



Why Young Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity

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Why Young Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity Jamil Jivani Longlisted for the Toronto Book Award

The day after the 2015 Paris terror attacks, twenty-eight-year-old Canadian Jamil Jivani opened the newspaper to find that the men responsible were familiar to him. He didn't know them, but the communities they grew up in and the challenges they faced mirrored the circumstances of his own life. Jivani travelled to Belgium in February 2016 to better understand the roots of jihadi radicalization. Less than two months later, Brussels fell victim to a terrorist attack carried out by young men who lived in the same neighbourhood as him.

Jivani was raised in a mostly immigrant community in Toronto that faced significant problems with integration. Having grown up with a largely absent father, he knows what it is to watch a man's future influenced by gangster culture or radical ideologies associated with Islam. Jivani found himself at a crossroads: he could follow the kind of life we hear about too often in the media, or he could choose a safe, prosperous future. He opted for the latter, attending Yale and becoming a lawyer, a professor at Osgoode Hall Law School and a powerful speaker for the disenfranchised.

Why Young Men is not a memoir but a book of ideas that pursues a positive path and offers a counterintuitive, often provocative argument for a sea change in the way we look at young men, and for how they see themselves.

Why Young Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity Details

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From Reader Review Why Young Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity for online ebook

Toby Mustill says

Why Young Men... This book has insights that I previously failed to recognize. The book explores so many angles and influences on youth that the reader cannot help but be enlightened. It goes into details regarding the most important institutions and individuals for young men. It helps connect school, religion/culture, parenting, community, peers and youth work to put the pieces together on how to help our youth. Although the book has a strong focus on minority youth and radicalization, it draws parallels to white youth and the alt-right movement. Thoroughly insightful, very enlightening.

Trina says

3.5. I found it interesting and I appreciated a few comments he made about feminism (dealing with issues related to young men doesn't mean there is opposition to women). I'm not sure about his thoughts on Charter Schools, but I'm a unionized, public school teacher so I guess that's not surprising. I do wish there were more suggestions on how to improve the lives of our young men, but Jivani definitely gets the conversation going, especially in relation to religion and men of colour.

Zawadi says

This book was a great start. It's really relevant, seeing as radicalization through religious extremism, white nationalism, and so on mainly affects young men nowadays. It deals with serious topics such as institutionalized racism, structural inequality in employment opportunities, the media and its decline in credibility, and etc. It's written in a not overly complicated language, making its argument accessible to all which is good.

I, however, found it a frustrating read. That is because it really glossed over toxic masculinity and hypermasculinity. It wasn't until the very *last* chapter that those topics were broached. This was a lost opportunity because, especially in a post-MeToo world, it could have been an example of allyship. Holding men accountable for the havoc they wreak on society (with violent crime, the gender wage gap, total dominance in political and non-political positions of power) would have really made a more interesting book.

The author also defensively couched feminist critique of men complaining about being victims of patriarchy as not problematic, which I found strange. An entire aspect of manhood, which is (sadly) subjugating women in patriarchy, is being ignored.

It rang false to me when, in Chapter 2 for example, 'tough guy' masks are used as an excuse for predatory and aggressive behaviour (such as being keen on sexual conquest and fighting). This demonstrated how men, especially young men, are put in prisons of their own making, because of a proclivity towards wholeheartedly adopting rampant misogyny that is present in 'Hollywood gangster subculture' (Jivani, page 25).

So that's why I have little to no interest in hearing of men's angst about showing vulnerability. The willingness to be emotionally vulnerable has been weaponized against women in patriarchal society. It has been used as a way for men to claim superiority over women. So seeing men now struggling to show human emotion is funny to me.

I don't want to pin all of the world's problems on this book. But I think it dealt with a really interesting premise but faltered in the execution. I'm glad that I read this book though. I learnt something new about world issues and grassroots organizations who helped to show a brighter future to the world's youth.

Kevin says

Why Young Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity is an interesting book on exactly what its subtitle describes, but by the end it felt like it was just skimming the surface. It felt like a really well-written undergraduate essay but lacked the deep interrogation of the intersection of rage-race-identity-gender-geography-etc. that a really impacting book would have.

Merge this one, written by Jamil Jivani, with Daemon Fairless' *Mad Blood Stirring: The Inner Lives of Violent Men* and you might have the perfect recipe for a paradigm-changing book (see my review of *Mad Blood Stirring* here).

