Conversations

Through The Fence

Writers in this issue responded to the prompt:

“What is a man, and what is a male?”

This publication seeks to create and foster a space for worldly conversation and artistic expression through writing and art.
The editors of Conversations Through the Fence would like to extend our sincerest thanks to all who have contributed to our second issue of Conversations Through the Fence.

To the writers and artists, thank you for sharing your work. To readers/responders, thank you for your patience and for your passion in fostering a love of literacy and conversation.

WANT TO SUBMIT?
• Limit entries to 300 words (2-3 pages handwritten or 1 page typed).
• Include your name and your unit.
• Handwritten and typed submissions are accepted.
• Please, if possible, do NOT submit original copies. Our team cannot guarantee the return of the work.

INTERESTED IN JOINING OUR MISSION?
Inside men can reach out to the Conversations liaisons, Kevin and Kenneth (Watheeq), to submit work and inquire/give input on future issue themes and prompts.

EDITORIAL BOARD
Beth, Kevin (Bruno), Katy, Kenneth (Watheeq), Lee, Maggie, MJ, and Rayna

PROMPT FOR NEXT ISSUE:
“A Day in the Life…”
Submissions due Friday, December 14, 2018.
Materials can be submitted to anyone on the editorial board or to the Learning Center in Recreation. Include your name and unit on the submission.
WHAT IS IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial by Watheeq

Feature Artwork:
“What is a Man to You?” by MJ

Feature Writing by:
The Preacher (SB) with Response by Rayna
Anonymous with Response by Viv
Leslie with Response by Lydia
Anonymous with Response by MM
MJ with Response by EM
Ronnie with Response by Maggie
Anonymous with Response by RH
D. Franklin with Response by Sarah

APBP Logo by Maurice
EDITORIAL

It’s interesting how many different point of views and opinions you’d hear if you asked random people “What is a male?” and “What is a man?” I recently did just that, and received answers such as: “A male is someone who was born with a certain biology and a man is a responsible adult male” … “a male and a man is the same thing” … “a male is the opposite of a female and a man is the opposite of a woman” … “a male is a boy who does what he’s told while a man does what he wants to do,” etc. etc.

In this issue of our magazine we seek to get both the writers and readers involved in a provocative discussion of Man v. Male; this issue’s prompt was inspired by the theme of an upcoming Interactive Forum hosted at F.C.I. Hazelton by its Think Tank and facilitated by Think Tank member Jonathan.

The idea behind the Interactive Forum is to create a space where both Inside and Outside participants can engage in healthy dialogue concerning their views of what is a male versus what is a man?

While Jonathan views man as the awakening of consciousness from unconsciousness (male), we invite our readers to other thought provoking point of views that serves well as a precursor of what to expect and look forward to at the Interactive Forum you wouldn’t want to miss.

Find out how you can be a part of this event!

-Watheeq
YOU ARE MERELY A MALE BY BIRTH, ONLY BY CHOICE AND EFFORT CAN YOU BECOME A MAN. THE TRANSFORMATION OF BOY-TO-MAN DOES NOT HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT. WE HAVEN'T FIT MEN BECAUSE TODAY'S MALES CANNOTcope WITH THE WORLD, AND COPING IS WHAT BEING A REAL MAN IS ALL ABOUT, HE HANDLES THINGS. GROWING INTO AN INTERNALLY-AMBITIONOUS, COMPETENT, SELF-GOVERNED, LOVING, AND PLEASANT MAN OF HONOR IS A SERIOUS PROCESS. VERY LITTLE ABOUT IT IS ACCIDENTAL.

WITHIN THE FORMERLY EXPECTED TIMELINE OF A YOUNG MAN'S LIFE, BY THE AGE OF 23, HE HAD A COLLEGE DEGREE AND HIS FIRST YEARS JOB EXPERIENCE WITHIN HIS CAREER. FURTHERMORE, TODAY'S 28 YEAR OLD HAS BUT TWO YEARS YET OF COLLEGE TO FINISH AND THEN HIS FIRST YEAR ON THE JOB, SO IT WILL TAKE THREE YEARS TO ARRIVE AT WHERE HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN 5 YEARS AGO! THUS, AT 31 HE IS 8 YEARS BEHIND THE CURVE—AND THAT'S 8 YEARS OF HIS 13 YEARS OF MAJORHOOD. THREE-FIFTHS OF HIS YOUTH ADULTHOOD SQUANDERED.

IN ESSENCE, A MALE MAY BECOME A MAN NEVER CAN A MAN, A REAL MAN, RETURN TO MALEDOM.

