

Is there anything good about men?  
Roy Baumeister

Yes there is a lot good about men, and Baumeister expresses it very well

In the final chapter we learn that this book started out as an essay. That's what it is – an extended essay. It makes a number of good points, which it repeats more often than necessary in order to stretch the material out to book length.

The book cites relatively few sources, some of which it uses extensively. A lesbian named Nora Vincent wrote a book entitled "Self-Made Man" about her experiences masquerading as a man for a year. He also quotes "Professing Feminism" about the dogmatic way in which feminism is taught on campuses, and Christina Hoff Summers "Who Stole Feminism." They are all good books, but he leans on them a little bit heavily.

He repeats on every other page the theme that neither men nor women are superior, they are simply different. He even goes so far as to say that women have the capacity to be men's equals in most spheres in which they compete, that the difference is solely one of motivation. He absolutely does not contend that men are superior in any way and repeatedly goes back to the claim that they are different. This is undoubtedly a prudent stand to take in writing such a book. Even though it quite consciously defuses and dodges confrontation, it will undoubtedly find enemies enough.

Baumeister's chapter titles are a pretty good guide to the book. I use them to frame my review.

Chapter 1: An odd, unseasonable question

In the last half-century, since the rise of feminism, it has become de rigueur to look for excellence in all female undertakings and to examine every area of potential male supremacy with a critical eye seeking to find prejudice at work. Baumeister recognizes that he is a pioneer in attempting to find good things to say about men. Even at that, as I noted above, is extraordinarily measured in his praise of men, balancing every positive with some supposedly equally compelling virtue possessed by women.

Chapter 2: Are women better than men or vice versa?

He says there are four possible answers to the question of whether men or women are better. Until the 1960s the assumption was it was men. Then he claims that in the 1970s there was a brief period in which it was assumed that there was no real difference between the sexes – differences between boys and girls were no more than skin deep and were totally cultural. Since the 1970s, Baumeister claims, the presumption has gone the other way – women are superior. And if you don't spout that party line you find yourself in trouble with the authorities: academic deans, human resource departments and your wife.

Baumeister says that this book is dedicated to the fourth, hitherto unexamined proposition that men and women are simply different. They should each be appreciated for their strengths. Our strengths are complementary. We are not enemies, but allies and should see each other that way.

Baumeister does note that just about every bell curve distribution for men is flatter than for women. More short men, more tall men. More stupid men, more smart men. More antisocial men, more hypersocial men. A statistician would say that the standard deviations are greater for men than for women in almost every measure applicable to human beings.

He discusses Larry Summers' great gaffe at Harvard, stating what every intelligence researcher accepts without question: there are more men than women on the far right hand side of the bell curve distribution of intelligence. There are more vastly intelligent men. Put another way, do not look for female Newtons, Einsteins or Von Neumanns anytime soon.

### Chapter 3: Can't or won't? Where the real differences are found

Baumeister's thesis in this chapter is that men and women are fairly much equally capable. The differences are primarily in motivation. Women could be anything that they want, but they generally don't want it. They do not want the stress, the aggravation, the risk and danger that come with success in the male sphere. They do not want to work 60 hour weeks and be away from their families. They do not want the glory that comes from being a victorious general, or the risk entailed in becoming one.

### Chapter 4: The most underappreciated fact about men

Baumeister talks extensively about the fact that among wild horses only the alpha male gets to breed, and the process so depletes him that he only retains his alpha status for a few seasons. Being an alpha male is hard work, but the reward is that you leave a lot of descendents.

The "glass ceiling" is only a myth. The facts seem to indicate that men make more because they work harder. They work harder because they are hard-wired to compete, to strive, in order to achieve reproductive success. Women get to reproduce anyhow. They don't have to.

