

REINVENTING

THE LIBERATING POWER OF
COMPASSION AND CONNECTION

MASCULINITY

EDWARD M. ADAMS AND ED FRAUENHEIM



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COMPASSION AND CONNECTION**

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Reinventing Masculinity

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Dr. Ed Adams: To those who understand the power of compassion and to those open to learn. And to the countless lives that have been harmed or destroyed whenever compassion is ignored.

Ed Frauenheim: To my son Julius, for teaching me how to be a better man.

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FOREWORD

I was delighted to be asked to write a foreword for this book by Ed Adams and Ed Frauenheim because it offers deep insights into the problematic nature of modern masculine identities.

What we become as men is so much out of our control. We didn't choose to be a male—to have the genes, bodies, and the early life social conditioning we have. Males often engage in aggressive competition with other males for reproductive opportunities. Females too create their own hierarchies. We find our social competition culturally textured. We find ourselves with impulses, attitudes, and beliefs about the way we should be.

For men, this is typically some archetypal version of a “hero” prepared to sacrifice life and limb for kin and country, for honor and tribute. We are to be tough and fearless: to hide emotions of fear, grief, vulnerability, and despair, to be the right stuff. We live in fear of being shamed as a wimp or a coward, as unwanted or irrelevant!¹ As so much entertainment infecting young males demonstrates—from James Bond myths to Superman and the Avengers—it's all about power to defeat the other.

This book highlights the fact that it doesn't have to be

like that. Indeed, new evidence suggests that during the few million years we evolved into hunter-gatherers, males were relatively nonaggressive; their status was gained through altruism, caring, and sharing—and sexuality was open. Our basic nature has been deeply corrupted. Modern cultures have basically driven us all crazy.²

Yet we're also beginning to understand the evolution of emotional needs and what brings out the best and worst in us. With such insights, many of which are expertly outlined in this book, we can gain new awareness about who we are and what we can become. We can consider if the roles we inherited are good for us, for our relationships, and indeed for humanity. The reality is they are not, and they haven't been for many thousands of years.³

Modern anthropologists are finding that early humans were not particularly aggressive. Instead, scholars are pointing to very peace-loving and caring human beings in the hunter-gatherer groups that were the primary social structure that shaped our minds. In fact, it's likely that human intelligence and language evolved partly *because* we focused on developing prosocial relationships.⁴ This isn't to romanticize hunter-gatherers, because some were and are quite aggressive. Yet, we also know that when social environments are benign then male psychology is also benign.⁵

If we are by nature quite benign, peace-loving, and caring, then where did it all go wrong? Most scholars point to one thing: agriculture. With agriculture the hunter-gatherer way of life gradually disappeared. Then, as groups got larger, static settlements emerged, and resources expanded. This opened the way for aggressive dominant males to race to the top of the hierarchy, threatening all those below them.⁶

And where has this got us? It's tragic to consider the billions of men who have rushed at each other with spears and swords, the guns and bombs that over the centuries have left screaming, terrified, and dying bodies strewn over countless battlefields. Why are men so vicious toward other human beings? Why do we spend so much of our energy inventing sharper blades, longer-flying arrows, and more-powerful bombs to kill and maim? We must face the fact that we are a species with extreme potentials: both to inflict great harm and to offer profound compassion.

The message in this book will help wake us up. And it may make us angry. That anger comes from becoming aware that we men have been scripted to see ourselves as nothing but disposable bits of DNA, strutting our stuff, prepared to step on whoever gets in our way—and to be stepped on. This can be seen on countless battlefields, on the football field, and in our race to the top of million-dollar salaries. It suits one group only, and that's the ruling elite.

How can we free ourselves from this absurd, competitive, destructive, and intensely hierarchical culture? First, we must begin to care for each other. We have to start to care about being men connected with the destiny of other men. Men all over the world need to say "enough is enough." We need to demand better social conditions and wiser scripts for us all. We need to demand better entertainment, better education, better emotional support, better guidance, and better leadership.

Women too have had an incredibly bad deal in the last five to ten thousand years as a result of male hierarchies. Females have been exploited, traded and raped, suppressed and marginalized, and even in religion treated as second class. But they are rebelling more and more, and quite rightly too.

Men can support that. And we should do so without hanging our heads in shame. We must see the tragedies we've all gotten caught in as coming from gene-built and culturally shaped scripts that none of us chose. We did not choose our brains or social environments. But we must aspire to be compassion-focused and live our lives as helpfully as we can.

