FROM *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DR RANJ

HOW TO BE A BOY

AND DO IT YOUR OWN WAY!

Illustrated by DAVID O'CONNELL

Hachette Children's Group

wren & rook

For Rohan, Sajjan, Veer and Oscar

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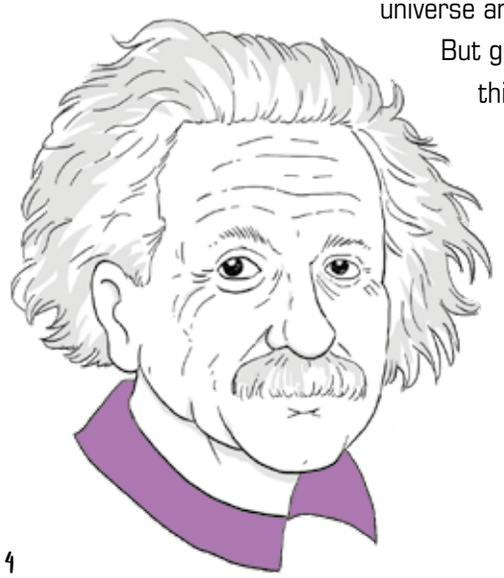
DO I MEASURE UP?

Have you ever asked yourself what 'being a man' really means? It's something I've wondered throughout my life. I always hear people say things like 'man up' or 'boys will be boys', but what are they actually talking about? Do they think that being a boy or a man means that you have to look a certain way or be good at specific things? Can you only be a man if you behave a certain way?

What do **YOU** think?

We're not the only people to have pondered it. In fact, it's a question that has crossed the minds of some of history's greatest thinkers. For example, Albert Einstein was a pretty clever person, right? He possessed possibly the finest scientific mind that humanity has ever seen. His theories and calculations advanced our understanding of physics, the universe and pretty much everything in it. But guess what else he spent time thinking about?



'TRY NOT TO BECOME A MAN OF SUCCESS, BUT RATHER TRY TO BECOME A MAN OF VALUE.'

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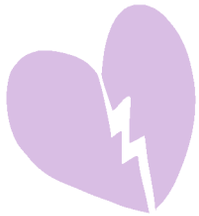
Clearly, this is a subject that even world-famous scientists have grappled with!

If I had a penny for all the times I sat down when I was younger and wondered if I was 'boy' enough, I'd be rich. OK, maybe not rich, but I'd have more money to spend on cool stuff for sure. Because I didn't always like the same things (like football or Formula 1) that other boys in my class did. I wasn't the one being chosen to be a team captain. Actually, I was usually picked last because I wasn't that good at sports. And often, I felt like there must be something wrong with me.

I know now that all this worry about how to be a boy is SO unnecessary because you are who you are – and that's perfectly fine! The thing is, all of us – no matter how boyish or manly we might (or might not) seem – have questioned ourselves and wondered whether we are how we should be. So whatever your reason for picking up this book, I'm going to explore all this with you, and together we'll come up with some answers for those questions in your head. Who knows, you might even be surprised at what you'll find out!

Why all the fuss?

If people have been talking about this stuff for ages, why did I decide to write this book now? For two reasons, really. First, because the subject of how boys or men should be is being spoken about more and more, in all sorts of places. You may have come across discussions about it on TV, at school or on social media. There are lots of opinions around, which is why it's important to learn about it and make up your own mind.



Secondly, we're also hearing a lot about men who aren't behaving well, who attack or hurt others verbally and physically. Sometimes people say this is caused by problems with 'toxic masculinity'. You might think you know what 'masculinity' means – that it describes how a man or a boy ought to be. And yet when people talk about masculinity, it's often because something bad has happened. And that can make it seem like 'masculinity' is a bad word.

DOES THAT MEAN IT'S BAD TO BE MASCULINE?

Definitely not! There are loads of brilliant things about masculinity, if we can only adjust our thinking a bit. And the other thing to note is that not all boys or men *are* masculine (nor do they have to be) – at least not in the traditional sense.

