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WHY YOU NEED THIS BOOK

MEN ARE BRILLIANT.

Being a man is brilliant. Seriously, it is. Except for penile dysmorphia, circumcision, paying the bill, becoming a weekend father, critics who've been hating on us for, well, pretty much fifty years – oh, and those pesky early deaths.

Suicide isn't much of a laugh either. Nor is paternity

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fraud, schools failing boys, military conscription, conception by deception, the criminal sentencing gap, coughing up 70 per cent of income tax, dominating homeless statistics or getting throat cancer from oral sex, which – ironically – is what’s really going down for a new, unassuming generation who still aren’t briefed on life’s nagging bloke truths.

Hence the time is now for a new, improved approach to masculinity.

From our relationships with women to our relationships with ourselves, nobody should be more informed on the everyday politics of being men than us. It’s our prerogative.

Yet, despite living in society’s most liberal age, our greatest ever technological era – where ideas, information and the occasional celebrity porn tape can be shared in an instant – tackling the gritty, salty stuff integral to our well-being, not to mention our hair line, remains strictly off-limits. Not because we can’t communicate, but because the truth is inconvenient for everyone else.

Men being honest – really, truly candid about what affects them sexually, financially, legally and psychologically – remains rigidly taboo because it’s the ultimate game-changer.

Funnily enough, that’s precisely why we should embrace it. Like a piñata for the pissed off, we’ve spent

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decades being the trendy target in a long line of public floggings. The overrated, unfashionable gender. The one social group it's politically correct – no, no – *virtuous* to dislike. In fact, man-bashing has become mainstream, so lucrative that people build entire careers on it – which might explain why, for many, it musn't be ruined with a reality check.

The megalomania of it all recently snowballed to the point of censorship, with the European Union attempting to criminalise any criticism of the sisterhood via the (ironically titled) Statute for Promotion of Tolerance, whilst Facebook already suspends users for the same reason – which, together, isn't just bonkers, but a bit Putin, too.

Thankfully, there's light at the end of the tunnel.

When London's Southbank Centre held the UK's first ever men's festival, Being A Man, earlier this year, it was a line in the sand. Putting our issues on the map with a straight-down-the-middle legitimacy, it attracted hundreds of people from all demographics – male, female, young, old, black, white, gay, straight – to chew over the credentials of masculinity in a safe space. Think Radio 4, but with beards and some really trendy brochure artwork.

Topics ranged from friendship – with Billy Bragg and Phill Jupitus detailing the success of their cast-iron, twenty-year kinship – to mental health, fathers and marriage. Even Tony Blair's former spin doctor, Alastair

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Campbell – not to be mistaken for UB40's Ali Campbell, as one onlooker did – detailed his journey back from alcoholism and depression at a time when men's self-destruct stats are at a record high.

Aside from being one of the few instances in human history where men, not women, had to queue for the toilets, it also offered another first: men were allowed to dip their toes into feminism – without apology or the fear of being wrestled into a headlock by Germaine Greer. About time, too. By this point we'd been criticised non-stop for about half a century, so were probably due a right to reply. Maybe even a full-scale comeback, like the Union Jack. Years ago, it, like us, was considered a symbol of benevolence and strength, before modern sensitivities made it naff – perhaps even offensive. Although it never changed, attitudes around it did. So when Morrissey took to the stage in 1992 with it draped across his shoulders, the *NME* accused him of being racist; an accusation which, although incorrect, made everyone edgy. Suddenly, people were fine being patriotic, but only sheepishly. They didn't possess themselves too loudly for fear of being misinterpreted as jingoistic and torn down.

It took the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 for everybody to finally relax and discover a renewed comfort level with national pride. The reason? They'd been given permission to.

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On some level, Being A Man offered a similar thing. It allowed those wanting to fly the flag of their gender to do so, freely – be it holding doors open, sitting with their legs apart or having a sense of basic worth – without being labelled sexist (or, in the case of *Game of Thrones* actor Richard Madden, threatened with castration).

Although it wasn't perfect, the festival set us off on the long, hard slog of detoxing masculinity and countering the disconnect between us and everything good. Not only did it offer permission for men to be men, but it was also a commercial success – which pricked ears. Since then, similar events have cropped up in India and the US, where, most recently, hundreds gathered in Detroit for America's first conference on men and boys.

Of course, some questioned why they were needed at all. Female critics sneered 'every day is a men's festival', whilst a handful of grandstanding guys asked: 'What's the point of more pale, stale males getting together and talking about themselves?' The answer is simple: because, despite 1.9 million years of evolution, we still haven't *quite* nailed this thing called life.

Even at our best, brilliant people like John Cleese drop the baton – which is disconcerting considering he's one of our better brand ambassadors. Intelligent, acclaimed and in possession of the super-brain behind *Monty Python*, which might just be the funniest sketch

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show ever, he continually buys into marriage despite three failed attempts, including one to Alyce Faye Eichelberger, who got more of his fortune than he did when they split. Still, after paying her off with £600,000 per year for seven years, an £8 million lump sum, an apartment in New York, a £2 million London mews and half a beach house in California, he soon went off and married somebody else – only signing a last-minute pre-nup on the hair-pulling insistence of lawyers.

Some might call this admirable, but there's nothing romantic about financial ruin.

No less frustrating are the likes of Wimbledon champion Boris Becker, who can ace a sports tournament with ease but can't appreciate that – as a man, and especially a famous, rich man – he's a sitting duck for anyone determined to get a baby with a bursary and a lifestyle to boot. Thus, if he's going to have random sex with an opportunist in a restaurant, he might want to consider the possibility of an ulterior motive, or expect a fax – and a bill – nine months later.