Jivani explains that the title of this book came from a question he was asked by a journalist ("Why young men?") while being interviewed on the topic. He said that he stumbled through the question and gave a meh answer... and I'm still not too sure that he got the right answer here either. All the boxes are checked and the facts are locked down - certainly super helpful in exploring his subject. But it still feels like it was written from atop a pedestal... To sneak up a bit higher in my own rating, it needed to get down from those heights and get a little bit dirtier. (2.5/5)

Barbara McVeigh says

I bought this book for my school library after hearing Jivani speak at The FOLD last May. What stuck with me was his comment: "The hardest thing I ever had to do was leave my friends" in order to change his trajectory.

I was curious to read the rest of his book to see how his ideas and experiences could help my students. I learned a lot, but still felt like the book was just the start of a conversation, just skimming the surface. A next step could be to explore the writing and speeches Jivani mentions on pages 79 & 80 - writers he was introduced to by Professor Andrea Davis while at York University.

The book is easy to read with access to his references at the back of the book.

Judy Reads says

I bought this book after hearing Jamil Jivani speak passionately about why young men turn to violence, crime and radicalization. A lawyer, community organizer and activist, Jivani was articulate, thoughtful and

reasoned. As a boy growing up in Brampton, Ont., with a largely absent father, he wanted to be a gangster. He eventually turned away from crime, opting instead for education and change.

Yet "I was drawn to all these bad ideas because I thought I was not important. And these groups were interested in me because I was," Jivani said in answer to questions after a reading from *Why Young Men*.

There is no doubt that Jivani, who just turned 30, can be a powerful agent of change.

Despite recently being diagnosed with Stage IV lymphoma cancer which has spread to his bones and forces him to wear a neck brace, he lit up the room on his book tour after spending the afternoon with high school students in Calgary. He never flinched when a teenaged boy asked about an incident detailed in the book, where young Jamil asked a friend to help him buy a gun for a potential school fight.

Yet that in-person passion and insight doesn't quite connect in *Why Young Men*.

Jivani's reason for writing the book began after the November 2015 Paris terror attacks, when he realized the descriptions of rage and anger in the accused terrorists mirrored the sense of disconnection he saw in his boyhood friends. The chapters detail his life in a largely immigrant community, the sense of detachment and his decision to move from a life path that saw his best friend end up in jail while he went to Yale. But despite an amazing story, this book seems too... distant?

At its core, this a book of ideas and an argument for positive change rather than an ill-defined memoir. The message is powerful and Jivani is clearly gaining his voice. I expect he will expand on those ideas moving forward.

Caden Mccann says

I decided to pick up *Why Young Men* recently after having seen Jivani interviewed on CBC in light of the recent Toronto van attack. In the book, Jivani offers a memoir of sorts, providing an account of his experiences growing up as an alienated mixed-race kid in the GTA, his schooling at York and later Yale Law School, and some of his work abroad investigating Muslim radicalization after the 2015 Paris attacks.

Ultimately, Jivani seeks to highlight male radicalization and violence as something that transcends religion and ethnicity, and provides some thoughts on how to address the current crisis of masculinity. Although initially I found there was a vaguely self-righteous tone to Jivani's memoir, overall I found this book to be an engaging and thought-provoking read on what is a highly topical issue, 3/5.

Robert Briggs says

Why Young Men lived up to Michael "Pinball" Clemons' description on the back of the book. It is a look at the life of a young man under pressure and includes his research into the lives of other young men who are similar and different than him. The parts about Jivani's parents were most interesting. I also liked his discussion of Belgium. He was there at a very interesting time. The book left me wanting to know more discussion about Jivani's philosophy at the end, but it is a good look into his experiences.

Kate says

There isn't a final answer for the question of the title but there are many likelihoods presented with a mix of personal experience and research. A quick read and a timely one.

Miriam says

Very readable, many ideas packed in, but easy to get through. Perhaps could have been 2-3 books, a few different interesting perspectives on this large & complex topic (issues & intervention in NA, in Europe, positive masculinity, policy issues), but maybe he'll do some deeper dives in future books? Refreshingly nuanced conclusions (mostly: a little bit of column A, a little bit of column B), and compelling combination of personal experience and research. I feel more hopeful and energized, knowing I live in the same city as thinkers like Jamil Jivani.

Clarissa says

This book was powerful. It's so hard to imagine living a different life when you used to the one you have. It's an eye opener on what it's like to be Black or Muslim and live in a country of predominantly White people. I being white myself, I have never had any of the issues that this man grew up with and I lived in Toronto until a teenager as well. Its amazing to see how far he's come along and what he's turned his life in to when it could have gone another way.