Right now, as you're growing up, is the most important time to be talking about this. This crucial, magical time of life as a boy shapes the kind of man (or person) you'll become. This book will help you go on to become an amazing adult by encouraging you to reflect on what it takes to be kind, good and responsible in today's world. For too long, boys have been left to work it out for themselves. Now you don't have to!

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The journey begins here

Right now, the most important thing for us to get our heads around is this: no matter what you might have been told, the first step to being a great boy or man is being whoever you are and respecting yourself. This book is going to pick all your insecurities about 'being a man' apart and show you why they don't need to stress you out.

We'll discover why masculinity isn't about living up to any particular ideal of a man that's set in stone. I want to show you that masculinity can take many different forms – and, above all, be positive. It can be something that we nurture, celebrate and promote in all its shapes and forms.

Take it from me: I've gone from being a boy who pretended to like football because all my friends did, to a teenager who felt that he was too sensitive and emotional to be a 'lad', to a man who is proud to say that he likes fancy dress, enjoys dancing and loves to wear sparkly things. In my forty (ish) years on this planet, I've learned so much about what being a boy or a man *really* means.

We're going to break down what being a boy is and help you work out who you truly are and how to be the best you can be, in your own way, no matter what that is. Think of it as a personal companion teaching you about yourself, guiding you through the challenges of life and encouraging you to always think and act in positive ways – like an antidote to so-called toxic masculinity. I'll show you that the key to it all is as simple as a bit of kindness – to yourself and others. I've also asked some inspirational friends of mine to give you some of their ideas and advice. And I've shone a spotlight on incredible people doing awesome things in the world.

So, why should you read this book? Because it's absolutely **AMAZING** and is going to change your life, of course! Well, I hope it will. Even if it doesn't, it will give your confidence a massive boost. Also, it's going to make you think long and hard about who you are, how you feel and how you express yourself. You don't have to do it all at once. Take one chapter at a time and have a think after each one. Together, we're going to smash down barriers and start thinking about who we really are and who we want to be.

LET'S **DIG IN.**

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THE M WORD

1

We're going to start with what we define as masculinity and why. If you picked up the *Oxford English Dictionary* and looked up the word masculinity, it would say: 'qualities regarded as characteristic of men'. But what do we actually mean by that?

Let's begin with a couple of challenges. First, grab a bit of paper and write down which of the following qualities you would associate with being a boy or man. Go on, I'll wait.

Leader Artistic Focused Brave Musical
Assertive Creative Camp Beautiful
Caring Protective Ambitious Rugged
Tender
Gentle Strong Intelligent
Kind
Professional Funny Macho
Laddish
Emotional Understanding Ally