These great men, like millions more, are superlative in countless ways, yet they don't seem to operate at full-truth level. Instead of seeing their vulnerability in the way everybody else does, which would serve them better, they believe their own hype. They take sexual attention at face value. They see strength manifest in their bodies as biceps,

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triceps and abdominals, or as money in their wallets, and think they're invincible – but they fail to see the personal as political, which means looking at the bigger picture. Joining the dots between individual experience and the larger socio-political structures that bind us.

This, gentlemen, is always the fatal gap in our armour. Not least because women have long been upping their game in this department and their general consensus is that we, as men, deserve bringing down a peg or two.

I once met Caitlin Moran, author of *How To Be a Woman*, during an awards ceremony in London. To her legion of fans she's the voice of contemporary feminism, only funny. Yet, despite her credentials as one of Britain's more well-rounded celebrity 'libbers', she insisted that all men lead a charmed life compared to women – always – which makes positive discrimination against us forever fair game.

The irony of a millionaire explaining this to a lad from Liverpool was not lost on me.

Then again, had I been told this ten years earlier, I might've agreed. After all, that's all we're ever told. Now, however – having burned my briefs – I can see that she's actually only half right. Yes, there are advantages to being male: we can have as much sex as we like without being called slags; we rarely have to worry about being groped on a packed bus or making the Sophie's Choice between

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kid and career. But we also have our own issues of everyday sexism: denied parental rights; left to die years earlier than women (because NHS spending favours them – as we'll see later); and casually packed off to war like mules. None of this shit is a) power, b) privilege or c) easy.

But if bestselling experts can't see this, it's no wonder men who aren't paid generous sums to discuss gender issues don't either. Ask any man. Or, rather, ask a woman who lived as a man for eighteen months. American journalist Norah Vincent did exactly that as an elaborate premise for her 2006 book *Self-Made Man*. A bridge between two worlds, it gave a unique insight into our lives – and, to her surprise, the experience was every bit as complex, as difficult and as demanding as being a woman.

Specifically, she said:

It was hard being a guy. Really hard. And there were a lot of reasons for this, most of which, when I recount them, make me sound like a tired and prototypical angry young man. It's not exactly a pose I relish. I used to hate that character ... I always found him tedious and unsympathetic. But after living as a guy for even just a small slice of lifetime, I can really relate to that screed and give you one of my own. In fact, that's the only way I can truthfully characterise my life as a guy. I didn't like it...

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I thought that by being a guy I would get to do all the things I didn't get to do as a woman, things I'd always envied about boyhood when I was a child: the perceived freedoms ... But when it came to the business of being [a man] I rarely felt free at all.

If only the world had listened sooner we could've saved her a job. But, of course, they didn't. They never do. It's almost like the truths of masculinity have become a classified document in recent years – unfit for public consumption. Just like airline companies won't serve energy-generating food on long flights in case they create restless, demanding passengers, the establishment won't share the reality of men's lives: the underbelly of the beer belly.

Instead, they keep us socially sedated with an air-brushed version. Usually one that features a great big pair of tits. Open any bestselling men's magazine and see for yourself. There'll be little evidence of the burning issues we face as a gender. You'll find fast cars, sports stars and women who forgot to get dressed. You'll learn how to cook a steak, 101 ways to please your girlfriend and what to wear whilst asking your wife's permission to get the snip. You know, the really important stuff. It might go on to discuss business, killer six-packs or even the gentrification of the denim shirt, but for a new generation of men this is no longer enough. Because although

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it's glossy, it's exciting and it entertains – often brilliantly – it also keeps us asleep.

Paradoxically, few of us end up living the dream.

Over the past decade, scores of men have realised that the big-breasted nirvana they saw in *FHM* during the 1990s doesn't really exist. In its place are divorce courts, absent children and prostate trouble. That's not to say these lads' mags don't have their place – they do, because they cheer male sexuality when it's an easy target – but they still don't illustrate the light and shade of reality. And, if knowledge is power, then such editorial engineering, no matter how well meaning, leaves us all a bit, well, impotent.

To be fair, it's partly our own fault. American comedian Bill Burr put it best when he said we don't want to question our gender roles and our relationships with women because we want to fuck them. And he's right. That's why editors talk to our penises, not our brains. However, whilst this approach might get us laid, it's also getting us shafted. Because every man who isn't prudent about his life invites misandry (learn this word – it's the male equivalent of misogyny). Think of it like professional boxing without bobbing and weaving, parrying or being cross-armed in the ring. You'd be performing at a massive disadvantage for no good reason. Yet, as men, we do this all the time in life. And, just like a blind-siding

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punch, old age or a credit card bill, misandry creeps up on us. It ends up being the eye-watering family law ruling which forces you to become a second-Sunday father – a McDad – or a gold-digger's cash-point. These are the truths that are too ugly for handsome magazines. Trust me, I've worked on them.

They're the same truths that newspapers and top-ranking websites frequently avoid reporting in case they upset the establishment – or worse, their female readership. After all, that'd be bad for business. Most newspapers devote entire sections to women and their well-being because they're the main target of advertising revenue. Men are simply given sports pages and told to be happy.

Journalistically, it's as if we're allowed to discuss the heavy-duty issues like war and politics, but not the war and politics of being male. Granted, some might say the reverse – that the very existence of women-specific supplements separates them – but the reality is that there's little they can't say in them. No women's issues are truly off the agenda, with no insult too offensive. Meanwhile, we're shushed and shamed into compliance. And herein lies our problem: if the women's movement has freed up women, men need their own equivalent. After centuries of succeeding for the mutual benefit of everyone – a bit of anaesthetic here, a spot of rocket science there

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– we’ve spent recent history feeling guilty for it. Instead of having a sense of pride (one that points and laughs when someone says we can’t multi-task or use a washing machine, even though we created the damn thing), we now concern ourselves with appearing asexual, being modest and ‘finishing last’.