I also really liked how it dived in to the problem facing Muslims and the way Islam is warped. How these young men get involved and become radicalized.

I found at times closer to the end it did drag a bit bu the book was not long to begin with so I can handle it. Biggest lesson from the book. We are all human and must treat each other so. I recommend this book to EVERYONE. You must read and must understand.

Carole says

Jamil Jivani is a young man born and raised in Brampton, Ontario who is now a lawyer living in Toronto and teaching law at Osgoode Hall Law School. During his youth, he flirted with gang culture and Nation of Islam, and almost didn't graduate from high school. In this book, he discusses how he got from there to here and most importantly, poses the question of the title.

It was a very interesting read. There is, of course, no easy answer to the question of why are some young men attracted to sinister groups. He refers to many examples from Canada, United States and Europe, often drawing on his own personal experiences and research.

Although the answer is elusive and complex, I found that he made a number of connections that I had not thought of before. The way he draws parallels between young Muslims in Europe who are attracted to ISIS, young Americans who are attracted to white supremacist groups, and those young men who are attracted to gangs is very clever.

Altogether, this was an interesting and thought-provoking book.

Ben Truong says

Why Young Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity are a collection of thoughts, insights, and opinions of Jamil Jivani when he felt familiar with the Paris attacker in 2015. He did not know them personally, but he knew the communities that they have grown up in and the challenges they faced, because it mirrored the circumstance of his own life and if the loom of fate twisted differently, he too could have been like those attackers.

Jamil Jivani was raised in a mostly immigrant community in Toronto that faced significant problems with integration. Having grown up with a largely absent father, he witness what his future could be by the gangster culture or radical ideologies associated with Islam. Finding himself at a crossroads, Jamil Jivani choose a better path and headed off to Yale, became a lawyer, a professor at Osgoode Hall Law School, and a powerful speaker for the disenfranchised.

Why Young Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity purposely complicate the mainstream narrative about traditional masculine identity and Jamil Jivani used his experiences as a young man from a disadvantaged background who now works as a lawyer and social justice advocate to personally retell his thoughts through his existential and physical journey he takes throughout the book.

Advocating for safe spaces to talk about what it means to be a man is central theme to the book. Growing up in the highly multicultural city of Brampton, Ontario, Jamil Jivani experienced first-hand how tensions between young men of color and (often white) police officers can lead to catastrophe as he relates personal experience in each instance.

Why Young Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity is written well and features clear, digestible prose in short, focused chapters. Jamil Jivani discusses the dissonances he experienced growing up in an immigrant-majority neighborhood with a mostly absent father in a mixed-ethnicity household, his mother is a white Christian and his father is a Muslim African.

Jamil Jivani is a compelling rhetorician. Hard experience has led to strong opinions and his central thesis is that social media have unduly influenced many young men of color, in particular to Hollywood and, in some cases, political or religious radicalism, which poisons their understanding of manhood and tilting them toward rebellion and criminality. Facing racism and unfair treatment by police is clearly painful and alienating and the recourse, according to Jamil Jivani, is gaining education and meaningful employment, which is why he pushes for mentoring programs and policy reform within existing systems.

He recounts travels to Europe and the Middle East to identify commonalities and variances in young men's experiences, particularly in majority Black and Muslim communities. Most, but not all, of what he finds confirms his own viewpoints.

The book does however, becomes rather grating, as Jamil Jivani wears his centrist, accommodating heart on his sleeve, which normally isn't a bad thing, but the continuous righteousness of his own ideas went on a tad too much. Another shortcoming to the book is that the lives of gay and bisexual men of color are rather invisible in its pages. In a book about gender roles, race, and identity, this absence is rather glaring.

All in all, *Why Young Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity* is an interesting take on the ever changing male identity in an ever increasingly rising feminist visibility in the world.

chanel nouseforaname says

I thought this was a highly readable look into how many young men get caught up in lifestyles and situations that they would have otherwise avoided by being neglected or ostracized by their communities and looking for community elsewhere. I also see how not feeling welcome in your community can lead young people *maybe, but not necessarily, towards violence*, but could definitely lead them towards an individualistic lifestyle where they may not want to engage in what is seen as "normative" "linear" or "homogenous behaviour". This is better explained in the book.