THE MEN MUST BE MEN OR THE BOYS WILL CONTINUE TO RULE—AFRICAN PROVERB.
The Preacher (SB)
Picture this. And listen. The police dispatcher chimes: “10:80 all units, one belligerent black male, 5’10”, black pants, white shirt, black jacket, respond to request for back-up.” At the scene, the officer sings ‘Hands up’! “Don’t shoot,” says this unarmed man. “What did I do? I don’t understand.” Cries out this courageous man. “He’s resisting arrest!” Thirteen shots rang out from the P.D. Aims to the chest. To them, that’s just another black male, whose life didn’t matter. But he was a son to a man, who happened to be a father; He was that wife’s man, who happened to be a husband; He was a man of valor, who happened to be a Marine, a U.S. soldier; He was man enough to be a father to three daughters and four sons. Now, there’s blood flooding into his lungs. Cowardice males with badges, claim fear of their life of an unarmed male who ate bullets from the officer’s guns; Yet he was man enough not to run to confront a contemplated murder. Man of the house, killed in his own driveway. Six males paid leave, robbery up the highway. Deadly force (un)justified. The difference between man and male? It’s not that hard to tell from this typical tale, yet, true story. “As a man, being a male is mandatory. However, being a man is a male’s obligation.” This is a complex issue facing this nation.
Killing a male is still death of a man. Understand?

Response by Rayna
SB, this piece was powerful! Opening with “Picture this. And listen” prepared me to imagine. The scene you portray of the officer and the unarmed man felt recurring, as if on a feedback loop because it is just so common… Your word choice really struck me as well, like, “the officer sings ‘Hands up’! ‘Don’t shoot…” The word sings, in this context, seemed to capture how police brutality, for some officers, is like a routine activity… it’s as if they’re doing something they enjoy and humming along with a tune that’s only in their head… As I read on, the more this sounded like a piece to be performed at a poetry slam (or over a beat)… like the lines, “He was man enough to be a father to three daughters and four sons/Now, there’s blood flowing into his lungs/Cowardice males with badges, claim fear of their life of an unarmed male who ate bullets from the officer’s guns/Yet he was man enough not to run”… Turning to your conceptualization of man versus male, I had to work hard to analyze it as you dug deep! Some thoughts… Male could be thought of as an ascribed status (born into, assigned at birth) and as a descriptor (“black male… cowardice males”). Man might be thought of as an achieved status, one that requires action to claim (or earn). The different roles you refer to—son, husband, father, and Marine—required some sort of action/involvement. Man is what you become. Thank you for sharing your wisdom. Black Lives Matter.

-Rayna
Anonymous

Through time I believe that society’s perception of a man has changed, depending on its need at that moment in time. So, let us journey back into time for just a moment. In medieval times a male knight was considered to be a Man because he was a noble and brave warrior in the eyes of those he saved (e.g. saving the damsel in distress). In the late 1800s to early 1900s a male was considered a man because he was a quick gunslinger. Someone who could kill with nerves unrattled (e.g. the hero and man of many dime novels of the Wild West). Then we had the male who became a man in the 1950s to 1980s because he worked hard, loved his kids and family, and stayed loyal to his wife (e.g. the all-American dad). Lastly, we have the self-labeled man. He has the look, money, cars, clothes, and multiple women. He must be a real man (e.g. Instagram famous). The help of social media, magazines, commercials, and television has helped amplify this vain image of what is a Man. We as a society somewhere along the line have allowed ourselves to believe that a male can become a man if his image physically fits what society likes on Instagram. So, the message that we are sending our young males is that if you get enough followers on Instagram you are a Man.

“Social Media Man.”

Response by Viv

Social media is destroying the new generation. It emphasizes what men should look like and not on moral characteristics. As you mentioned, this generation is focused on self-labeling through social media which leaves an abyss of ambiguity. Once our society was introduced to the new and rapid developing technology then our norms began to change as well. You express in your introduction that a man is what society conveniently needs him to be, but at the end, you state that a man now is depicted with how many followers he has on social media. Therefore, my question is, could this lead men to experience what women have always endured? I ask this because for decades, if not centuries, women are portrayed in articles, books, magazines, television, etc., on how they look; from her hair, to her makeup, to her physique, and now men are experiencing this type of oppression. I agree with you when you state the “lives” on social media are vain images of what a man should be, but this is a harsh reality of what women have faced even before social media was emerged.

-Viv
Leslie

STOP! Male is a birthright. Man is a right earned. To one household, a male may be considered a man when he reaches puberty and loses his virginity. In another household, a male may be considered a man when he earns a college degree.