This, we are constantly told, is the new formula for being a man. Succeeding to the point of being useful, but not leading. Or, if we do lead, feeling bad for it. Remembering that if we ever do triumph it’s because our achievements are handed to us on a plate, probably at the expense of women, not because we’re skilled and work hard.

Suspiciously, this formula misses a sole, independent sense of self that sees men determine for themselves what masculinity is. One that’s free of women’s approval and isn’t dogged by fears of whether she’s faking it. Which begs one very important question: is this a *Sex and the City* version of being a man – one that hangs our identity on a thumbs-up from the opposite sex – or is it the real thing?

Fortunately, there’s a better acid test to determine our credentials as modern men. And it’s this: on top of DIY, Sunday-league football and being able to evict unwelcome spiders, can we rationally, respectfully, intellectually defend the brotherhood when it’s under fashionable

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attack – even if our voice shakes? Because if we cannot, who can – and who will?

Those who don't generally sell out for sex. And although this sounds good, it rarely ends well. Just ask bestselling author Esther Vilar. In 1971, she wrote her trailblazing book *The Manipulated Man*. In it she noted that, contrary to popular belief, women in industrialised countries aren't simply oppressed by all men, all the time, but – rather – it cuts both ways. We manipulate each other. Upon publication she received death threats from 'Gal-Qaeda' extremists – or is it Shehadists? – all over the world, proving that it's not always easy to stand your ground, even if you're making a fair point. Nineteen years later, when Neil Lyndon wrote *No More Sex War* in 1992, a virtual peace treaty between the genders which suggested feminism needed to soften and consider men as allies, not aggressors, little had changed. In fact, the hostility was so irrational that one critic from the *Sunday Times* suggested he must've been motivated by a small penis complex. Charming.

But as Winston Churchill once said, 'You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life.' And his words remain true. Almost five decades after her book hit the shelves, Vilar said in reflection: 'If I had known then what I know today, I probably wouldn't have written this book. And

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that is precisely the reason why I am so glad to have written it.’

Amazingly, after decades of so-called solution feminism, virtually everything in it remains unchanged.

Men are conscripted; women are not. Men are sent to fight in wars; women are largely not. Men retire later than women (even though, due to their lower life expectancy, they should have the right to retire earlier). Men have almost no influence over their reproduction (for males there is neither a pill nor abortion – they can only get the children women want them to have). Men support women; women never, or only temporarily, support men. Men work all their lives; women work only temporarily or not at all ... Men only borrow their children; woman can keep them.

Naturally, this is all our fault. In 2013, British Labour MP Diane Abbott made a damning speech about Britain’s men and boys – smugly announcing that masculinity was ‘in crisis’. The shadow Public Health Minister – who, rather brilliantly, was later sacked from the front bench by Ed Miliband after failing to toe the party line – declared that male culture is ‘a celebration of heartlessness; a lack of respect for women’s autonomy and the normalisation of homophobia’. Even for the millions of men who are gay, apparently.

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She added that men ‘find themselves voluntarily creating an extended adolescence’ by living at home with their parents – which has absolutely *nothing* to do with rising house prices, but everything to do with being ‘resentful of family life’.

The speech, which made no reference to women’s identikit behaviour, might’ve been funny if it weren’t so tragic, so I couldn’t help but address it when we met at a charity fundraiser in the V&A museum. There, she admitted that her entire theory came from a chat with a ‘handful’ of male friends. Hardly a credible, detailed study. Fortunately, the one good thing her rant did do was get people talking. Years ago, such a speech would’ve gone unchallenged in a bid to be seen to ‘get’ feminism. But contemporary conversations are a tad more balanced now. The erudite Tony Parsons, who is a total lad, made a blistering retort in his *GQ* column, whilst actor Jude Law told me at the Groucho Club that ‘men are no more in crisis than women’. Very true. You see, men don’t need focus because they’re faltering, but because parity is a two-way street. Thus, if air-brushed images of models make young girls feel bad, then articles entitled ‘Why Are Middle-Class Men Useless?’ by Janice Turner are crushing for boys. Yet that exact headline appeared on the front page of *The Times*.

This kind of stiletto sexism – popularised by the likes

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of Julie Burchill, Suzanne Moore, Sarah Vine and Barbara Ellen – isn't traditionally something men have had to deal with, so they let it go, hoping it'll pass. But here's a secret I'm willing to share: it hasn't and it won't. Hence this book.

If you become a father to twins – one girl, one boy – current data proves that your son will die younger, leave school with fewer qualifications and be less eligible for work than your daughter.

Statistically, she'll graduate university, but your son will be lucky to make it past the application stage. FYI, women now dominate further education at a rate of one million for 700,000 men, with one London university, the Royal Veterinary College, formally identifying white guys as an under-represented group. In fact, across the Russell Group of institutes – Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Imperial College London, Leeds, Liverpool, London School of Economics, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield, Southampton, University College London and Warwick – only three have a majority of male students.

This means your son will more likely join the ranks of the unemployed ... the majority of whom are now – yep, you guessed it – men. The Office of National Statistics noted that, for May–July 2014, 1,147,511 British men were out of work compared to 887,892 women.

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The same is happening in the USA, where 80 per cent of the 5.7 million jobs lost by Americans during the financial crisis between December 2007 and May 2009 were held by men. The same men who, at eighteen, were forced to sign up for military service – risking death and injury – or face five years in jail or a \$250,000 fine. Currently, non-compliance makes all men ineligible for various federal benefits including employment, financial aid, citizenship, loans, voting and job training – men, but not women.

