**Giese, Rachel. (2018). Boys: What it Means to Become a Man.
Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.**

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“Boys: What it Means to Become a Man”, is a book written by Rachel Giese, which narrates her experience of grasping masculinity as she raises her adopted son while being gay. This process challenges her to develop an awareness of how boys are constantly stuck between expressing their raw emotions and living up to societal norms and standards on how to navigate those feelings. Giese examines multiple developed regulations and expectations as they pertain to modern day masculinity and the how these dangerous rules can make boy’s emotional and social impact difficult. Giese uses several strategies, such as cultural analysis, and mainstream media reports to explain the process from boyhood to manhood. Also, Giese uses historical factors, psychological, and sociological investigation to inspect how developing boys are seen in the world. Giese outlines a figurative, but still fictional thing called the “Man Box”, and the effect it has on evolving boys and its impact inside leisure sports. Lastly, Giese discusses sexuality challenges and investigates the obstacles boys encounter with during their academic process.

The “Man Box”, which is a term created by Jeff Perera is a form of fixed depiction of a realm that portrays the assumed factual ideas and nature of manhood and masculinity, and what it means to be a true version of a man in society. Several markers, such as being “tough, strong, head of the household ... in control ... emotionless, and heterosexual” (p. 1). are used to define and identify true masculinity. On the contrary, on the exterior of the box we discover unpopular

characteristics of what entails manhood. Undesirable labels that are the opposite of masculine traits can be defined as being a “pussy, fag, batty boy, bitch and a momma boy” (p. 1). Antagonistic, bigoted, and homophobic beliefs are shaped because of rigid markers of masculinity, which generate hatred and violence towards gay boys. Also, harmful labels like these portray gay boys into feminine standards and make the masculine characteristics of the Man Box unattainable for them. This makes gay and trans boys a target “for transgressing the set rules of male identity” (p. 2). Giese highlights the ways in which masculinity is displayed in different environments by how blue-collar men display a different sort of masculinity than men in corporate boardrooms (p. 4).

Giese also describes the ways in which sports is central to the Man Box, because “the association of maleness – and boys-ness – with sports is assumed to be natural” (p. 111). The Man Box’s correlation of masculinity with sports occurs easily. For this reason, “a lack of interest in sports is considered a suspicious sign of male failure” (p. 111). This notion describes how society considers sports as a crucial part of boyhood and manhood that can “override the instincts of even the most protective and thoughtful parents” (p. 111). On the flip side, coaches may also contribute to the trashing of players by using insults, such as “punk”, “fag” or “bitch”, which is the exact undesired rhetoric labels portrayed on the exterior of the Man Box. Nevertheless, sociologist Michael Kimmel, states that “an interest in sports is one of the defining features of maleness” (p. 112). Resisting the regulations of the Man Box is not allowable in sports because it threatens manhood and weakens bonds among men; however, the exception is that in sports, men are allowed to express emotions, such as defeat, sadness, and anger as a reaction to losing.

The Man Box creates a wide range of issues because of the dangerous notion of what constitutes a “manly man”, the safety of and wellbeing of men is at risk, “such as binge drinking and having unprotected sex” (p. 14). For this reason, these dangerous ideals and norms forced upon men, increases their ability to be “the perpetrator or victim of violence, more likely to sexually harass women. They’re also more likely to experience depression and think about suicide, and they’re less apt to have intimate friendships and seek psychological and emotional help” (p. 14). These negative limitations can create boys who are apprehensive to pursue psychological and emotional support and prevent them from forming close friendships. When young men are insecure and fearful of the amount of their masculinity it negatively impacts their ability to create platonic relationships with their peers.

Throughout history, male friendships have remained the epitome of closeness and was above all other relationships, especially romantic ones. Giese states that, “before women were considered equal to men and before marriage evolved into a romantic and companionate union, these male bonds stood above all” (p. 52). Additionally, “male friendships, in fact has been idealized throughout Western history, foundation to society, culture and art” (p. 52). Among these close male friendships, “some of this was sexual, what we’d now understand as gay, but homosexuality as a discreet emotional, social and political identity is a modern concept” (p. 52).