Whereas 80% of women have left some genetic trace of their presence on earth, only 40% of men have done so. Weaker men don't get women. This was much truer in prior ages when polygamy was accepted, or monogamy not so strictly enforced as it is today. Just as with wild horses, this improved the breed. Strong men left progeny, weak ones did not. Only in the last couple of centuries, since the advent of the welfare state, has this been reversed. See Helmut Nyborg's article entitled *The Decay of Western Civilization: Double Relaxed Darwinian Selection* in [\[\[ASIN:0957391331 Race and Sex Differences in Intelligence and Personality – a Tribute to Richard Lynn at 80\]\]](#).

## Chapter 5: Are women more social?

Baumeister makes a strong case that men and women socialized differently. Men have wide networks of acquaintances, women smaller networks of closer friends. This leads very naturally into the next chapter...

## Chapter 6: How culture works

Culture is everything that mankind does in groups. It includes building our factories, infrastructure, educational institutions, military organizations, sports teams and governments. These institutions obviously are built up by many people over an extended period of time. No single individual is indispensable. Moreover, the individuals within these organizations tend to specialize. A corporation will have people who specialize in product development, marketing, finance, logistics and other tasks that need to be accomplished.

Baumeister's key insight is that these organizations require exactly what men have always had: broad networks of rather shallow relationships. An organization can work quite effectively even if the people within it do not like each other a great deal. It does not matter if the guy in the shipping department is an irascible slob as long as he gets the product shipped to your customer.

Women's relationships on the other hand tend to be closer, warmer, and more personal. This is exactly what is needed in a family setting. A child needs to feel loved and appreciated, and needs sympathy and kisses and the Band-Aid for the boo-boo whether or not it is bleeding. A man will take a systematic approach and say if it isn't bleeding don't waste the Band-Aid.

## Chapter 7: Women, Men and culture: the roots of inequality

Culture is a male creation, arising out as it does out of large networks of weak relationships such as those developed by men. The institutions that characterize our culture, the military, universities, corporations and so on were all developed by men. Not surprisingly, they were formed to accommodate people who think like men. That would be people who are ego driven, logical, results oriented.

There was an initial assumption in most of these institutions that women would not fit in. Judging from the fact that they did not evidence much desire to be in, the men who created and staffed the institutions assumed that women were intellectually or temperamentally not up to it. Baumeister finds that this is not the case. A half-century after being admitted in substantial numbers, women have come to dominate many departments of the universities and government bureaucracies. Their presence is certainly obvious in the military and the upper echelons of corporations.

Baumeister reasserts his observation from chapter 3, "can't or won't" that the reason for women's scarcity in the upper positions in these organizations is not a question of ability but one of motivation.

I offer an observation of my own. This last week has seen the publication of a piece about eight people who control as much wealth as the bottom 50% of humanity. This is the list:

**Bill Gates**  
**Amancio Ortega**  
**Warren Buffett**  
**Carlos Slim Helu**  
**Jeff Bezos**  
**Mark Zuckerberg**  
**Larry Ellison**  
**Michael Bloomberg**

It is no shock that they are all men. They all started their own business, or businesses. Baumeister mentions elsewhere, in another connection, that it was only in 1986 that the first company founded by a woman, Liz Claiborne, joined the Fortune 500. It remains the only one. Here is a list of the top women in American business today. Did you ever hear of any of them?

Irene Rosenfeld  
Carol M Meyrowitz  
Indra Nooyi  
Ellen Kullman  
Angela Braly  
Ursula M Burns  
Lynn L Elsenhans  
Patricia Woertz

Moreover, the stories of Larry Ellison's and Bill Gates' genius are legend. I can't remember any legendarily smart women executives. Legendarily clever would be Elizabeth Holmes, the first self-made woman billionaire and hence the first to go from billion to nothing in no time flat in the Theranos fiasco.

Chapter 8: Expendable beings, disposable lives

Going back to the observation that only 40% of men have ever reproduced, Baumeister stresses that men need to take risks in order to get the opportunity to leave progeny. Society needs people who do take risks – soldiers, miners, firemen and entrepreneurs. They are paid a premium to take those risks. Sometimes they lose. Although employment is about equal between the sexes, men are 13 times more likely to die on the job.

