writing is by older males, with one piece on “hot and healthy sex” by a 33-year-old. This may well be a strength of the book, older males’ views are interesting to younger boys and having information about what other boys think can be helpful when the chances to talk honestly are limited.

It is useful to compare this book with its prototype—*Girls’ Talk* which Pallota-Chiarolli compiled and edited (published by Finch Publishing in 1998). In the introductions, the differences are stark. The idea for *Girls’ Talk* is presented to readers as arising from Pallota-Chiarolli’s own longing for a book to help figure out how to fit in as a “female” and “an ethnic.” For boys,
there are no personal revelations. Instead, the boys’ voices are used to reassure readers that this is really just boys talking. “So you’ve opened this book and you’re probably thinking what’s all this about? Well it’s about boys, their lives, their relationships and other stuff that matters to them. But this time it’s not some expert saying what to think, feel and do. It’s actually guys doing the talking about what’s really going on for them.” (vi).

This claim is more than a little disingenuous. Telling the boys what to think, feel and do is exactly what Martino and Pallota-Chiarolli do. Girls’ Talk, included lists of questions for girls to use in their conversation with other girls, relatives and “funky men and boys.” Maria, as author, inserted her own experiences into the discussion. The boys, however, are offered advice and “challenged” (that is, guided) to consider a more approved version of “doing masculinity.” In this sense Boys’ Stuff is the direct descendant of the Guide to Virile Manhood first published in Australia in 1932 by the Father And Son League. The emphasis in that publication was to avoid masturbation. Martino and Pallota-Chiarolli urge the opposite, “But did you know that in the past there were a lot of myths about masturbation?” (34) but retain the moral tone. Boys are not-so-subtly chided to eat correctly, avoid drugs, drive carefully, treat girls with respect and, above all, recognise gay rights. Dealing with same-sex attraction is undoubtedly an important theme for young males in our culture. And the ridicule and violence directed towards boys labeled as “gay” is real enough. However the emphasis given to homophobia in the book would make it appear that every boy is furiously attacking and labelling other boys as effeminate or else suffering outrageous abuse at every turn.

Authors are, of course, entitled to emphasise the aspects they think important. However, in this case, homophobia is highlighted as part of a theoretical framework which undermines the usefulness of the book for boys. The book is informed by Connell’s dominant or hegemonic masculinity theory which valorises “marginalised masculinities”, particularly males who identify as gay, and demonises “dominant masculinity” or “hegemonic masculinity” as oppressive. This schema is reflected in many of the chapter headings and questions the book asks the boys to consider. Headings like “Undoing masculinity” (16) imply that young men both could and should do away with their male identities. This is not very helpful to the majority of boys who are struggling with making a positive sense of themselves as heterosexual male beings. The authors have ignored more recent research on homophobia which avoids this polarity of “good” gays and “bad” heterosexuals by situating homophobia in a broader developmental context. More recent theory highlights how boys learn about putting other boys down by calling them poofers long before puberty, before homosexual practice is understood or experienced and before boys consolidate their own sexual identity.

Surely the role of a book such as this for young men could be celebrating and highlighting positive aspects of their male identities thereby encouraging them to take risks to broaden their options. Girls’ Talk manages this...
very successfully due to its positive, personal, gossipy tone. Boys’ Stuff is hampered in this role by its reliance on the theory of hegemonic masculinity which requires a stern approach and an emphasis on the bad things that boys might do: “being a man means you love your sport, you fix your car and you dig chicks and you drink beer” (4). Questions like “Who’s been telling you how to do masculinity—how to look, how to think, what to do?” (17) both disparages boys’ ability to make their own decisions, and ignores the subtleties of peer and other pressures that boys face in developing their sense of themselves.

The section on “Rules for being a boy” (3) also relies heavily on hegemonic masculinity theory to explain the way the world “is” for boys and therefore falls into the trap of virtually expecting boys to be stereotypes, rather than noticing the many other ways that they live their male lives. For example, questions like, “When was the first time you figured out you had to stir girls when you were with other guys?”(8), almost invite boys to follow these “rules”, rather than celebrate the variety of ways boys actively engage with girls in non-disparaging ways in their every day lives. Having established what is to be avoided so clearly, positive stories of boys who do “love their sport”, which appear later in the book, appear out of place.

The authors clearly want all boys to lead good lives and are tuned in to the ways boys struggle with male identity. The book resounds with some moving stories from the lives of some boys. It is a shame they have relied so heavily on a theory which is not particularly useful for supporting boys to build positive male identities, as this limits the scope of the book.

RICHARD FLETCHER AND DEBORAH HARTMAN
The University of Newcastle


Late-twentieth century imaginings of Thailand in the West revolve around a sexualized exoticism, in which AIDS and the sex trade have become synonymous with a national identity. Both academic and popular writings have tended to construct Thailand as a seamless and homogenous whole, with little attention to local ethnic and class differences. Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand, edited by Peter A. Jackson and Nerida M. Cook, is a compilation of essays from the diverse fields of anthropology, sociology, linguistics, literature, history, and critical theory that attempts to complicate orientalist stereotypes of Thailand. Through an examination of both Western constructions as well as Thai self-renderings, the book’s contributors address such themes as the conflation of prostitution and sexualised femininity, the