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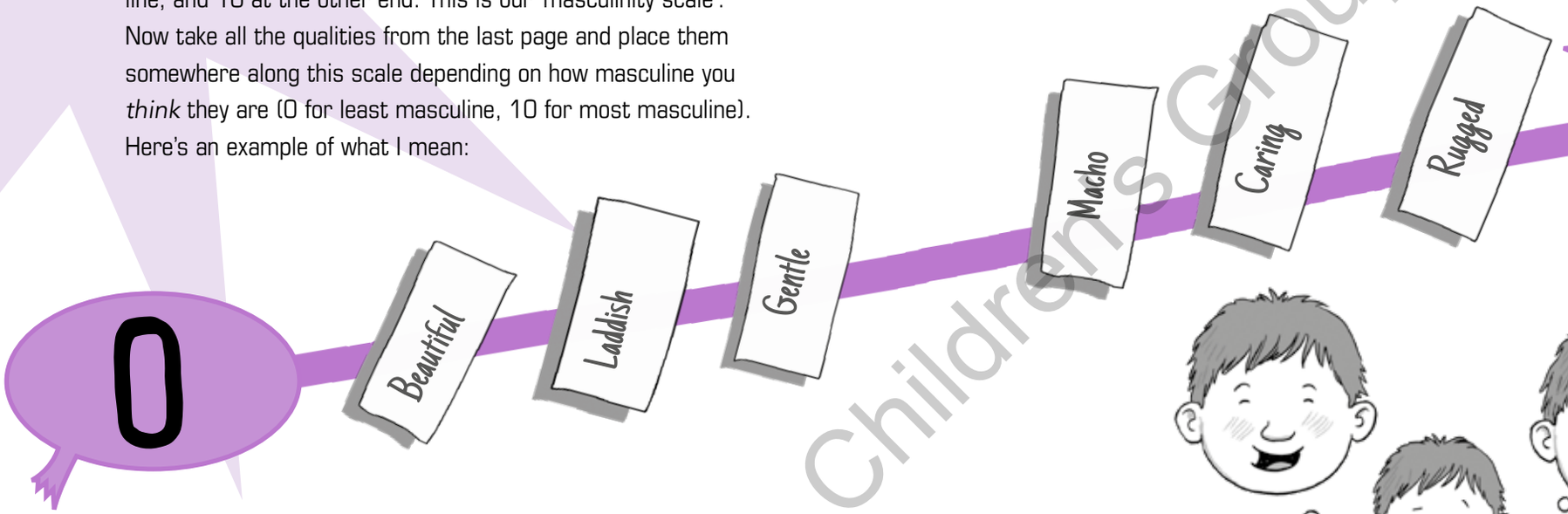
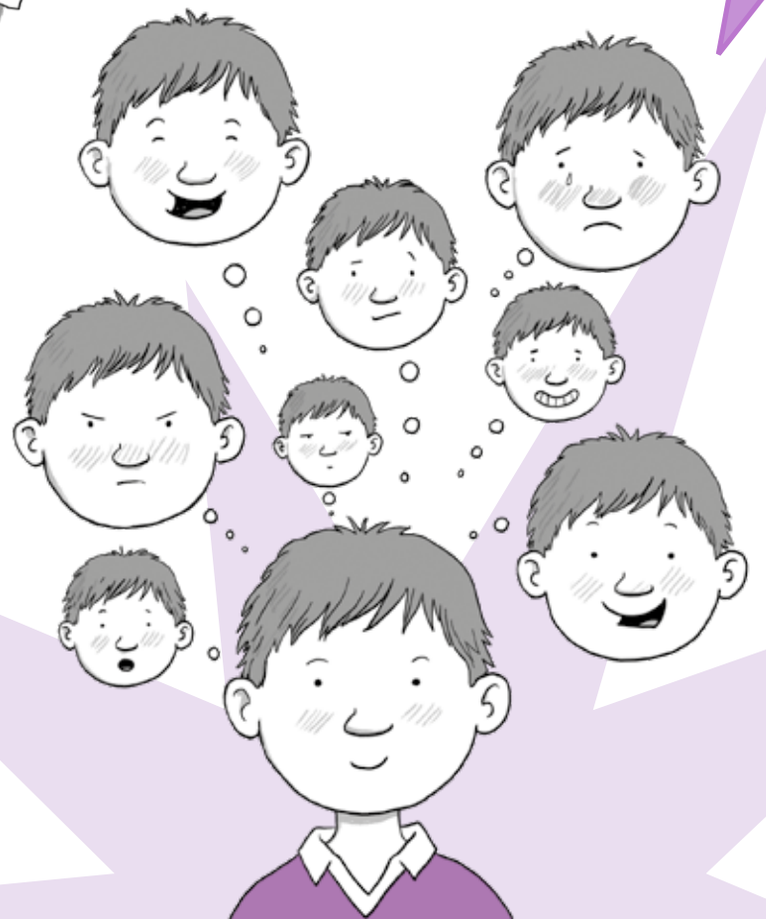
The 'masculinity scale'

