Giese, Rachel. (2018). <u>Boys: What it Means to Become a Man.</u>
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In "Boys: What it Means to Become a Man", Rachel Giese describes her journey of understanding masculinity while raising her adopted son. This journey forces her into the realization that boys are constantly caught between their raw emotions and societal expectations on how to manage those feelings. Giese delves into the countless set rules and expectations within modern day masculinity and how these toxic rules can hinder boys' emotional and social impact. Giese draws the methods of her study from cultural analysis, reports from mainstream media, and anecdotes from parents. Additionally, Giese draws upon historic context, psychological and sociological research to explore how growing boys view themselves, and how society views them. She describes the metaphorical, yet fictional "Man Box", its impact on growing boys, as well as its impact within recreational sports. Giese also delves into the sexuality struggles and woes creating friendships among boys. Finally, Giese explores the struggles boys endure throughout their academic career.

In the introductory section, Giese explores the rigid realm of Jeff Perera's creation, the "Man Box"; which depicts the supposed true notions and essence of manhood and masculinity, and what it takes to be a true man within society. Some labels within the box describe true masculinity as being "tough, strong … emotionless, and heterosexual" (p. 1). However, written

outside of the box we find unwanted traits, that undermine the true character of what manhood is all about. Unwanted labels, being opposite of masculine, can be described as being a "pussy, fag, bitch, and a momma's boy" (p. 1). Hostile and homophobic beliefs form due to such rigid labels of masculinity, which create animosity towards gay boys. Subsequently, these labels undermine homosexual boys into more femme standards, as the masculine traits of the Man Box are almost unachievable for them. Gay and transgender boys are frequently targeted "for transgressing the set rules of male identity" (p. 2). Giese explains how masculinity is demonstrated in different settings, comparing a gay bar versus a construction site - with the former being much more feminine, and the latter being hypermasculine (p. 4).

Additionally, Giese explains how sports are also at the center of the Man Box, "as its rules of behaviour define masculinity" (p. 109). The Man Box's association of masculinity with sports comes naturally. Therefore, lacking interest in sports can be a suspicious sign of male failure (p.111). On the other hand, coaches may condescend boys who are falling behind during a game, telling them to "man up", or to "stop playing like a girl" (p. 111). Coaches also may trash talk their own players, by deploying slurs such as "punk", "fag" or "bitch" – the exact unwanted labels displayed outside of the Man Box. However, according to sociologist Michael Kimmel, sports are one of the "few venues in which over-the-top male emotion", such as tears of joy can be displayed judgement free (p. 112). Deviating from the rules of the Man Box is acceptable on the sports field – as it validates manhood, cementing bonds between men, and demarcating boundaries (p. 113).

The Man Box presents its own wide variety of problems. Due to the risky nature of being a "manly man", men are more at risk with their health and safety, from unprotected sex to heavy

binge drinking (p. 14). Due to these risky and violent norms imposed, men are more likely to be "the perpetrator or victim of violence, more likely to sexually harass women … [and] more likely to experience depression [and suicidal thoughts]" (p. 14). Such negative impacts cause boys to be less apt to seek psychological and emotional help, as well as hold intimate friendships (p.14). If young men feel anxious about the level of their masculinity, it is reflected in their ability to develop friendships with other boys.

Male friendship has been idealized throughout Western history, foundational to society, culture, and art (p. 52). Before courtship between a man and a woman was seen as romantic, the love between two male friends sometimes took on a sexual role. Until the mid-1800s, sex was an act as opposed to an identity (p. 53). Therefore, homosexuality began to shift into a more recognizable identity, much like gender fluidity. With the creation of scientific labels, love between two men became anything but platonic, and deemed unnatural. This created an awkward, stark line between homosocial ("bros/buddies"), and homosexual (sexual desires between men) (p.56). With the two categories of relationships between men being so harshly divided came new rules or set standards of masculinity. Due to these rules, intimate same-sex connections became antithetical of being a true version of the Man Box's manly-man.

Among heterosexual men today, there seems to be a fear of being perceived as homosexual or even feminine. If two heterosexual men wish to be connected to one another, Giese refers to a term called the "masculinity tax" (p. 56). This term refers to platonic male intimacy that requires a fundamental rejection of homosexuality and a hostility toward anything that seems unmanly (p. 56). Rejection of homosexuality can be demonstrated through terminology men use to commun-

icate, such as "no homo", used right after a feminized/homosexual comment or act.

Around the ages of fourteen and fifteen, boys seek friendship from other boys as opposed to their counterparts. However, tight-knit friendships between two young men loosen later in adolescence (p. 61). Boys become distrustful of one another and less comfortable expressing their feelings. When faced with rejection from another male friend, young men hold off on being vulnerable indefinitely. Due to the culture of being hypermasculine, there is little room for authentic conversations and connections, because there is such a fear of looking weak or being judged (pp. 66-67).

As boys are expected to uphold tough morals, this has a trickledown effect into a violent aftermath within schools. For instance, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold entered Columbine High School as seniors in 1999, where they massacred twelve students and a teacher, before taking their own lives. Panic grew about "alienated and anti-social white boys", resulting in a growing preoccupation with zero-tolerance bullying within schools (p. 19).

Giese explains her son's anger management issues during classes at school. Due to his temperament, the school principle recommended he attend a disciplinary afterschool program. Giese realizes that most of the boys within the afterschool program had a multitude of disabilities, much like her own son. Each boy was slapped with the label of "bully", "troublemaker", and/or "unmanageable" (p. 86). In an era of zero tolerance within schools, the "line between bad kid and good kid is now thickly drawn" (p. 86). Yet the label of "bully" is often too readily utilized within common incidents at schools - without an understanding of the cause, or realization that such conflict may have been at fault to both parties (p. 87).

Furthermore, statistics prove that "boys, boys of colour, poor boys, and boys with disabilities are the ones most often suspended and expelled; they're also the children who will most likely drop out of school as a result" (p. 88). Nadia L. Lopez, the founding principal of Mott Hall Bridges Academy, describes the harsher punishments inflicted on boys within the school system. Boys, especially those of colour, are treated very differently within the education system (p. 73). Administrative staff, as well as teachers, discipline boys more often and more severely than girls, and such discipline is more intense on boys of certain racial groups (such as Black, Indigenous, and Latino) to an even greater degree (p. 73).

However, boys are not only to be feared within the school system, but are to be feared for. This is evident in the "rising numbers of high school dropouts or falling behind rates within academics" (p. 19). Giese believes that this is due to the education system being too feminized and feminist, the inherent difference between boys and girls in learning style, and even in the makeup of their brain chemistry (p. 19). The scare narrative about the "boy crisis" in education "contends that modern boys as a group are in deep trouble: they are being left behind, while girls surge ahead" (p. 74).

Giese intends to examine the myths of masculinity, and the challenges that boys face in order to upkeep the Man Box within daily life. Giese's academic audience may consist of those in the legal, sociological, and the psychological field. Her work may also benefit mothers raising boys, public and private school boards, and law enforcement. While depicting the narrative of boys through the voice of a woman may be difficult to project, Giese utilizes excellent sources and scholars. However, one limitation of Giese's text is that she leaves out anecdotal stories from boys

themselves, but only includes the voices of scholars. Knowing directly what boys endure while growing up through the scope of the Man Box may be more realistic, as opposed to pushing the narratives of scholars alone. Giese's "Boys: What it Means to Become a Man" offers a wonderful, multifaceted exploration of the dark secrets regarding modern-day manhood.