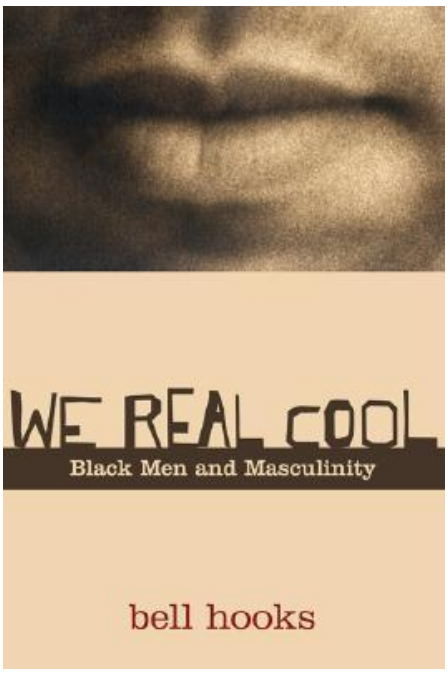

We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity

bell hooks

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We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity bell hooks
When women get together and talk about men, the news is almost always bad news," writes bell hooks. "If the topic gets specific and the focus is on black men, the news is even worse."

In this powerful new book, bell hooks arrests our attention from the first page. Her title--*We Real Cool*; her subject--the way in which both white society and weak black leaders are failing black men and youth. Her subject is taboo: "this is a culture that does not love black males: " "they are not loved by white men, white women, black women, girls or boys. And especially, *black men do not love themselves*. How could they? How could they be expected to love, surrounded by so much envy, desire, and hate?

We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity Details

Date	:	Published November 14th 2003 by Routledge (first published November 7th 2003)
ISBN	:	9780415969277
Author	:	bell hooks
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From Reader Review We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity for online ebook

Everett Darling says

Not only does Bell Hooks "challenge the misguided notion that ours is a culture that loves black men," she also emphasises why our culture SHOULD care about black men.

Briana says

I recommend this book to everybody. It gave me an understanding about men and how they think. I absolutely love this book. I learned more than just words, I received knowledge from reading this.

Q says

I want to give this book a 4.5 and the reason I wouldn't give it a 5 is simply because I am currently yearning for something that does what this book does but for Black British people. It's something that I have constantly sought after but reading this book and being so enthralled by it really made me want to know where the Black British social commentary is.

The chapter 'it's a dick thing' is by far the most important in the book, I feel. Simply because of the importance I think breaking the belief in sexual power and dominance is into contributing to alter the minds of people. I'm still trying to digest it all and will perhaps offer a better review/critique at some other point.

Zanna says

Hooks explains why she felt the need to write this book, rather than leaving it to Black men to speak for themselves on the topic:

> Many of the individual black men working in the field of ending male violence against women and children are experts at explaining black male crisis and finding paths to healing, but they just feel they do not have time to write. There is not even a small body of anti-patriarchal literature speaking directly to black males about what they can do to educate themselves for critical consciousness, guiding them on the path of liberation... as a black woman who cares about the plight of black men I feel I can no longer wait for brothers to take the lead and spread the word

She begins by explaining that West African men arriving as slaves in the Americas did not come with condioning in patriarchal masculinity. They were taught to identify manhood with domination, the willingness to be violent and the suppression of emotion by their white captors.

She cites autobiographical texts by men like Henry Box Brownshowing that the freedom they went towards

was the freedom to be a benevolent patriarch. She notes that Frederick Douglass "did not feel his manhood affirmed by intellectual progress" but by fighting with the slave overseer. While these men were opposed to violence against women and Douglass in particular was a strong supporter of women's liberation, their values were shaped by the white USian ideal of patriarchal masculinity. Oppositional alternatives were available to some black men, such as 'the Tradition of John' and interaction with Native/Indian people.