Yet, in another household, a male may be considered a man because he can fight good with his hands. We all come from different backgrounds and cultures with various opinions of what constitutes a man. Does this make one more than the other right?

I believe personally as long as a man is positively contributing to his family and society to make everyone better, then it does not matter of his race and cultural background. A man finds what is good inside himself and others then passes down these qualities to help make our communities a better place for everyone. Each man has a unique quality that fits squarely into this puzzle we call life. When a male tries to fit into the puzzle, he sometimes needs to transform in order to fit more perfectly (man).

We all have either a perception, misconception, description, definition, or a traditional memory of what is a man. What we must not allow to happen is for a male to be given the title of a man without earning it. More times than not when something is given without being earned, we tend to abuse and take it for granted. So, let us as a society set a high standard for a male who wants to be labeled a MAN. (Remember, Male is a birthright and Man is a right earned.)

As we dive deeper into this topic of Male/Man, it leads me to think that maybe we all have this perception wrong. Why is it that we have strictly labeled this topic Male/Man? Isn’t “male” the last four letters of “female,” and isn’t “man” the last three letters of “woman?” Maybe we should stop saying that we are all equal and start living it. Maybe we should all stop labeling what is a man. I say this because I was raised by my great-grandma. And all the character traits that society labeled as a man, my grandma had them all. She provided for me, cared for me when I was sick, instilled values in me, worked hard, and disciplined me when needed. But she was not called a man, but a strong woman.

Just maybe, just maybe, we are all missing the bigger picture. I leave you with one final thought: When a baby is born, they put on its birth certificate “male,” not “man,” or “female,” not “woman.” Male is a birth right. Man is a right earned. Female is a birth right. Woman is a right earned.

Response by Lydia

Thank you for sharing. My favorite part of your piece is when you mentioned your great-grandmother’s discipline, morality, worth ethic, and strength, all traits that could lend themselves to masculine stereotypes. I appreciate you pushing back against those definitions. In raising you, she exuded strength that moves past any perceived limitations of gender, which lends itself to the question: How do we define gender roles, and how can those definitions be improved to be more inclusive?

You also wrote: “We all come from different backgrounds and cultures with various opinions of what constitutes a man. Does this make one more than the other right?” I believe that coming from a place of listening, caring, and understanding makes all the difference when learning about new viewpoints and cultures. It’s something I’ve grappled with in ethics and rhetoric classes. Your question reminds me of those conversations. I also wonder how trans and nonbinary identities fall into this dichotomy of male/man and female/woman. These questions are challenging and so, so important. I want to hear more about your experience with these labels and how your beliefs reflect your circumstances. Thank you for challenging and inspiring us.

-Lydia
Anonymous

When defining the difference between male and man, we find that there are some similarity in them both. These two are both adult species. We can describe many adult male species, but when it comes to describing man, he was given authority over every living species. God gave man the ability to think, reason, understand, and the will to choose. Man goes through different experience in life. Through these experience, man gains strength, he also gains wisdom. The wise decisions he makes build character that brings about humility, integrity, honesty, and obedience. Man takes these principle and passes them off to his family. Through his family they are passed on to the society. Now we have an adult male that holds within himself the same characteristic as a man. What separate male from man is ignorance. This results from our showing of knowledge. Now from this lack of knowledge male thinks it’s ok to disrespect themselves and others. They honor not their mother and father. They disrespect the female species reproducing a child with her and not taking responsibility for the child. When it comes to others they think of only themselves. When the male species hasn’t taken the time to study themselves, he can’t see himself as the man he should be. Now male must go through a multitude of lessons. These lessons give him the strength to overcome his mental and physical desires in life. Male is striving in life to become perfect man. This is our goal in life to overcome our weakness. To be a pattern for our children and all who follow us in life.

Response by MM

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on what separates a male from a man. This distinction is an interesting one. And you approach it in an equally interesting way. You show here that ignorance is what creates this separation between these terms. Somewhere along the way, knowledge that should have been passed from one generation to the next was lost, and today, relationships and families are less than they could be because of this loss and this ignorance. After reading your piece, I wonder how does someone get back to that knowledge that was lost. How do people overcome that ignorance? What are the lessons that someone has to go through to become a man?

I loved your ending lines: “This is our goal in life to overcome our weakness. To be a pattern for our children and all who follow us in life.” I specifically liked the idea of becoming a pattern. It created this image of a knit-blanket that has been knit in a specific way for so the majority of the length, but now, the pattern is changing, the stitches becoming closer-knit and the colors more vibrant. At the heart of what you are saying is hope. We aren’t stuck repeating the patterns that came before us. We can change.