Psychologically, your son will be more likely to suffer from depression and attempt suicide than his sibling, but there'll be less support in place to save him. More than ten men a day kill themselves in England and Wales; it's by far the biggest cause of death for young men in the UK. If he survives this temptation, he's more likely to endure everyday violence than women, with the Crime Statistics for England and Wales 2011/12 noting that two-thirds of homicide victims were men. The same report also recorded 800,000 cases of domestic violence against males, but awareness campaigns and shelters still only target females. This isn't a simple oversight, but an entire culture that's been cultivated for years.

A lack of respect in wider society will make gang culture appealing, but your son will be blamed for wanting affirmative peers when he joins one. He'll then spend

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years worrying over his body and sexual ability, because he'll be told that penis size matters, whereas your daughter will be told she's beautiful in every guise. Then, if he's seduced by his female teacher, she'll leave court with a slapped wrist thanks to a legal system which is frequently lenient with women (see the Everyday Bullshit chapter), but if your daughter has an affair with her male maths tutor he'll be chalking up numbers on a prison wall.

By the time your son's eighteen he will probably believe you're less valuable than your wife in terms of parental need – that fathers in families are an added bonus, not a crucial cog. Then, when he grows up, he might start his own family – maybe or maybe not by choice – but if his relationship doesn't last, he'll become one of the four million UK men who have no access to their children, but are forced to fund them.

To cap it all, he'll be progressively neglected by British healthcare, despite being more likely to get – and die from – cancer. Yet NHS funding will pump more money into women's healthcare than men's. Oh, and if he sits next to a child on a commercial airline such as Virgin or British Airways, he'll be moved in case he sexually abuses them. Your daughter won't, even if she has previous form.

At best, a lifetime of this leaves our boys deflated, dispirited and disenfranchised. At worst, it pathologises them. It encourages a suspicion of our sons and nephews,

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sealing their fate before they've even started. It also tells women they're justified in holding a lazy, dim view of us and can forever do no wrong.

Sadly, like most guys, he'll accept this because, historically, it's what we do. In a bid to support women's emancipation, in a bid for peace, in a bid to maximise our chances of getting laid, we say nothing – we allow jokes to be made about our intellectual ability, our emotional intelligence and our capacity for commitment, without saying a word. But it hasn't worked. The gender war is still a bloody mess.

One reason for this is that nobody ever taught our sons to be part of the balance. Instead, they're told that men who complain should be seen and not heard. Written off as misogynists for daring to demand a fair deal.

Obviously, this isn't to say that girls are off having a fine time – most of society is well-versed on the problems and pressures faced by women. The same women who have spent years trying to prove their worth beyond motherhood and housework. In the Oppression Olympics they'd be Usain Bolt. But, unlike us, they get column inches. They get government funding and MPs. They have a vocal community who will stand in their defence. Specifically, they don't have men telling them to 'woman up'.

Fortunately, since the advent of the internet – a place no editors or agendas can censor – men have re-discovered

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their footing. Websites and organisations such as the National Coalition For Men and the appropriately titled A Voice for Men have articulated the scope of our issues better than any left-leaning broadsheet ever could (or would), which explains why thousands of 18–24-year-olds visit them every day. Reassuringly, they're not just a bunch of angry, hairy blokes. The editor-at-large of AVFM is Erin Pizzey – the woman who set up the world's first ever domestic violence shelter in London's Chiswick in 1971. Her story, which includes fleeing the country after receiving death threats from hard-liners, is so fascinating that actress Kate Beckinsale, who grew up nearby, now wants to transform it into a Hollywood screenplay. Poignantly, Erin described her role on the site as 'coming home'.

In the Alexa ratings, the system that measures web traffic and online popularity, both are already up there and growing, fast. Why? Because they're bucking a trend where men's magazines aren't. They're telling it straight.

When Sharon Osbourne used American television show *The Talk* to describe Catherine Kieu Becker's attack on her California husband as 'quite fabulous', she got more than she bargained for. Whilst they laughed and cheered the woman who drugged her partner's food with sleeping pills, tied him to a bed, cut his penis off and destroyed it in a garbage disposal unit so it couldn't be re-attached – all because she objected to his request for

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a divorce – men plagued the network with complaints until Osbourne was forced to apologise. Even one of the cameramen refused to film the live scenes and walked away, leaving producers in a prime-time crisis. Never before had women on US TV been held accountable in such a way. It was genius.

Here in Britain, Fathers 4 Justice have long been modern-day, male equivalents of the suffragettes with their bid to equalise family law, dressing up as superheroes and throwing themselves in front of the proverbial horse.

Together, this all happened with people power – something we'll personally need to be our own propeller of change. After all, nobody's going to do it for us. We are not of interest to MPs, UN panels or charities, so we need to get off the sofa – even just mentally – and help ourselves. Don't panic, I'm not suggesting we take to the streets with placards, but turn on any TV channel or radio station and there's a global conversation about men – sometimes disguised as being about women – taking place without us. These all slowly influence our worlds, which is precisely why we need a male equivalent of feminism: something that will define, defend and expand social equality for blokes and boys, too.

You can be forgiven for laughing at this point because people assume the suggestion is absurd – that such a thing doesn't need to exist, or already does on such a huge scale

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that it's the natural order of things – but they're wrong. As this book will prove.

