

Man Out: Men on the Sidelines of American Life. By Andrew L. Yarrow. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018. www.brookings.edu/press. No price on book but Amazon gives list price as \$24.99. Review by J. Steven Svoboda

Full disclosure: The author and I had some fairly extensive discussions (I am briefly quoted on pp. 158-159) and I am thanked in the acknowledgements.

Andrew L. Yarrow, a former *New York Times* reporter and current senior fellow for the Progressive Policy Institute, has written an important book on a topic that somewhat surprisingly does not seem to have previously been centrally addressed among the current onslaught of books on gender and masculinity. The subject of *Man Out: Men on the Sidelines of American Life* is the large number of men who are sidelined in various ways from what at least used to be considered fundamental building blocks of the life of a man—marriage, children, and gainful employment.

What is the matter with men? Yarrow poses important questions. Even the questions have questions, as it were: In the book's opening sentences, the author seems to grapple with the same issues that may trouble a thoughtful reader: "[W]e know these sidelined men are out there. But they don't fit old stereotypes of failure.... Why is this happening? What can we do?" The author notes that many seemingly separate problems may be interrelated and part of this same topic, like "white men not working... black men whose lives don't seem to matter... adult boys living in their parents' basements... men struggling with relationships and marriage..." Finally Yarrow concludes, "But we don't see a single larger story." The larger story is, in the author's estimate, that American males who are in various forms "men out" of the American mainstream. "Between one in four and one in five men between their early 20's and mid- to late 60s ... aren't working, three to four times the proportion during the 1950s..." So we have a United States now in which "less than half the nation's children live with two married parents who are in their first marriage."

One problem with having so many "men out" is simple: Men who are in the best health are the opposite of "men out," namely, they are working, married, and have working spouses. Unfortunately, men also have a much harder time than women bouncing back from divorce and suffer from depression that is less acknowledged by society and by the men themselves relative to women (and in any event women tend to initiate the great majority of divorces). Suicide is growing especially among white men, having risen by 59 percent from 1999 to 2015.

It can hardly be denied that such a far-reaching topic is inevitably complex and laden with multiple variables. Are video games to blame? The opioid epidemic? A changing economy? A culture that honors individual freedoms for us all and in the process, perhaps inadvertently gives men more space to not, as the phrase goes, "man up"? A tougher job market? Changing dynamics between men and women? Different attitudes toward marriage? Of course the answer is all of the above. Is it possible, as the author suggests in a provocative chapter, that in a world where the

average US adult spent 10.5 hours per day in front of a screen in 2016, that the Internet functions much like alcohol and is itself a big part in the malaise? (This doesn't seem a crazy point in a world where, as the author notes, two in five millennials spend more time on their phones than with real people.) Young men sometimes expect to be promoted without earning it. And they also often seem to have an "ambition deficit."

Another issue is the growing craziness of CEO compensation. Economic stagnation since 1973 and outsourcing of manufacturing jobs has certainly played its part. Middle-skill jobs that used to support a family have dried up and been replaced by low paying fast-food and big box jobs.

Yarrow presents a lot of statistics to readers as he attempts to get to the bottom of things. He also interviews a number of observers, both activists and men who are simply trying to get through the day. Also welcome were the individual stories about particular communities, for example, Horicon, Wisconsin, where jobs at the John Deere plant pay less than in the past and "the Rotary, Elks, and American Legion have hemorrhaged male members and are barely kept afloat by the women who have joined." The author really cares about meaningfully addressing this hitherto neglected topic and for the most part, he succeeds.

I would have liked to have seen some of the topics raised by Yarrow explored in more detail, such as the invisibility of the problem due to self-imposed gender norms. A second related issue is confusion about masculine identity due to gender roles being in flux. And "a changed culture [that] has made it at least somewhat okay to retreat from productive, caring, and civic-spirited lives."

The author is sometimes in my view overly willing to say "the said thing," perhaps without turning it over in the light and inspecting it to see if it is really true and belongs in this book. We are told that "men largely preside at the pinnacle of economic and political power" and in the next breath, that "the vast majority of serious intergender violence is committed by men." In fact the first statement is only true of a vanishingly small minority of men and oddly the book is devoted to everyone NOT described by this statement, and the second assertion is simply not true, as even the Justice Department has noted.

In a book about men's difficulties, why is it mentioned that "a vocal minority of men are unabashed misogynists" when an arguably more pertinent, arguably larger minority of men and women are unabashed misandrists? The same for this myth about women getting paid 20 percent less. At other points the author notes that "the pay gap shrinks if one looks at comparable jobs." Why would you ever not look at comparable jobs? If you are going to say that women take less ideal jobs than men, you have to at least define your terms. And if you are going to rightly decry a "blame-the-man trope [that] is facile, hateful, and largely wrong," how about not doing man-blaming yourself?