-MM
MJ
You are merely a male by birth. Only by choice and effort can you become a man. The transformation of boy-to-man does not happen by accident. We haven’t fit men because today’s males cannot cope with the world, and coping is what being a real man is all about. He handles things. Growing into an internally-ambitious, competent, self-governed, loving, and pleasant man of honor is a serious process. Very little about it is accidental.

Within the formerly expected timeline of a young man’s life, by the age of 23 he had a college degree and his first year’s job experience within his career path. However, today’s 28 year old has but two years yet of college to finish and then his first year on the job, so it will take three years to arrive at where he should have been five years ago! Thus, at 31 he is 8 years behind the curve—and that’s 8 years of his 13 years of adulthood. Three-fifths of his young adulthood squandered. In essence, a male may become a man. Never can a man, a real man, return to male-hood.

Response by EM
MJ, your response seems to focus on how a male becomes a man and the usual progression this transformation takes. I thought it was interesting that you emphasize intentionality here: “very little about it is accidental.” One must have the intention of transforming and see that transformation through. This made me think about what shapes identity in general, how decisions and intentionality play a key role but also circumstance, and even at times coincidences can shape someone’s identity. Is becoming a man the same as forming an identity, or is it a separate process?

What do you mean by “coping is what being a real man is all about?” I would love to hear more about this idea. Is it that “being a real man” means facing your fears and addressing your worries rather than running away?

You lay out a specific timeline of how a man’s life should go. I wondered how many men’s lives have fit this timeline and how many variations there are outside of this progression from college to career. Is there one right way to live? I ask myself this question often.

Thank you for your words and thoughts. I love reading something that makes me ask challenging questions. -EM
Ronnie

If I was to give you my personal definition of male and man, I would have to say that every male was born that way. From birth, his sex is established and physically he will forever be known as a male. However, a man must be taught to be that way. There are many ways a male can learn to be a man. He can learn from another man, he can learn from trial and error through the mistakes he makes. He can also learn by watching other males shirk their responsibility of being a man and realize he wants to do it different. These are examples of just a few ways a male can learn to be a man.

When you begin to break the terms down even more (from my point of view), once a male reaches a stage that he fully understands right and wrong and the cause and effects behind the choices he does or does not make, that begins the process on whether or not he will make the choice to be a man. Then he must make the responsible choice to be one. A man takes responsibility for his actions and words. A man owns his faults and acknowledges his shortcomings. A man takes on challenges that come his way. A man shows love, cares for others, and gives respect without expecting any in return. A male from a mental perspective will make the choice to do the opposite of what a man will do or limit what he will do with conditions and expectations.

Response by Maggie

Ronnie, thank you for breaking down these terms for us! I like how you show the different ways in which a male can learn to be a man. There isn’t always a clear mentor or role model for one to learn from, but you show how a male can still learn what makes a man through observations and experience. It seems like the determining factor of whether or not a male can become a man, based on your definitions, is whether or not a male embraces his responsibilities.

I appreciated the list you include toward the end of what different actions define a man. I especially liked that you added in, “A man shows love, cares for others, and gives respect without expecting any in return.” While taking responsibility for one’s actions is a common idea of what makes a man, being able to show love and care for others is something that is valuable but often not mentioned in this discussion. Your words here add another level of complexity to this definition of “a man.” Also, “[giving] respect without expecting any in return” is not an easy thing to do. Here, you ask for humility rather than pride. Pride is set aside so that one can acknowledge his own flaws and care for others. You’ve given me a lot to think about. Thank you for sharing your perspective!

-Maggie
Anonymous

Man – one possessing in high degree the qualities considered distinctive of manhood. Also a human male. Male – of, relating to, or being the sex that produces sperm cells which fertilize the eggs of a female. Also of, relating to, or characteristic of the male sex.

