

"If you're a man struggling with your masculine identity—
or a woman struggling with a man who ought to be—
this is the book for you."
—Barbara Ehrenreich, bestselling author of *Nickel and Dimed*

what makes a man

22 writers imagine the future

edited by

rebecca walker
author of *Black White and Jewish*

What Makes a Man

Rebecca Walker (Editor)

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A timely and profound anthology from the national bestselling author of Black, White and Jewish, Representing a stunning range of essayists and novelists, both men and women, this groundbreaking anthology boldly confronts the complications, possibilities, uncertainties, and joys of being a man in the 21st century.

What Makes a Man Details

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From Reader Review What Makes a Man for online ebook

Jessica says

Really interesting collection of short stories. Worth reading just for two or three of the really impressive ones.

Louise Silk says

This was a nice attempt, but really not particularly useful when it comes to redefining manhood. All of the essays are well written and some throw a glimmer of light on a new form of masculinity; most however, don't say anything particularly new and exciting.

If we are in fact developing a new masculinity that shows a deeper and richer respect for humanity, there needs to be much more. Men and women have their work cut out for them finding life purpose independent and beyond the dictates of our still-dominating culture.

Zeo says

Includes:

Rebecca Walker, "Putting Down the Gun"
Michael Datcher, "The Gift"
Martha Southgate, "My Girlish Boy"
David Coates, "This Is My Story"
Tajamika Paxton, "Loving a One-Armed Man"
Bruce Stockler, "No Means No (and Other Lies)" from Sleep At Red Lights
Douglas Rushkoff, "Picture Perfect"
Jay Ruben Dayrit, "Pig Farm"
Malidoma Somé, "Slowly Becoming" from Of Water and the Spirit
Peter J. Harris, "Me and Isisara Sing Oldies"
Anthony Swofford, excerpts from Jarhead
Kenji Jasper, "Confessions of a Pull-Proof Trigger"
Catriona Reed, "Not a Man"
Meri Nana-Ama Danquah, "Men Holding Hands"
Jarvis Jay Masters, "Sanctuary" from Finding Freedom
Michael Moore, "The End of Men" from Stupid White Men
Jesse Green, "Lacking Harriet"
Rachel Lehmann-Haupt, "Multi-Tasking Man"
Christian Wiman, "The Limit"
Ruth Bettelheim, "Binuclear Man"
Choyin Rangdrol, "War Is Obsolete"
Howard Zinn, Afterword

I don't remember the specifics of most of these essays. I do remember being shocked at Moore's piece, and

then realizing that the ideal target audience for the book is actually someone who does think like Moore at the start - and then by the time they get to Moore's piece hopefully they have assembled from the earlier essays the tools to pick apart the logic, but need to see it from someone else's mouth before they can check it coming from their own. Or, they still aren't at that point yet and might find Moore an accessible place to find relevancy and connection to the discussion. And that's kinda the key - this book is not written for people who already have an in-depth knowledge and awareness of gender and power. It's for people who will find Moore's presence in the book a selling point.

I also remember: reading Walker's intro talking about her son while I was on the light rail on my way to work, and it almost made me cry it cut so deep. Danquah's piece was unsettling like turning a near-empty bottle over to let the contents collect in the lid. Swofford's essay spurred me to read the book it was excerpted from soon after this.

Dominic says

Better than i thought it would be. could have done without the michael moore essay though.

Laura Avellaneda-Cruz says

Some of the most compelling essays I've ever read (and a few not-so-good ones) by men and a few women on manhood. Some, like Pig Farm and The Limit read like fiction, beautiful and engaging, but will kick you in the stomach with the power of their messages. Many good men who struggle to defy problematic traditional norms of manhood will find themselves in these pages. Many concerned parents will find insight into how to raise their sons. Anyone who hopes for a more humane culture will find meaning in these essays.

Dany Siggy says

One of the essays, Jesse Green's "Laking Harriet" just proves to be another instance of gay racism (there was a line about how gay men are in crisis because their one source of privilege- manhood is challenged. um, white supremacy? anyone?)

Aside from a few of the essays, others depended heavily on the heterosexual paradigm for (re)defining manhood-- which seemed awfully odd in an anthology from Rebecca Walker (then, again, she did write Babylove). I don't think this would be at all harmful for any (anti-racist, anti-sexist, etc) man to read, but might be damaging to hetero-white men without much of an analysis.

Nick W. says

Several interesting perspectives on what it means to be a man. Certainly many that are different from my own. I'm not sure I dig collections of essays. O well, made it through.

Jennifer says

A great collection of essays and short stories that men should especially read.

Rianna Jade says

Two or three amazing essay, many meh essays and a few that had me rolling my eyes.

Heather says

I picked up this book after the foreword was included in a class' reading assignments. The essays were brilliant, with a single painfully out-of-place exception, and though I wished the book had some sort of commentary, or footnotes, something to draw the pieces closer together than the vague descriptor of "masculinity" could, I was exceptionally pleased.

However, Michael Moore's addition was both offensive and out of place. Perhaps I don't understand his tongue-in-cheek style, but I found his piece to be nothing but an affirmation of everything feminists fight against, everything wrong with a tendered worldview, and especially wrong, wrong, wrong for this otherwise delightful little book. I crossed out Moore's pages and kept reading.

Aaron says

I like the book. I've only read the first chapter thus far, but I feel that the book is very interesting. One of its themes is unconventional masculinity, which applies to me very much. I've never been a conventional male.

Summer says

Good collection of essays on masculinity and growing up male.

Spencer says

I appreciate what this book is doing and found several of the essays to be on topic and revealing about a slowly growing trend towards a new type of masculinity.

However, other essays seemed to still have the tone of "men need to shape up or ship out" in an aggressive attempt, something the editor of the essays would certainly like to get away from, to show how men are or less often how they could be. There were several incredibly well written essays, one by Poetry Magazine

Editor Christian Wiman and another as an excerpt from Anthony Swafford's *Jarhead*.

I feel like this book was a surface attempt to delve into masculinity and what it could be. It did more of saying here's how men act and here are a couple men who do it differently and here is how women react to men. I did not go deep enough or really give any sort of practical understanding of the future of masculinity, perhaps that was not its purpose as many movements just need exposure to get people like me to read them then take the ideas further.

I believe there is a new masculinity that incorporates male's biological tendencies, but shows a deeper and richer respect for themselves as humans and the rest of the world. An opportunity to see the gray areas of gender and reject the burdens of stoic and emotionally damaging manhood.

I commend Walker for her attempt, but I don't think it was as powerful as it could be. There is much more to know and to show the world about what masculinity could be.

Emily says

Some of these essays were so good, and some of them fell short for me. One thing this book accomplished was engendering a big increase in the compassion I feel towards how the patriarchy hurts men. I was particularly interested in how many of these stories focused on the ways that boys experience neglect and suppression of their emotional lives, and how cultural expectations can keep them from developing into full, emotional sophisticated human beings.
