**Giese, Rachel. (2018). Boys: What it Means to Become a Man.
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In the book “Boys: What it Means to Become a Man”, Rachel Giese examines the qualities, causes, and ramifications of masculinity. Notably, Giese’s curiosity and motivation to understand masculinity developed as a result of her role as a mother of an adolescent boy. Giese explores the plethora of norms and stereotypes associated with contemporary masculinity and the potentially negative repercussions of such societal expectations and standards. In her study, Giese utilizes a cultural and societal analysis of masculinity and employs personal anecdotes as well as those from other individuals while also acknowledging both present-day and historical contexts regarding masculinity. Furthermore, her analysis includes biological, sociological, and psychological research, which Giese uses to emphasize the “origin” of masculinity, why boys and men act in a specific manner, boys’ self-perception, and society’s perception of them. For instance, Giese describes a collection of characteristics supposedly associated with manliness through a description of the Man Box. Further, she mentions the destructive potential of these idealized qualities and explains how social conditioning, a lack of education, and how activities such as sports can reinforce such attributes. Finally, Giese draws attention to the difficulties males face in same-sex friendships and their struggles within an academic and an intimate setting. Overall, the

effects of male stereotypes and norms, and potential solutions, are discussed.

Giese begins her book by delving into the Man Box, a metaphor constructed by Jeff Perera that describes the alleged fundamental ideals of masculinity. In other words, the Man Box is used to characterize behaviours that are thought to be related to an idealized manliness in modern society. For example, various qualities located inside the Man Box, such as “tough, strong, head of household, stud, stoic, in control, emotionless, heterosexual” (p.1), are said to describe conventional masculine ideals and expectations. In contrast, qualities outside the Man Box are viewed as unfavourable and characterize men who do not meet masculine standards. These negative qualities are thought to be detrimental to the nature of manhood and include demeaning slurs such as “pussy, fag, batty boy, bitch, mama’s boy” (p.1). Accordingly, males attempt to internalize and exhibit characteristics within the Man Box due to societal expectations. As a result of internalizing these qualities, boys may develop into men who disregard their own emotions and the emotions of others and who are motivated to dominate others. For example, individuals who deviate from the Man Box, such as gay men and transgender individuals, are often ridiculed by heterosexual males.

Furthermore, Giese explains how the ideals of manliness are socially constructed, reinforced, and influence quality of life. From an early age, boys are exposed to a multitude of influences. These influences come from family members, friends, the media, and so on. Boys are taught to conceal and suppress their emotions, to act tough, and sometimes they are praised for aggressive behaviour, such as in sports which are at “the centre of the Man Box and its rules for masculine behaviour” (p. 111). Thus, the constant exposure of manly ideals shapes boys’ demeanour and personality. Markedly, men who value and exhibit qualities within the Man Box

are said to be more satisfied with their lives in comparison to others, likely the result of “...aligning themselves with traditional forms of masculine behaviour and attitudes provides them with a sense of belonging and identity...” (p. 14). However, Giese explains that negative factors are also associated with individuals in the Man Box: “They are more likely to take risks with their health and safety...more likely to be the perpetrator or victim of violence, more likely to harass women...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).

Additionally, the characteristics of traditional masculinity discussed thus far have a significant impact on one’s self-knowledge. While discussing masculinity with Tyvon Hewitt, a social worker, Giese uncovers how he views societal expectations and standards of manhood. Giese notes how Hewitt considers that having these beliefs about masculinity “aired and reiterated and reinforced over time” causes parts of the individual to perish due to not being able to express oneself authentically (p. 16).

Notably, by referring to biological research on differences between males and females, Giese emphasizes that innate biology is not the fundamental cause of boys’ behaviour. Although differences exist between males and females, Giese quotes Fine, a psychologist, who argues “that measurable inherent differences between the sexes are minimal” (p. 37). Instead, Fine proposes that our behaviours result from a complex interplay between biology and the environment (p. 37). Likewise, Giese suggests that our environment, such as the social context, significantly shapes personality; hence, cultural expectations play a significant role in the development of masculinity. Namely, Giese suggests that the Man Box metaphor’s “utility lies in how it clearly separates the

biological fact of maleness from the cultural creation of masculinity” (p. 2).