But first, we must name it to claim it. Previously, people tried to introduce terms like 'masculinist' or 'meninist' to define a bit of well-intended brief-burning, but they never quite stuck – in part because people couldn't actually say them. So what's left – a men's human rights activist? Nah. Too dry. An equalist? Too pious. A feminist? Afraid not – after all, that's incomplete. In the decades that feminism has been the political and social standard it hasn't touched the sides of men's issues, except in ways where it has also helped women (paternity leave is only a top topic for this reason – we're expected to be equal caregivers, but not equal in the law).

Instead, I reckon we should all become Suffragents – a new breed of sane, sorted men whose political interests are jointly at the fore with women's. Not to undo or compete with feminism, but to sit alongside it and create symmetry.

And this, right here, is your formal invitation to be part of it.

Thankfully, more than ever, we are already galvanising in this way, whether consciously or not. Look at Movember. A self-made men's movement, it's been raising consciousness, as well as smiles, since catching the world's imagination in 2003. From the humble beginnings

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of thirty Australian men fundraising for a dying friend, it's moved in from the fringe of internet ideas to become a major weapon in winning. Still, its Burt Reynolds brilliance isn't just because it has generated more than £345 million across twenty-one countries, bank-rolling 800 programmes and saving countless lives, but because it laughed in the face of people who thought men wouldn't have the collective balls to do it.

Then again, at the opposite end of the scale, it's hard to imagine there was also a time when men didn't use a moisturiser – that the multi-million-pound industry fronted by some of Hollywood's leading figures, including Gerard Butler and Clive Owen, once didn't exist. My point? Things change. The parameters of what's socially acceptable for men shift. Years ago, skincare was for girls, just like feminism. But, in a changing world, men have branded their own version of the same product and included it in their daily routine. The same is happening with man politics: the age of putting up and shutting up is dead.

Eventually, with regular use, this approach will change the face of men's issues, which – whether you like it or not – are *your* issues: Should we fund the first date? Are we sexist if we enjoy pornography? Why are we still waiting for a male pill? And do women secretly hate us? Finally, the answers are all here, in this politically incorrect, yet

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factually correct, compendium of no-bullshit masculinity for a modern age.

After all, we are brilliant. So let's keep it that way.

THE POLITICS OF THE PENIS

NO MAN IS EVER BORN with a sense of insecurity about his penis – ever. It's something he's taught.

Fortunately, once you understand this, you can 'un-learn' the toxic myth that size is king and finally be at peace with your penis. Not only is this psychologically healthy, but it also sets you free from a lifetime of put-downs, painful operations and expensive scams which never, ever work.

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Best of all, it also makes you bulletproof in the face of size slurs, which are part of everyday life for all men, regardless of how big they actually are.

It hasn't always been this way. In ancient Europe, less was considered more – see Michelangelo's Renaissance masterpiece *David* if you need a visual aid. Today, however, it's a little different – and not just in art. Now, men are rated, denigrated and humiliated by their penises in every facet of life.

For most of us, this a universal experience. One which every bloke, every boy, will have a memory of, neatly tucked away and rarely – if ever – referenced. But it sits there, smirking. I've seen it myself. In some of the most prolific media operations in the country, I've watched smart, clever women in positions of power sell out to stiletto sexism with a hooked little finger, even though any man would be fired if he claimed a female CEO was rude because she had a roomy vulva.

Thankfully, the unspoken truth is that every penis is perfectly fine exactly as it is – including yours. It does not need enlarging, pumping, piercing, widening, trimming, straightening or stiffening. You wouldn't be loved more, better in bed or more popular if it were the size of a fire hose. You'd just be you – exactly who you are now, warts and all – with a few more centimetres. Besides, cock-mocking isn't really about rating length

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or girth, but about the power that can be gained simply by doing it.

Thankfully, your masculinity, your dignity, your credibility is bigger than that. Chances are, so is your penis. And, even if you think it isn't, size doesn't matter because your best sexual organ is your brain. Read that paragraph again.

In a world where belittling men's bodies is often confused with women's sexual literacy, this is important to remember. Currently, despite their life-creating brilliance, our dicks face regular ridicule in everything from song lyrics to government road safety campaigns. (No, really – thank Australia for that one. In 2007, Sydney's Road and Traffic Authority ran the 'Pinkie' ad 'Speeding: No One Thinks Big of You', which showed women equating reckless driving with smaller genitalia.)

Here in Britain, we have Lily Allen doing it for them. She spends hours slagging off MailOnline for 'judging' women's bodies and putting pressure on the sisterhood to be a certain size and shape (even though it's mostly female journalists who write these articles, and female readers, including her, who consume them), but she doesn't extend the same courtesy to lads.

First she released 'Not Big', in which she muses about her classy size demands by singing: 'You're not big, you're not clever, No, you ain't ya big brother. I'm gonna tell

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the world you're rubbish in bed. And that you're small in the game.' Lovely. Then, Goldcock's second family-friendly offering was 'Not Fair', which sees her deride a boyfriend for not giving her an orgasm when, where and how she demands it. The lyrics are: 'Oh, he treats me with respect, he says he loves me all the time ... There's just one thing that's getting in the way. When we go up to bed, you're just no good ... It's not fair and I think you're really mean.'

Now, I don't want to get into the nitty gritty of Lily's sex life – in fact, I can't think of anything worse – but wow: isn't this the pot calling the kettle black? Here we have a prime example of a woman who says making people feel bad about their bodies is cruel and harmful, sexist even, yet she does exactly that. Unsurprisingly, when I call her out about this on Twitter it instantly hits a nerve. She responds within seconds, arguing that the songs are about 'specific men, not all men', so she's 'not a hypocrite'.

I can only imagine how comforting that is for her ex-boyfriends, not to mention her son who, in case she hasn't noticed, has a penis.