Additionally, “sex was understood to be something you did, not something you were. In the West, it wasn’t until the mid-1800s that the categories of heterosexual and homosexual were created” (p. 53). Eve Kosofsky a cultural theorist “observed that as gay identity became more prominent and visible there emerged a distinction between homosocial relationships and homo-

sexual ones. The former are emotional and related to male group loyalty (think bros and buddies), the latter to sexual desire (think gay love and sex)” (p. 54). Because of these regulations, intimate homosexual connections were categorized as contrary to ethical of what it means to be a correct representation of a manly man as highlighted in the Man Box.

There is growing fear to be seen as homosexual and feminine among men today. For example, when heterosexual men have a desire to be associated with one another, Giese describes this term as “masculinity tax” (p. 56). which is a platonic male intimacy needing a rejection of homosexuality and a hostility toward anything that seems unmanly (p. 56). The resistance of being labeled a homosexual is displayed through language that men communicate with each other, like when men say, “no homo”, immediately after feminine and homosexual deemed comments.

It is much more common for boys to form close friendships with other boys than with girls. This is especially true for adolescent boys who are developing a sense of boyhood and an understanding of society’s standard of masculinity. “However, ... despite the importance of these childhood friendships, boys begin to lose their close male friends during later adolescence” (p. 60). This prevents space for boys to foster emotional connections and share vulnerability with other peers. “At this age, boys become distrustful of one another and less comfortable expressing their feelings” (p. 61). As boys develop and grow, their expectations within society to fit into a box becomes heightened. This causes a division among boys with straight boys entering manhood, becoming more self-conscious about same-sex intimacy, and turning their attention to romantic relationships (p. 61). This combined with fear of appearing weak and hypermasculinity, many

young boys are socialized to assume labels socially constructed to define what constitutes manly behaviour and traits. As a result, this culture of hypermasculinity, produces fear and creates limits for meaningful conversations among boys to take place.

With boys being expected to live up to tough standards, it has created violent repercussions within schools. For example, Harris and Dylan Klebold entered Columbine High School and cosplayed as seniors armed with bombs and guns massacring twelve students and a teacher, then killing themselves after. (p. 19). This caused panic and coined the term “alienated and anti-social white boys” (p. 19). As a result, “growing preoccupation with zero-tolerance bullying policies within schools” was adopted. (p. 19).

Giese details her son’s own challenges in school due to complex behavioural issues. Giese states, “by the time he was eight, he’d been suspended twice. He’s affectionate, funny, guileless and charming; but he’s also impulsive and reactive” (p. 86). This resulted in the school recommending Giese’s son attend an afterschool program designed to discipline misbehaved kids. This caused Giese to recognize that many of the students in the disciplinary afterschool programs exhibited several forms of disabilities like her son, such as autism spectrum, ADHD, and anxiety disorder (p. 86). But with the label of “bully” being used to describe “common incidents of childhood conflict, without an understanding of the underlying dynamics, or without realizing that the conflict might be mutual” (p. 87).

The ability to address behavioural disabilities among children, especially boys become difficult, especially with rules, such as “zero tolerance”, which draws a “line between bad kid and

good kid, aggressor and victim” (p. 87). Moreover, fear for boys within the school system is expanded by the way society perceives boys as something to be feared. many believe the rising number of school dropouts among boys is due to “an education system that was too feminized and feminist, as well as to an inherent difference between boys and girls in learning style and even in the makeup of their brains” (p. 19).

Giese plans to inspect the misconceptions of masculinity and the difficulties facing boys that are pressurized to uphold and live up to the Man Box version of what constitutes a man and masculinity in their daily lives. The academic audience of Giese’s book may include family court systems, child-service workers, psychologists, and sociologists. Additionally, her book may be beneficial for mothers, especially single mother’s raising boys, and school systems. Capturing the chronicles of boys and boyhood from the perspective of a woman can be challenging to express, but Giese used excellent methods, sources, and intellectual professors to provide a detailed explanation on the subject. One limitation I found in Giese’s book is that there were no personal stories shared by boys to detail their own experience with masculinity and manhood. Having direct insight from boys through the lens of the Man Box may help conceptualize a realistic understanding of masculinity and manhood through the perspective of those who live with the concept. Overall, Giese’s “Boys: What it Means to Become a Man” provides a great versatile examination of the unpleasant and true concerns associated with modern-day manhood.