Giese also explores how boys and men interact with other individuals. In particular, she mentions how they perceive and interact with gay men and with same-sex friends. For example, Giese discusses how, historically, same-sex friendships were of the utmost importance; however, more recently, due to the growing overlap of the social spheres of women and men, the importance of love-based opposite-sex relationships and the nuclear family grew (p. 53). During this shift, homosexuality became more noticeable. Consequently, same-sex friendships between men decreased in importance since the idea of “men loving men began to be seen as suspicious and unnatural” (54).

In contemporary society, there appears to be a concern of being mistaken for a homosexual among heterosexual guys. Homosexuality is often believed to undermine the essence of manhood; thus, men within the Man Box might be fearful that others will perceive them as gay. In response, boys and men may bully gay men. Also, Giese highlights that if they show affection to a friend of the same sex or say something that could be considered feminine, they may follow their actions with phrases such as “no homo” to affirm their heterosexuality (p. 56). Giese employs the term “masculinity tax” to explain why boys and men use the phrase “no homo.” According to Giese, platonic male intimacy necessitates a rejection of homosexuality and hostility toward anything effeminate (p.56).

Moreover, as boys enter late adolescence, same-sex friendships decrease in quality, and they start to lose their close male friends (p. 60). Giese discusses the psychological consequences of this loss by referring to Niobe Way, a psychologist who studies friendships and the emotional

lives of boys. It is no surprise, Way notes, that during late adolescence, the risk for depression and feelings of isolation are heightened; a potential consequence of the loss of emotional sustenance, which was once present when they were younger, but no longer present in their current, more superficial friendships (p. 60).

Concerning the academic life of boys, Giese explores a concept known as the “boy crisis.” The “boy crisis” suggests that boys are falling behind in school whereas girls are improving. However, she emphasizes numerous problems with the “boy crisis.” Giese states that it is based on fallacious premises that all boys “are fundamentally the same...share similar capacities and interests ...have equal opportunities...are treated equally...” (p. 74). In reality, boys’ educational hardships are exacerbated by social and structural disadvantages, learning challenges, and family issues. Markedly, current research suggests a more significant difference in academic achievement and graduation rates among boys than between boys and girls (p. 95). Racism and poverty, not sex differences, are significantly more responsible for boys’ challenges.

The acceptance of stereotyped masculinity and the display of male dominance, Giese proposes, is linked with numerous adverse outcomes (p. 194). Markedly, the ongoing conceptualization of maleness in opposition to femaleness is a significant impediment in improving the negative consequences of masculinity (p. 195). Females are devalued when attributes associated with femininity, such as vulnerability, are belittled, and, consequently, males are discouraged from claiming similar qualities as their own. Liberating girls and women from limiting, harmful gender stereotypes is intrinsically linked to boys’ and mens’ liberation from their own set of limiting gender stereotypes (p. 195).

Furthermore, those in the sociological and psychological fields would be among the scholarly audience interested in reading Giese's book. Giese's book would also be beneficial to many school boards, administrators, and legal professionals. In the domestic sphere, parents of young boys will benefit significantly from the knowledge presented in her book.

Giese discovers during her investigation that, generally, boys' emotions are in a continuous conflict with cultural pressures regarding how to deal with them. She is not seeking to make a case against masculinity; instead, she attempts to reimagine what it means to be a guy. Giese employs various sources of information as well as superb scholars. She has written an excellent book, which is extensively researched, well organized, and inclusive of various races, genders, and sexualities. Overall, Giese's book, "Boy: What it Means to Become a Man," is an intriguing investigation of contemporary manhood and is enjoyable to read.