I’ve given brief definitions of these two words so that I may be able to point out brief similarities in the two words and brief differences in both of them. As you can clearly see above, man and male is of one gender male, yet you could have any species that can fertilize the eggs of a female and be considered a male. But to be a man one must first be a human being and must be of male gender. Second, you must have certain qualities that separate you from being a mere boy and a man. Any boy can be considered a male, but until they truly embrace adulthood, which is the state or time of being an adult, they can never be considered a man, unless only out of a state of ignorance, which truly shows why the are a mere male boy and not a male man. See, to be a man and not just a human male, you must not only be able to make a family, but be able to provide for one, teach them things in life, give them a better insight on life, period. Any male can produce offspring, but only a man will take care of they kids and see to their success in life. Let’s take the male lion, for example, one of the fiercest species to walk the earth. It has every utensil to be considered a male, yet it could never be considered a man in no type of situations for two very big reasons. You must first be human male, when it clearly is not. Second, it must provide for this family it has created, but in most cases it doesn’t. In fact, it actually will mate with a female lion in heat and leave, never to be seen again. In some cases, it may even come back and kill its own offspring for territorial rights. Only in very rare situations will the male lion actually help take care of its offspring, yet it is still only a male lion, never to be a man. This is clearly the opposite of a man. A man would take pride in raising its kids and providing for them. A man will do anything to make sure its kids is as safe as possible in life. I am sure any man you come across in life feels this way about its family. Yet I have only truly pointed out a very few differences between a male and a man, which is of the same gender. It makes them so similar in ways, but very different in so many ways… I hope I have shined some light on this topic of one gender. Once again, this is male vs. man.

Response by RH

Hello and thanks for your contribution, your point is something that I’ve watched a couple of my friends grapple with as they raise their sons. It is one thing to have a son; it is another entirely to help that boy become a man who can wrestle with the complexities and responsibilities of manhood. I imagine that’s particularly difficult to do in a culture like ours, which espouses a macho conception of manhood that can be quite limiting. Because of that, I really like how you’ve defined manhood as a set of broad, baseline responsibilities. I think there is a lot of room within that definition for different kinds of manhood to be enacted, so long as the person remains rooted in what matters—doing right by their family or those around them. Your response made me think of my late grandfather, who was a WWII veteran who raised three sons. On the surface, I don’t think many would consider him a feminist; he certainly never verbally expressed any sort of feminist leanings. And yet, I think of him as one of the first feminists I knew. Here was a man who had only sons, but who raised all of those sons to respect and appreciate women. All of his sons had daughters of their own, and all of those daughters were raised in loving homes where they were told they came second to no one. We all played sports as kids, attended college, and forged successful professional lives, in part because we came from supportive families with fathers who loved us and pushed us to succeed. I still marvel at how a gruff factory worker from the rust belt managed to raise three sons who would in turn become such wonderful fathers of daughters. Then I think about what you wrote and I see that he was a man who saw that there doesn’t have to be just one kind of manhood. You can be strong and gentle, so long as the core values remain in place. I think that’s a message that has a lot of resonance today. Thanks again for your words! -RH
D. Franklin
When it comes to male vs. man, gender is the first thing that comes to mind. Male is just a gender type, now man is characteristics. Same of the characteristics of a man is honesty, responsibility, humbleness, caring, loving, and persistent. When I was growing up I’ve been told I was a male. I used to do things like if I can take something from you, it’s mine. If you are playing with something and you put it down, automatically becomes mine; but, now, when I get into my teens transitioning into adulthood, I started to do man-like things. I began to carry money in my pocket without spending it. I’m able to do my duty without being supervised. I learned how to value things that matter to me the most, like my family, my freedom, my job, and my health. Honesty is something that all men should have in this world, along with his word. That’s something I was taught when I was growing up as a male in the streets; with those teachings I became more honest with myself. Like when I’m on the phone with my niece and she asks me, “Are you still at school?” I no longer tell her, “Yeah.” I let her know I’m in jail baby. Being responsible got me through life. A man has to take full responsibility for his actions. A male uses blame instead of being a man and own up to his actions. Males use other outlets when dealing with events. They’re not honest at all. Persistence define a man it shows that he is firm about what he believes and it shows that he is resilient. I want to now talk about some male-like things. Males are deceptive. Deception is just what it is the community deceived me by making me think the guys on the corner were the people to be growing up. Like I said in the beginning, male is just a gender type. Look at the male dog. I’m not a animal or pet. I’m a man I have sat down and digested some good morals that’s why I’ve become the man that I am today. Strong, trustworthy, and honest. These are the makings of a man in my eyes.

Response by Sarah
Franklin, what a thoughtful piece on the difference between males and men. As I was reading your words, I couldn’t help but stop and reflect on my own gender and ask myself what I believe the difference in females and women to be… Like you, I believe that “female” merely checks the box for birth sex, while being a woman is something more substantial; it feels like it is something that needs to be earned and proven to the world.

After reading your submission, I think that you would also agree that being a man is something a person has to work for—whether it be working to be trustworthy, persistent, or honest. I believe that the same goes for women; one must work to be a woman and to represent themselves in an authentic and honest way. At the end of the day, nothing can truly be given to a person without them having to work for it and earn it. From what I can tell from your writing, you’ve earned the right to call yourself a man.

Keep writing.

-Sarah
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