I would have liked to have heard the author's answers to his questions: "If men and women are equal, why do men pick up the tab, and why are fathers second-class parents at home and in the eyes of employers and courts?" Yarrow points out that the need for fathers is clear. "Strikingly, father absence may depress academic performance more than poverty does." Girls are hurt as much or more by father absence as boys, being more likely to be abuse victims and more likely to have children outside of marriage and almost twice as likely to divorce.

Here are a couple disturbing issues I don't remember learning previously: Social organizations like Lions, Kiwanis, and so on—as well as churches--have suffered a drastic decline in male participation and are now largely dominated by women. A little-discussed fact is that employment rates are worst among men under 35 years of age. Only half of adults born in the 1980s earn more than their parents, compared to 90 percent of those born in the 1940s. Disturbingly, millennials who are NOT working seem to be on average happier than those who are employed. A phenomenon mentioned in a later part of the book that may be somewhat parallel is the men who play video games during up to 75% of working hours and are "perfectly content with not working, not having a partner, and living with parents."

Counting lost annual income as well as costs to Medicaid, SSDI and other public assistance, and health care costs, may more than a trillion dollars is lost each year because of men out! The author and an economist to whom he spoke underscore that the loss is not just economic but rather people's time and people's creativity and people's heart.

Another thread that I feel the author could have profitably pulled: "Women say they want men to be equal parents and caregivers, yet women and society signal that mothers remain the most important parent. The macho man may be out of style in theory, but women looking for a male partner appear to value many aspects of traditional masculinity." A bit later Yarrow points out the classic dilemma faced by many men in the current era: "[W]omen want a man who is a feminist but still pays for everything, one who is suave and a well-toned hunk, a high-earner who is good in bed and appreciates women for 'who they are,' not just their 'looks"; one who listens, is sensitive and smart, but is also a knight in shining armor to protect them." What about the related fact that it is now fashionable to make fun of men and such terms as "mansplaining" are now "accepted by many women who would rightly find similar putdowns of women sexist and anything but cool"?

The author speculates without any visible evidence that men "may benefit in some occupations from continued sexism." Perhaps, but so also may women. I could really have done without a reference to "women's widespread *and mostly valid* complaints that they have to do everything." Everything, really? This point is reiterated two or three times. For that matter, do we need the persistent references to men's rights groups with statements that "*some*" members can lapse into misogyny, not to mention the horrific misinterpretation of the "Red Pill" movie? If men have issues, why are they apparently wrong to be working to try to fix them?

It is welcome that the author does sometimes recognize males' contribution, as when he notes that "fathers have been found to generally play a bigger role [than mothers] in promoting their children's cognitive development, regulating their behavior, stimulating creative play, and developing their identity and social competence."

The author raises one glaring issue that somehow never seems to be discussed: Child support guidelines designed for a distant past when men earned a living wage and women largely stayed at home "don't fit a society where many mothers work and many fathers don't." And yet these laws continue to be applied, routinely resulting in women staying in expensive houses with their children and men barely scraping by in squalid one-bedroom apartments where they are likely to also be lonely and be struggling to see the children they are financially supporting. The author points out that some women receive child support despite themselves earning six-figure incomes, and often the man's support level is based on a job and a pay level that he no longer has.

Andrew Yarrow closes with a number of suggestions. I appreciate the much needed call to "get off the four-year college-is-for-all hobbyhorse" and change the public reputation of perfectly viable options for the non-professorially inclined: community college, career academies, and apprenticeships. On the other hand, I personally believe that in the US, "wage insurance or subsidies" are completely unrealistic and will smack of socialism to many, and a universal basic income is similarly just not going to happen here. Conditional benefits that require certain job training or education by recipients sound more realistic to me, as does a trend in Texas of all places to give fathers more time with their kids in conjunction with child support orders. Texas also has a program to give men behind on child support training and a job in exchange for not imprisoning them.

Imprisoning fewer people would also help quite a bit and is another trend that is already under way. Preschool continues to be one of the best investments a country can make in its future, the author usefully reminds us. A rebuttable presumption of joint physical custody after divorce would also help. And how about an office of men's health? Further research into a male birth control pill? Research into the increase in suicides? The author contributes a poignant one-liner: "If the only things certain in life are death and taxes, the United States seems to prefer death."

Andrew Yarrow has opened a critical dialog about a subject that should be of top importance and concern to all Americans. For that he deserves our praise, our cheers, and our readership.