The observation, going back into the mists of time, is that a woman did not need to take risks in order to reproduce. There was always a man willing to fertilize her. On the other hand, her lifetime fertility is quite limited. Whereas Genghis Khan left thousands of offspring, the most successful woman would be very lucky to leave a dozen. Risk-taking has always paid off for men, not for women. Society takes advantage of that fact.

Another note is that although the most prestigious positions in society are dominated by men, so are the most ignominious: drunks, convicts and the homeless. Most women get some respect. Lots of men get none.

#### Chapter 9: Earning manhood and the male ego

Most boys and men are highly competitive. Those who did not compete got left behind in the reproductive sweepstakes. Society historically gave beta males little opportunity to leave offspring.

A man has to have a healthy ego in order to come on to a woman. The odds of rejection are high. He has to take his lumps and get on with it. One of the most trenchant observations from Nora Vincent, the "self-made man" was that being rejected by women time after time was hard on the ego. Without the pretense of being a man, her lesbian self was treated much more kindly by women than her masculine alter ego.

#### Chapter 10: Exploiting men through marriage and sex

A culture is not interested in fairness. The strength of a culture is its ability to reproduce itself by whatever means. The young must be borne and raised, and somebody has to pay for it.

In the old days of polygamy and/or mistresses, rich guys usually supported their paramours well enough to see that the children got raised.

Baumeister contends that monogamy was contrived by man to make sure that every man got a wife. I had not read that elsewhere and I am not totally convinced. In any case, in today's society the fertility of the men at the top end is much more limited than it was previously. These are the guys who are working 60 hour weeks. It may be true, as Trump infamously said that they will let you grab them anywhere, but in this day and age they will probably not bear your babies even if they do.

There are lots of women whose men cannot support them very well or who wind up without men to support them. Society takes care of this in two ways. First, divorce laws have been written to ensure that the former wife gets her pound of flesh as the guy goes out the door. Second, society has contrived welfare benefits so that a woman always has at least some money with which to raise children.

He observes that the lower life expectancies in the old days men shorter marriages. A lifetime commitment was only 20 to 30 years. Now it is 65.

He also observes – and this is very good to see in print, nobody else has the courage to write it – that the male sex drive is much greater than that of women. Men want more sex. A woman has a high sex drive when she is young and fertile, not pregnant and not on her period, in the conducive atmosphere with a congenial man and in a good mood. A man has a high sex drive period.

Men often discover when the blush is off the rose after the first couple of years of marriage that his wife is not nearly as interested in sex as she used to be. He is. Here he is trapped. Philandering is more strongly frowned upon than ever, but yet his wife has more societal support for turning him down than ever. The divorce courts are ever harsher with men. Baumeister asks if it is any wonder that men are reluctant to commit. It looks on the surface like a dumb deal. With the advent of feminism there is more sex than ever available for free, and committing is a worse and worse deal.

More than that, time favors the man. A woman's attractiveness and reproductive capability diminish rapidly after the age of 35, whereas a man can go on twice as long. The way the deal is structured now, men should not rush into commitment. And they do not. This has an adverse effect on society, of course, as the young required to perpetuate it are not being born.

Chapter 11: What else, what next?

Baumeister has an extensive section on schools. Several things work against boys. Boys have a flatter bell curve by the measure of intelligence. More geniuses, more idiots. By virtue of the rampant grade inflation all schools have implemented, the geniuses get lost among the mediocre, but the idiots are still highly visible.

More than that, boys are competitive and easily bored. They are not content to get gold stars and be put on the honor roll along with a bunch of mediocre kids. If they can't be truly the best, they don't want to play the game. A lot of smart boys are rolling their eyes, shrugging their shoulders and dropping out to play video games. At least that is one milieu in which excellence is recognized.

My conclusion is that there is a lot of original thinking in this book. It is an easy read, if a bit repetitive. A definite five-star effort.