As this book's authors highlight, men need to reclaim compassionate courage as a basic human trait that we can craft our identities around—one that offers meaning and purpose, dignity and wisdom. This is necessary if we are to stop the way our societies pit us against each other. We must stop falling for the idea that hostile competition is somehow heroic while denying that it's also deeply harmful. With a proper understanding of what compassion actually is, and what happens in our brains when we practice and enact it, we begin to see that it is the root of well-being. It is not submissive but assertive. It insists on equality and fairness. It insists on creating a world that we all want to live in and enjoy.

Reinventing Masculinity is a wonderful book for thinking about how to release ourselves from crippling processes. It's time for us all to stand up and say, "Give us back our full humanity; give us back our dignity." Let us find our courage, so that when it's our time to die we know we've tried to make the world a better, less competitive, more caring place.

Paul Gilbert

PhD, OBE, Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Derby, founder of compassion-focused therapy and author of several books, including *The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life's Challenges* and *Living Like Crazy*

PREFACE

This book is an act of hope and love. We believe men matter, and matter a lot. While this might seem obvious, it's important to examine and update how our culture directs men to develop and mature, cultivate loving relationships, express intimacy, succeed at work, and contribute to our communities. These actions touch everyone and everything that exists.

In other words, how we define masculinity is a fundamental element of our cultural life. We wrote this book to take a good look at the models of masculinity that consciously and unconsciously—often invisibly—influence all of us.

We found both bad and good news. First the bad news: the approach to manhood that dominates our culture is unhealthy, outdated, and dangerous.

The good news is that men are reinventing masculinity—or aspire to reinvent masculinity—in ways that make sense for our times, enable men to thrive, and offer hope for a better future for all of us.

This book is an attempt to support the shift from a confined masculinity to one that is liberating. To a masculinity that frees

both men and women from oppressive limitations and to live more expansive, compassionate, and connected lives.

Two Eds Are Better Than One

The two of us came together to tell this story in a way neither of us could do on our own. Here's what we each brought to the project.

DR. ED ADAMS is a licensed psychologist in private practice. He is also past president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinities, also known as Division 51 of the American Psychological Association (APA). In 2015, this division awarded Ed the Practitioner of the Year Award. For over thirty years, Ed has treated men in individual and group therapy. In 1990, Ed founded Men Mentoring Men (M3), a nonprofit organization in New Jersey designed to help men live larger and more meaningful lives as expressions of the "best of masculinity." Ed has facilitated growth in many men from the inside out through thousands of psychotherapy sessions, men's group meetings, and retreats.

Ed's experience as a psychologist and men's group leader has made him no stranger to the joys and sorrows men often experience but seldom share. Moreover, his personal experiences as a boy and man, including coping with a loving yet alcoholic father suffering from PTSD after long service in World War II, heightened his sensitivity to the complexity and challenges of the male experience. These experiences—of being a husband to a loving and supportive wife, of being a proud father of a thoughtful and caring son—have humbled,

educated, and strengthened him. Ed's personal and professional life experiences have fortified his commitment to share what he has learned through this book.

Ed also has been at the center of a masculinity firestorm in the media. As past president of Division 51, Ed was one of the spokesmen for the APA's new guidelines for treating men and boys. These guidelines were the product of four decades of research. Yet they immediately sparked controversy in the media when they were made public in early 2019. Conservative commentators blasted the research, which found that rigid adherence to traditional masculinity traits like aggression, dominance, and stoicism tend to be unhealthy—for men as well as for those in their lives. Ed explained the meaning of the guidelines on the *Good Morning America* TV show with host Michael Strahan. He also appeared on NPR, as well as on conservative pundit Laura Ingraham's Fox News program, among many other media appearances.¹

Ed Adams is also a professional artist—painter, sculptor, and poet—who for twenty-five years owned an art gallery showcasing his paintings and sculptures. Two of Ed's public sculptures honor ordinary men who during the Second World War showed extraordinary courage, connection, and compassion. Ed's monumental sculpture in Smith Field Park in Parsippany, New Jersey, honors Raoul Wallenberg, who is credited with saving over 100,000 lives. And Ed's bust of Oskar Schindler, who prevented the certain death of 1,200 Jews, now occupies a place of honor in the office of Steven Spielberg, director of the movie *Schindler's List*. Both Wallenberg and Schindler were men who exemplified the best of masculinity while thrust amid the worst of humanity.

Since we feel this book should reflect the diversity and fullness of the masculinity we espouse, Ed's paintings, vignettes, and poetry are integrated into the content of this book.

ED FRAUENHEIM is an author who has written about business, leadership, and society for more than two decades. Ed currently serves as senior director of content at Great Place to Work, the research and advisory company best known for producing the annual *Fortune* 100 Best Companies to Work for in America list. Ed also cofounded the Teal Team, a small organization dedicated to helping organizations evolve into more democratic, purpose-driven, soulful places.