Next, I want you to draw a horizontal line in the middle of a landscape piece of paper. Write 0 at the left end of the line, and 10 at the other end. This is our 'masculinity scale'. Now take all the qualities from the last page and place them somewhere along this scale depending on how masculine you *think* they are (0 for least masculine, 10 for most masculine). Here's an example of what I mean:



Here's the thing: there is actually no right or wrong answer here, instead it's designed to make you think. It's just a fun way to explore what we define as masculine and why. For example, it shows you that there are many different words to describe masculinity, and that not everyone would use the same words. And you might decide that certain words are more masculine than others, but someone else would put them in a completely different order. Whichever order you chose, remember this: **ALL** of these words can be used when talking about what masculinity is.

So you can be a boy/man and be **ANY** of these things we listed. Likewise, you don't have to be a boy or man to be these things – plenty of girls and women have these attributes too!



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Now have another think about your answer to the first question I asked . . . did the qualities you chose remind you of any particular people? And consider the boys and men that you know – what qualities do those people have? When you start thinking about it, you'll find that everyone is different and has different characteristics.

That's the point here: masculinity is not a fixed or set thing, and it isn't the same for everyone. It varies depending on who and what you are talking about. And it is so much more than what society tells us it should be. Yes, we're going to turn everything you might have thought about masculinity on its head!

A brief history of masculinity

At this point, you're probably thinking,

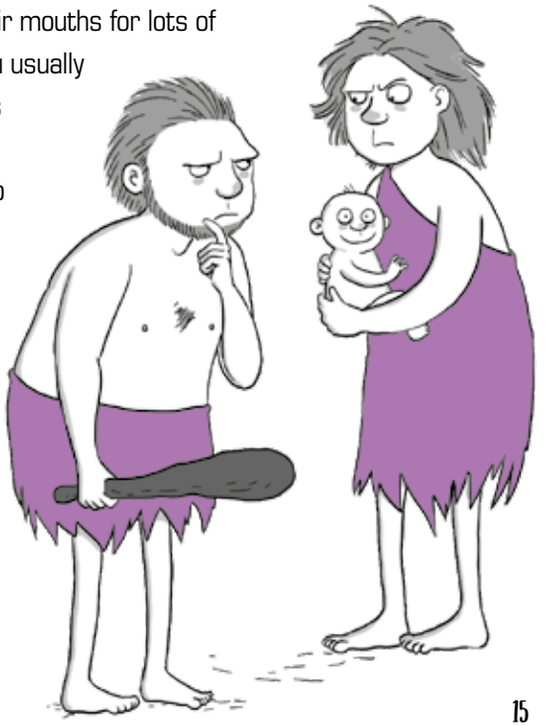
HANG ON, **RANJ**, YOU CAN'T JUST MAKE UP WHAT BEING A **BOY** OR **MAN** IS!

Well, that's exactly what humans have done over time.

Let's start at the very beginning. The Neanderthals were an ancient evolutionary relative of modern-day humans, who walked the Earth until about forty thousand years ago. Look them up in a textbook or online and you'll see a typical picture: the male is usually carrying some sort of tool or weapon and is portrayed as a bit of a brute, while the female is looking after a child and is depicted as the more nurturing one. Even to this day people will use the word Neanderthal to describe thuggish behaviour in boys or men. But are we right to?

We've long assumed that Neanderthals had different roles or jobs because of their biological sex, i.e. how they were born (their genetics). We've always thought that those jobs were determined by some of their physical and behavioural characteristics: men being the hunters and women being the gatherers. However, we've changed our understanding of what they actually did by looking at fossils of their teeth.

How? Well, Neanderthals used their mouths and teeth like a third hand, and looking at the pattern of wear and tear on them shows that they used their mouths for lots of different tasks! Even though you usually see the males characterised as the hunters in popular culture, the fossils suggest that the two genders shared a lot of the same activities, and women might have hunted just as much as the men. So the so-called 'masculine behaviours' were definitely not restricted just to the men.



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