But what would happen if a singer like Ed Sheeran or Paolo Nutini released a track about the equivalent – a specific woman, an ex, who needed to do more Kegel exercises at the bus stop? Or a former lover dumped because it was like throwing a sausage down

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Oxford Street? We all enjoy a bit of good-natured, self-deprecating humour – after all, none of us are perfect and the human form exerts a fascination with all its quirks – but it wouldn't get airplay and it certainly wouldn't be considered funny. Christ, it wouldn't even get released. So what's the difference?

See, whilst dick-dissing is portrayed as good fun for girls, the reality is considerably darker because, actually, Ms Allen is spot on. All this negativity *does* coalesce in peoples' minds and, if they're not thick-skinned enough to handle it, it can damage them. It sparks a chain reaction. Boys start worrying about their dicks, then start acting like dicks. They strap on 'elongating' devices which promise to stretch them if they wear it for ten hours every day of the year at the bargain price of £1,000. Or they try the Middle Eastern technique 'jelqing', which can only be described as trying to stretch a jumper after you've put it in the dryer.

Not only does this make me wince with sympathy pains, but I dread to think what happens when these guys invest all their time and money, but see absolutely no difference at the end of it. One thing's for sure, they wouldn't get any sympathy from the outside world: we're fair game.

When Jude Law was photographed naked on holiday at his mother's private villa in France, the media couldn't

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resist printing the shots, with the suggestion that every redeeming quality about him – his talent, his good looks, his success, his intelligence, his skills as a father – had all been deleted because in his trousers was an utterly NORMAL penis.

In an article entitled ‘Nude Jude’s Not A Huge Issue’, the *New York Post* wrote: ‘In snapshots that recall George Costanza’s infamous “shrinkage” episode on *Seinfeld*, the love-rat actor’s meager manhood is on full display as he changes into a swimsuit outside his mother Maggie Law’s house in Vaudelnay, France.’ Meanwhile, Gawker (check out the hypocrisy of their strict moral code in the Sex Isn’t Sexist chapter) chimed in: ‘Photos of Jude Law’s peni-winkle have been circulating. It’d be cruel for us not to share them with you. So, make sure your boss isn’t looking, click here to see the itty bitty fella, roll eyes, take [a] shower [and] get circumcising.’

Then again, should we really be surprised? Even Napoleon’s penis wasn’t sacred. Removed during his autopsy, it later went on display in a New York exhibition, where *Time* magazine said it resembled a ‘shriveled eel’. Half a century later and the staff at *Elle* – who collectively couldn’t achieve half of what he did, even with the advantage of everything men have created since – are still banging on about his alleged ‘tiny scepter’.

Yet when Kate Middleton was papped sunbathing

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topless, everyone was furious. Violation! Sexist! Rude! I wanted to weep. Not because of Jude's genitals, which were perfectly fine, but because our private parts are forever ridiculed in a way women's aren't. OK, breasts adorn page three, but at least they're celebrated. They're not put up to be laughed at. Ours are. Even multinational companies like Pepsi, who sell their soft drinks to children, for God's sake, use slogans such as 'Size Does Matter', which isn't just offensive, but really shit copywriting. I can do better on the back of a fag packet. Drunk.

Most people justify this by saying it only affects arrogant men, who somehow deserve it. On the contrary, I'd bet a small fortune the blokes taking the biggest blows are those battling a depressing size neurosis. Once, a seventeen-year-old boy emailed me via my website. He'd quit his rugby team, stopped going out and refused to date girls – all because he thought his penis wasn't 'good enough'. He also refused to use urinals, only ever cubicles, because the risk of being seen was too daunting. This boy (who actually had nothing to worry about – then again, none of us do) had been conditioned to hate his body from everything he'd seen and heard over the years. Yet the issue wasn't his penis, it was his perspective.

Worryingly, it's a view shared by millions of men everywhere. It hides in teenage bedrooms up and down the country, regularly reinforced by pop culture of every form

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and calibre. Even a recent production of *King Lear* at the National Theatre featured three – yes, THREE – references to men’s ‘small’ dicks. Integral to the plot and tastefully done? I think not. Together, this feeds a multi-million-pound juggernaut of fear, which invades every spam inbox on a daily basis with the promise of lotions, potions and perspex pumps which do more harm than good. Worse of all, it also becomes acceptable. The new normal.

When I first started writing at the *Mail*, I saw a man on *This Morning* discussing his decision to undergo a penis enlargement operation. A conversation which brought a tear to my eye (for all the right reasons). Chatting to Phillip Schofield and Holly Willoughby in a pre-recorded segment to protect his identity, the nine-minute feature peaked when before-and-after photos flashed up on screen, no doubt to cackles of laughter in the production office and across the country.

Yet, although he certainly got his money’s worth, I was more amazed that this brave chap coined a phrase which nailed our obsession with size: penile dysmorphia. Borrowing terminology from body dysmorphia, which sees patients clinically preoccupied with non-existent physical faults in themselves, this bloke summed up an endemic problem with just two words. It was this – not the gory footage of the operation – which brought a tear to my eye.

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See, he hadn't undergone surgery for vanity or to outdo his mates in the changing room. Why would he? None of them really care. Nor had he done it to correct a medical problem which was blighting his life (one that wouldn't have been taken seriously, even if he had). Instead, he was simply trying to undo years of taunts from women and the media which had left him psychologically scarred. The very messages which affect all males, from young boys and teenagers to war veterans. So I track down his surgeon, Dr Roberto Viel, to get an idea of what motivates his patients – and if there's a trend.

'I started doing penoplasty in 1991 after a woman asked me if we'd operate on her boyfriend, who was getting very depressed about his size,' he says from his Harley Street office, wearing day-glo scrubs. 'She'd heard about a doctor in America who did the procedure and wondered if it was available here. We investigated and, after realising it was safe, trialled it here. That was twenty-three years ago.'

