Lovers

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bell hooks, a distinguished Kentuckian feminist who teaches at Berea College, broadens her feminist approach by looking at “the new men” from an intimate, personal, and anti-gendered point of view in The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love. This analysis of the situation of men within our society brings two key points to the current gender debate. On one hand, it revisits the oppression that patriarchal and phallocentric dominant discourses exercise over individuals and collectives; on the other hand, it presents in a new light, and seeks to understand, men who do not conform to “traditional” male behavior.

Using feminist approaches to the male situation, hooks examines the difficult position of these new men. The author denounces the lack of space for sentimentalism and manifestation of feelings that men have endured for centuries. By discussing the violent and aggressive character of men, this critic opens a way for a “different” man. hooks calls for a rupture with traditional male repression and looks for an upgrade in inner and outer male relationships that aims at liberating them and allowing individuals to express themselves freely by avoiding patriarchal and subjugating ideological and physical barriers that still exist in our society.

The author attacks the main contexts of society where traditional masculinity collides with emotions and undermines the possibilities of full development for men. Workplaces and work behaviors, conceptions of sex and sexual life, fear of performances considered feminine, and popular culture and mass media that maintain a male dominant discourse, as well as the role of women as guiders to show the path for these new men to follow, are the aspects that hooks brings to the table. Circumstances understood as conventions forbid men to communicate in a completely open way; at the same time, these behaviors create unnecessary tension and unfulfilled relationships between men and women and among men themselves.

The use of feminist theories to analyze male behavior is innovative, capable of breaking away from old-fashioned classifications and alignments. By advocating male integrity and by redefining masculinity without linking it to violence, power, and domination, this author offers a new understanding of men and of human beings which is necessary in our society. hooks