1970s, the male centrefolds in Playgirl have gained 27 pounds worth of muscle. The “bulking up” of men, combined with the relentless attention to powerful performance (even if aided by drugs like Viagra), points to the insecurity at the heart of masculine identities.

Since 1700, the idea that civilization and masculinity are somehow in tension has been repeated. Warfare is one example of this tension. On the one hand, war was portrayed as a descent into barbarism, leading to the dismemberment of man and nation. On the other hand, it provided men with the opportunity to display true male bravery and honour, and was productive of strong bodies. The civilizing process also constructed and deconstructed national identities, based on a model drawn from representations of the male body. Just as the body-corporeal had to be defended against forces that threatened it, so too the body-politic had to be defended from “soft” and “corrupting” foreign cultures. In both cases, military-like drill and other processes of “hardening” could construct the body in a way that reinforced differences between male and female, national and foreign. As Forth convincingly shows, true men were “civilized”, but they simultaneously needed to be protected against the effeminizing qualities of that civilization.

Masculinity in the modern west is not an optimistic book. Forth is broadly sympathetic to the view that dominant forms of masculinity can be challenged, even completely deconstructed. However, Forth reminds readers not to underestimate the “entrenched and durable nature of certain dominant images of manhood in Western culture”. Traditional warrior-codes and conservative gendered identities are still loudly and powerfully articulated in twenty-first-century western cultures. Fears of women—with their allegedly “softening” and unmaning tendencies—still make many men and women nervous. Modernity seems to threaten men with literal extinction: industrial chemicals diminish sperm counts and girls are thriving in schools. Forth’s

book is a fascinating meditation on the diverse ways that predictions about the collapse of masculinity have been narrated in the past.

Joanna Bourke,
Birkbeck College

Dan Healey, *Bolshevik sexual forensics: diagnosing disorder in the clinic and courtroom, 1917–1939*, DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2009, pp. x, 252, \$40.00 (hardback 978-0-87580-405-7).

There was a dream, and for some a nightmare, that the Russian Revolution would usher in sexual liberation. The reality, emphatically by the 1930s though embedded long before, was a State defining sex as a biological function, reinforcing stereotypes of gender, and seeking to eliminate the subjective and psychological dimensions of desire in order to claim the person for collective goals. A generation of social, medical and cultural historians, going to the archives, is now looking at this in considerable detail. Though marriage was secularized, and divorce made considerably more accessible, there was no radical “sexual revolution”, to be reversed by the Stalinists. Yet something significant happened with the reconstruction of medical administration and the new opportunities and responsibilities given to doctors. Dan Healey has pioneered the study of homosexuality in the Soviet Union, and he now turns his attention to the medico-legal record. His central interest remains sexual and gender identity, and this is especially evident in his inclusion of a chapter (‘Bodies in search of a sex’) on the sexual determination of hermaphrodites or intersexuals. There are difficulties both with handling the unsystematically preserved and not easy to access sources and with conceptualizing clear theses. Healey responds by weaving together two bodies of records, from

Petrograd/Leningrad and Ekaterinburg/Sverdlovsk, with its rural hinterland, supplemented by material from another regional centre, Saratov, contemporary medico-legal writing and the recent English-language historiography, tied as it is to an agenda to emancipate self-defined desire and identity.

Following the opening chapter, which debates the actuality of the “sexual revolution”, the book turns to describe legal medicine as a speciality before and after 1917. Many doctors welcomed the end of the tsarist system and looked forward to the creation of a modern, state system of medicine under an independent ministry and finally separate from “police” (in the eighteenth-century sense). It was the expectation of both physicians and the courts that this modernization would involve a medico-legal service. Here we have an account of how this worked out in practice, in circumstances where forensic expertise was thin on the ground, with some noteworthy individual exceptions (such as Dr Lia Borisovna Leitman in Saratov), outside the capitals of Leningrad and Moscow. Healey places considerable weight on a political decision to define the threshold of sexual autonomy, not as virtually everywhere by age of consent, but by the standard of “sexual maturity”. This ostensibly modernizing move, replacing custom by an empirical determination—a not inconsiderable step in a country with substantial social groups accustomed to child brides—turned out to be a medical nightmare. Debate about sexual maturity was almost entirely about women, and it was reduced in practice to the biological question of the onset of menstruation and secondary sexual characteristics, rendering psychological dimensions invisible. It was an important matter, of course, in the area of rape, since intercourse with a child was a statutory offence and with a woman not. As the chapter on rape demonstrates, in practice usually only physical, “objective” evidence was acceptable to support a woman’s claim. The sexually experienced woman’s subjective report attracted little legal sympathy. The

result was an inappropriate amount of attention given to deciding whether a girl or woman was experienced or not, thus, in the medico-legal context, re-fetishising virginity. The Soviet courts also provided more opportunity to describe recurrent offenders and offenders against children in psychiatric terms, and this was important in bringing psychiatrists within the Soviet system of administration, in parity with other areas of medicine. The medical description appeared “objective” in contrast to Christian and bourgeois moralism.

People with sexually ambiguous status have, in numerical terms, never formed a large problem, but because their characteristics strike so fundamentally at almost all societies’ classifications, investigating them for what they reveal about sexual identity clearly complements Healey’s interests. Having located thirty-six cases in the first two decades of the Soviet period, he finds a shared interest in patients and doctors in searching for a modern, medical resolution, and there is evidence, in this area at least, that subjective preference—“the desiring subject”—was taken into account. Earlier than elsewhere, it seems, Russian doctors responded to the dilemma of intersexuality by rejecting determination of sex by the presence of ovaries or testes and offering to confirm patients in chosen identities.

The book combines archival detail with large-scale claims suggested by the wider body of historical work on sex and gender, and it will therefore interest readers other than specialists. It is, surely, very important to understand, as this book helps us to do, how the massive Soviet experiment in modernization actually worked out in the detail of the legal and medical administration of the most intimate and, often enough, painful events.

Roger Smith,
Moscow