Now, he says, it's their biggest seller. 'Liposuction is common and so is gynecomastia [surgery to correct 'man boobs'] but penis enlargement tops the lot. I do at least two or three cases each week. Even when the recession hit and people stopped spending money, the demand for every other procedure suffered a dip – except the penoplasty.'

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Big business indeed. So, come on, how many of his patients are genuinely small? And by that I mean medically defined small. 'It's very, very rare to see a real micropenis, which affects less than 1 per cent of the male population,' he asserts.

I've operated on a few, but the overwhelming majority of my patients have a penis that we consider average by textbook standards. Unfortunately, what we consider normal isn't necessarily what everybody else does, but it's understandable: everything tells men they're below average. It's destructive.

The reality is that my patients don't come to me wanting to be porn stars, they want their lives back. They're refusing to take their sons to the swimming pool because they've focused all their anxieties and self-hate onto their penis. We consider it a psychosexual treatment. By changing a person physically we're changing them mentally. Yes, they end up with a larger penis, but ultimately they leave with a bigger sense of confidence. A better quality of life.

This all sounds very philanthropic (although the surgeries cost about £7,000 combined), but surely all this added size also improves sex, right? Not quite. 'Length isn't important,' he says. 'It all relative when combined with

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the size of the vagina. Increasing numbers of women are having surgeries to tighten the vaginal wall [commonly referred to as ‘designer vaginas’] because they consider themselves too big, especially after childbirth.’

Which brings me to my next point. Because, if size does matter – as women often say it does – then surely it matters on them too. After all, friction is friction and their bits vary as much as ours. It reminds me of an episode from US television show *Curb Your Enthusiasm* called ‘Big Vagina’. In it, the show’s protagonist, Larry David, meets a nurse, Lisa, who claims she stopped dating his best friend, Jeff, because he has a small penis. When Larry later confronts him about this, it transpires it’s her who has the anatomical anomaly – not him. I won’t ruin the punchline, but I will say that it’s better than ten years of therapy. Not least because the moral of the story is this: if she thinks you’re too small, chances are it’s because she’s too big. After all, men can put a master key in a door, but if the lock’s too big then it won’t open. And that’s not our fault.

A 2006 study by Barnhart, Izquierdo & Pretorius for the Kinsey Institute found the average vagina measures 62.7 mm with a relatively large range (40.8–95 mm). The position of the cervix, marking the end of the vagina, can also vary at different points in a woman’s cycle, making them all shapes and sizes.

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The difference between this and penis size variation? Young lads are forever told size matters, whilst girls are told they're beautiful regardless of their physical attributes. That's the irony. Women scorn the fashion industry for putting pressure on them, but – whilst I sympathise – it's these women who trash a guy because his body isn't to their liking. Even though his body is his, not theirs. Rarely is a penis respected for simply being the amazing, life-creating body part it actually is.

I was once at a friend's twenty-first birthday party, which was festooned with pictures of him at various stages in his life, including some as a child in the bath. Even here, whilst celebrating his passage into adulthood, there were women whom I overheard say: 'Hmm, he hasn't changed much ... if you know what I mean.' Another time, during a man's speech about prostate cancer at a major health seminar in London, two women in the row ahead of me leaned in to each other and made an inch gesture between their thumb and forefinger. Both times, my heart sank. Not for me or my body – I'm happy – but for the death of basic manners.

Anyone would think the sole purpose of a penis was to pleasure women. Get in line, girls – they have a whole gamut of functions for their owner before anybody else even enters the room.

More importantly, the entire size debate is ... well,

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bollocks. Biology proves it. If male size did matter, it would affect our ability to urinate, father children and get an erection from the moment we reached puberty. Which it doesn't. Even the *Kama Sutra* explains that there are three sizes of penis and three sizes of vagina, the perfect combination of which depends on personal preference.

Instead, small is a shame we're taught about, then taunted with. Advertisers use it as a foundation on which to sell their 'remedy' products, whilst women broker it as an insecurity they alone have the power to relieve us of. Influential German psychoanalyst Karl Abraham suggested this was a vindictive form of penis envy – and, who knows, he might be right. After all, why else would people – well, let's be honest here: women – be so vile about something so amazing? If he's wrong, and he might be, then it's just simple sexism, which is worse.

Either way, it doesn't tickle. So trust me when I say that making a mental leap into healthy thinking is the cheapest, safest and most satisfying solution there is.

I once knew a guy at university who thought buying herbal growth pills from Japan would cause him to wake up with a penis like porn actor Jeff Stryker, solving all his problems. It didn't. It just cost him £45 plus import fees, one awkward trip to the Post Office and, later, embarrassing diarrhoea. He'd spend hours devising ways to pimp his penis (because of an ex's throwaway comment when

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he was fifteen), which essentially meant trawling websites to buy a whole manner of gadgets.

The rule of thumb was: don't ever open his post.

Thankfully, he eventually met somebody on a night out and, from that moment on, changed. Turns out the sex was mutually their best ever and, naturally, his penis was an integral part of that. Now, they're married with kids – and he's never doubted his dick since. Even though it's exactly the same as it was before.

He got off lightly, though. In recent years I've spoken with countless urologists who've seen horrifying home enlargement jobs that would cause even the toughest man to faint. There was one who used chip fat in an old glue gun to give himself bigger girth (it didn't work), another who tried to release his own suspensory ligament with a pair of kitchen scissors (don't even think about it – it didn't work) and the man who, quite literally, used Poly-filla to fill out his phallus (seriously, don't do it – it didn't work and I think he died).