Having worked with prison populations in writer Jamil's city of Toronto, which is also my city, I've seen first hand what he describes as community agencies and governments not contributing the necessary resources to assist in the progression of young men and women of colour in targeted neighbourhoods. His train of thought is easy to follow as well, when it comes to the situation in Brussel's Molenbeek community. It was very interesting to see how the narratives set forth parallel, overtake and reflect each other.

Jamil's interactions with the five percenters and the NOI is similar to that of my brother's interactions with NOI when he was in his late-teens and early twenties as well. I always wondered what my brother was reading and consuming and after awhile he too left the groups citing a difference of opinion; moving on to learning outside of the NOI and finding his own way. It's very easy to see how a young man seeking to develop their identity in a western culture that discriminates, assaults and condemns them could become radicalized in various contexts, in retaliation.

For a debut work I thought this was extremely well-constructed; Jamil provided a deep look into a situation plaguing young men that is similar in different communities but that is uniquely expressed in black and muslim communities. *Why Young Men* is uniquely compelling and insightful especially for people outside of the culture who are curious.

I found his own personal story engaging and emotionally intriguing, especially when he spoke of the struggles between himself and his white mother who was trying to understand him during his search for self and while he was out seeking answers in the world. I found his rise to Yale inspiring and the insight about the neighbourhoods surrounding Yale and the lack of integration of it's young black populace a great addition to the book.

Similar to *Hillbilly Elegy*, a memoir by his Yale brother J.D. Vance, whom he shouts out in his acknowledgments, you can see very clearly how communities and certain practices can fail their young no matter what race or demographic. However, when it comes to black and brown people and those who identify as muslim; it's important that these stories get told and that the experiences of black and brown people find their way to the mainstream. Too often, critical experiences of young people from marginalized communities get ignored and people only ask what happened, after situations such as the Paris attacks or school shootings, or the murders of women and children occur. When the information needed to look into the way that the youth are integrating, what opportunities were/are available to them, was always there but were just going largely ignored.

I found his insights re: organizational politics when it comes to youth work relatable. I also found the

information he shared around Peter Sloly really useful for anyone wondering why the state of policing in Toronto is the way it is currently with Mark Saunders our chief "representative" of police in Toronto. It's great insight for young organizers to reach back and examine how it could have been or how it could be in the face of how it is.

If you're from the city of Toronto, if you teach or work with youth, I think you'll find Why Young Men important to your understanding of the city's landscape and I think you should read it.

Chris says

Stimulating!

This book meandered a fair bit but I enjoyed the personalized style of the writing. Jivani is taking the reader along on his exploration of his theme, young men, the risk to them of criminalization and radicalization, how society can protect them from these things and offer them better lives, and at the same time reduce violence. I enjoyed the journey, bouncing back and forth with his own thoughts. This style pays proper respect to the complexity of these issues. What Jivani once thought were obvious solutions [e.g. create jobs for idle hands] he became more thoughtful about as he travelled among people with different cultural perspectives from his own. He notes the "interdependent nature of radicalization variables." In other words, and more broadly, what leads young men astray can't be boiled down to a single, fundamental cause. It's complicated. Always.

The downside of this approach is I'm left without clarity on where he stands on things. And I suppose that is evolving anyway. He seems an open-minded guy. Even a checklist of his key thinking/talking points would have been useful. But he leaves it up to the readers to draw their own conclusions. What he's done is started a certain conversation.

One fascinating insight was that fringe and hate and fundamentalist groups are very good at "posing as authorities on masculinity" to convince vulnerable young men to join in on their angry bravado, then take it to the next level. This expertise--and that twisted definition of masculinity--must be questioned by other men at all times.

Jivani also explored how change happens. He was inspired by the way communities acted quickly in the face of crisis, much faster than governments can. I guess the goal then becomes how to get governments to invest the people's resources (tax revenues) to ramp up effective programs to serve society at large when appropriate. [This from his discussion on the opioid crisis.]

I also appreciated his discussion on why young people don't tend to be voters. He quotes the rapper, Paris: "For many, the desire to keep the 'greater evil' out of public office isn't a good enough reason to engage in a democratic process that seems rigged, designed to maintain the illusion of choice while protecting the status quo."

Smallish beefs:

- "Journalists, who determine traditional news media content..." [Well, only partially. There's the corporate owners, advertisers, media consumers...in general Jivani's media critique was pretty vague.]
- Related to the above, at times I found his narrative painted activists [in Black Lives Matter, for example] as equal opposites of institutions [e.g. the police]. Missing is an analysis of the power dynamics at play.