Before these roles, Ed spent twenty years as a journalist and commentator focused on the intersection of work, technology, and business strategy. He has cowritten three books, including *A Great Place to Work for All: Better for Business, Better for People, Better for the World*.² That 2018 book included Great Place to Work's research on 10,000 managers and 75,000 employees. Ed and his coauthors discovered that the most inclusive and effective leaders—dubbed “For All Leaders”—have traits such as humility, curiosity, a focus on purpose, and the ability to cultivate trusting relationships.

Through that research and other articles and reports, Ed's work has explored the way our more complex, interconnected economy and global society are calling on men to break free of the narrow version of masculinity most of us grew up with. While a culture war rages in the mass media over what it means to be a man, Ed has contributed to a quieter though nonetheless vibrant conversation in the world of work and organizations. He has observed a growing consensus in the

business world: it no longer works to be autocratic, cutthroat, or emotionally unavailable. Ed has sought to connect the dots, to bridge these conversations to show that a different masculinity works at work today.

Ed Frauenheim also brings a lifelong struggle with “man-rules” to this book. Be strong? Ed grew up skinny. Dominate others? He lost his one fist fight in sixth grade. Just win, baby? He often froze during key moments of hockey, basketball, and soccer games.³ The traditional male obsessions with winning, with brute strength, with becoming king of the corporate hill have haunted Ed for much of his life. But through personal reflection, mindful practices, and plenty of help, he has come to redefine traits like emotional sensitivity, exuberance, and camaraderie as worthy. He is living a fuller life as a result, and feels like a better husband to his wife and father to his son and daughter.

Who Should Read This Book?

We wrote *Reinventing Masculinity* with several audiences in mind. The first is individual men seeking guidance on becoming a better man and living a better life. We imagine women seeking to better understand men’s needs will find the book valuable as well. It should also prove useful to mental health professionals and therapists treating men in individual and couples counseling. We also expect it will serve teachers and coaches—whether they be athletic, life, or business coaches.

We wrote *Reinventing Masculinity* with organizations in mind as well. We believe it can help business leaders cultivate more effective, inclusive, and soulful cultures. In a similar vein,

we are hopeful the book will contribute insights to academic courses in fields ranging from gender studies to psychology to management.

Finally, we believe the book will be useful and inspiring to men's groups akin to Ed Adams's M₃ groups as well as therapy or treatment groups. To help groups get the most out of reading the book together, we've included a Discussion Guide at the end of the book.

We also created a Reinventing Masculinity Self-Assessment—you will find it after the Discussion Guide. By answering the assessment's ten questions, any man can get a rough sense of where he sits on a continuum. On one extreme is what we call "confined masculinity," and on the other is "liberating masculinity." This tool is designed to help men locate where they are in their journey toward a freer, bigger, better life.

Gender Bending and Mending

We are hopeful that our book will be meaningful to the majority of men. That's because the up-to-now dominant, confined masculinity we describe has influence over all men, regardless of how they define their identities or practice their sexuality. Still, we want to acknowledge that our message is directed primarily to a particular audience. We are speaking for the most part about, and to, heterosexual men. In addition, the cramped masculinity we describe in the book tends to be felt most acutely by men who came of age in the twentieth century—Baby Boomers, members of Generation X, and older Millennials. What's more, our stories and suggestions are geared toward "cisgender" men. That is, men who identify

with the gender of their biological sex—as male rather than as female or nonbinary.

The very terms “cisgender” and “nonbinary” may be unfamiliar and even disturbing to many men who grew up with constrained views regarding the identities available to human beings. Those constrained views are at the heart of this book. As authors, we hope to help mend wounds that have resulted from fearful, intolerant ideas about gender roles—by which we mean the many social and cultural ways people of either sex express themselves. Not only do we honor the diversity of gender identities, we also appreciate the way masculinity is flavored by a variety of factors, including race, national origin, socio-economic status, and religion.

We’d like to add that—as two white, middle-class, middle-aged, heterosexual American men—we know our ability to comprehend the experiences of the entirety of men, not to mention women, is imperfect. But at the same time, we believe there is value in the two of us drawing from our experience, our expertise, and our empathy to share what we’ve learned. We’ve come to know a lot about stereotypic masculinity, and we see signs that even younger men and people who are adopting alternative genders find themselves damaged by that traditional, still-potent masculine ideology.

We hope this book highlights the ways that central beliefs about masculinity have shaped people’s lives, how those core assumptions are hurting us, and how a better, liberating version of manhood is emerging. What’s more, we see this reinvented masculinity as being built on universal principles. Compassion and connection are fundamental human