Instead, we should learn from these men. They weren't home alone looking for something to do because the football season hadn't started; they were searching for solutions to their anxieties, which had completely spun out of control. OK, the above cases are extreme ones, but men everywhere are wasting hours, days, weeks and months worrying about something they can't do much

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about anyway. Forget worrying if your penis is short; LIFE is short.

Author and comedian Richard Herring wrote 2003's *Talking Cock* – the male equivalent to *The Vagina Monologues*. In it he noted that men's paranoia about their size is so deeply ingrained (and encouraged) by society that we don't even question it:

Few of us are going to be prepared to rock the boat and look at the positive things that men do – to focus on all the men who are being good fathers, good lovers, good friends ... for fear of appearing un-manly ... Rather than making the obvious mental leap and concluding that the male stereotype was wrong, I had decided there was something wrong with me.

One easy, immediate and fun way to do this is by viewing porn with reality glasses. Not literally, of course, but by simply understanding that the actors in them are no more atypical than the pneumatic blondes they're with.

'I was always careful to point out the actual rarity of penises over 8 inches,' says publishing editor Dian Hanson, referring to her work on Taschen's *The Big Penis Book*. 'Seriously, I can't tell you how many thousands of photographs I had to examine to find ones of that size.'

Interestingly, proportionate to body scale, man already

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has the biggest penis of all the primates – but does bigger always mean better? I enter the online world of Craigslist to find out. In the personals section I find a man who's advertising his 11-inch penis to women with pride, which thus begins a very unusual email exchange. When he eventually agrees to speak with me, he admits that he frequently fails to get it completely up because a bigger dick requires so much more blood flow than normal. Even then, its heaviness means it often fails to stand at the optimum erect angle. Still envious? Thought not.

In 2012, a man called Patrick Moote learned self-acceptance the hard way. He got down on one knee and proposed to his then girlfriend at a UCLA basketball game in Los Angeles. Crushingly, before an audience of thousands, she said no – later telling Moote that it was because his penis wasn't big enough. Gutted, he became an overnight phenomenon when the clip of her rejection went viral, being watched more than 10 million times in four days.

Already on the world stage, penis in hand, he pragmatically decided to answer the size question in a documentary – or is it cockumentary? – called *UnHung Hero*. According to the film, which was endorsed by *Fahrenheit 9/11* director Michael Moore, the US penis size industry is worth a whopping \$5 billion. Gentlemen, that's \$5 BILLION WORTH OF SELF-LOATHING

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AND SHAME which could be spent on so many better things. Specifically, things that work. DO NOT GIVE IT ANY MORE.

‘The fear comes from the fact that we’ve all been lead to believe what’s “average” is huge, when, in reality, most of us are walking around within an inch of one another. Yet, whenever it’s talked about it’s always in extremes – “so small” or “so big!” – when, even across cultures, the difference in size is not as drastic as most people think,’ he tells me.

Besides, being insecure about having a small penis is way worse then actually having a small penis. The average female vagina is only 3.5 inches deep, and the clitoris is right up front, so it doesn’t matter anyway. The best thing guys can do is become informed. The film taught me that confidence is the cure for just about anything. If you are owning it then no one else will even care.

One man who knows this all too well was British filmmaker Lawrence Barraclough. Armed with a penis that’s 3.5 inches erect, he spent years agonising over his size until he finally faced his issues in a BBC Three documentary called *My Penis and I*. Groundbreaking for British television, it rugby-tackled women’s fascism with size and translated it into something positive for the guys.

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Once again, Barraclough's issues weren't innate or justified – they were simply acquired from a toxic narrative in the wider world. 'My penis insecurities stemmed from being laughed at by everybody who came into contact with my dick,' he told me. 'Right from my first sexual experience.'

In a bid to be accepted, he considered everything from completely avoiding sexual relationships to surgery, which either sees fat transferred from love handles and pumped into the shaft, or erection ligaments slashed so it hangs lower when flaccid (although only when flaccid – in fact, this tactic can give men 'dive-bomber dicks' that hang down, even when erect).

'It stopped being an option for me when I was told how little I'd gain and how potentially dangerous it could be,' he added.

I tried a penis pump a few times but I just found the whole thing a little too dispiriting. Ultimately, what set me free from my size concerns was being open and talking about them. When the film aired I thought people would see my penis and laugh at me all over again, but that couldn't have been further from the truth. Since making *My Penis and I*, not one person has said anything derogatory about my cock. Instead, they congratulate me on sharing such a personal story so publicly. I'm also

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a father now, which my penis had a small part in, so I couldn't possibly be anything other than happy with it. My penis made that happen. It's pretty amazing.

Abso-fucking-lutely. So can we definitively say, once and for all, that size doesn't matter?

'Yes, definitely,' says leading psychosexual therapist Phillip Hodson.

We live in a bigness culture where most women know that many male insecurities are penis-focused, so belittling their endowment is a power-play. Fortunately, there's no penis that is too small to give some pleasure – even if it's just a 'bud' then it's still as hot as the external part of a woman's clitoris.

Besides, when it comes to experience, does not possessing a 10-inch penis really stop you having the fuck of your life? Answers on a postcard, please...

Author Susie Orbach once said that fat was a feminist issue. If that's true, then penis size is an issue of the same scale for men. Now, thanks to the likes of Lawrence Barracough, Larry David and Patrick Moote, millions of men might just stand an inch or two taller because they appreciate the politics of the penis.

So, the next time you're about to sleep with somebody

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who looks at your dick and asks 'Who's that going to please?' the only answer should be: 'Me.' Not only does this ensure you're the custodian of your own dick dignity, but it proves you've got the balls to tackle size sexism head on.

Now that's big.