Hooks takes up the issue (much discussed by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* of women being the main wage-earners in black Usian families. She points out that while women earned the money, men often retained control of it and considered it their right to do so. The Moynihan report that accused black women of 'emasculating' black men proposed that black men could reaffirm their manhood by joining the military and fighting in the US' imperialist wars. Of course, hooks underlines the violent history and culture of Euro-Americans with which patriarchal masculinity is imbued. The Moynihan report shifted the blame for black men's woes from white supremacy onto black women:

> Tragically, collectively black men began at this point in our nation’s history to blame black women for their fate. This blaming ignited the flames of a gender war so intense that it has practically consumed the historical memory of black males and females working together equally for liberation, creating love in family and community. It has practically destroyed beyond recognition the representation of an alternative black man seeking freedom for self and loved ones, a rebel black man eager to create and make his own destiny. This is the image of the black male that must be recovered, restored, so that it can stand as the example of revolutionary manhood.

for example

> If patriarchal standards for manhood prized being silent and unemotional, Ali dared to speak out loudly, to be bold and boisterous, and express emotions, embodying joy, laughing, daring to be sad, to feel pain, and to express the hurt. Photographs capture Ali smiling, hugging black males, daring to be physically close. On my desk I have the image of Ali holding his mother, showing his love; everything a patriarchal man was not supposed to be and do. Ali let loose the boy within and swept us away with his laughter, his generosity of spirit, his heart. He expressed the playfulness macho men were supposed to repress and deny.

Meanwhile, black men were telling whites that 'they would rather by playboys than providers... White men were attacking black men in the sixties for not fulfilling the patriarchal role when it came to work and family, and black men were telling white men that sexuality was the only real site where manhood mattered and there the black male ruled.' White men seeking alternatives to patriarchal masculinity looked to the 'cool' of black men.

Hooks laments that some sections of black power movements embraced patriarchal masculinity and undermined the historical movement 'for racial uplift rooted in nonviolence and gender equality'. She also points out that black power militants who entered universities were confronted with the fact that the values of honesty, integrity and justice taught by their parents were not those that led to success under capitalism.

Education is a key theme. Hooks laments that black boys are not expected to be good learners, and that thinking black males have always been seen as a threat, and are likely to be cast as troublemakers at an early age. She points out that many black parents are now interested in reintroducing segregated education, since no one in black communities saw education as a 'white' thing until integrated schools instituted gendered racial othering.

> It is as though patriarchal white men decided that they could make use of militant black male sexism, letting it be the first and loudest voice of anti-feminist backlash. Polls and surveys of the population that looked at attitudes toward gender roles in the late sixties and early seventies actually showed that black males were much more supportive of women entering the workforce and receiving equal pay for equal work than other groups of men. The voice of black male sexism and misogyny was not representative. And yet it was that voice that received ongoing national attention. It was not the astute critiques of American foreign policy, of capitalism, that citizens of this nation heard from black power advocates. When they appeared in mass media it was only as agents proclaiming their right to do violence, their right to kill. This was one of the contradictions within black power rhetoric.

Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* is one extreme example of black power polemic couched in antifeminist, homophobic rhetoric and valorisation of violence. Hooks argues that the book was published and acclaimed because white male leaders condoned it. As well as pointing out that 'by embracing the ethos of violence militant[s of the Black Power movement] were not defying White supremacist capitalist patriarchy... [but] expressing their allegiance.', hooks critiques popular films like The Shawshank Redemption and The Green Mile as ultimately affirming the image of the violent Black male.

The burn here is that this image is extremely useful to white supremacist capitalist patriarchy's best proponents like Moynihan, who suggested that the violent Black male body could be used to fight wars: 'both imperialist abroad and gender on the home front'

Hooks notes that young Black men lack role models and that Black men in the public eye, such as hip hop artists, sing and talk about and present an image of violence at odds with their own nonviolent personal lives. Black women, she notes, are most regularly the victims of those men who are violent, and such violence is all too often ignored. OJ Simpson's violence towards Black female partners attracted no attention - it was only when a white woman became a victim that his behaviour garnered outrage. Indeed, it is when they are acting out that the world Black USian men live in pays them the most attention. 'Mass media simply ignored any aspect of the black liberation struggle that was positive and ongoing'

> As dead patriarchal heroes black power militants have become icons, commodified celebrities, and yet their critical understanding of the nature of domination is not studied, enlarged or treated as a starting point for new liberation struggle

> It is no accident that just as Malcolm X was moving away from antiwhite black separatist discourse to global awareness of neocolonialism… his voice was silenced by state-supported black-on-black homicide

In the chapter on sexuality, hooks writes about the Euro-American fascination with black sexualities and how this was played out in lynchings, and also how the 'sexual script' of the 'New World' was 'encoded with sadomasochistic rituals of domination'. She writes about the development of black sexualities in segregated communities and about the influence of patriarchal sexuality centred on the perceived male 'need to fuck'

She quotes Steve Bearman's essay 'Why Men are so Obssessed with Sex':

> We are born sensual creatures with an unlimited capacity to feel and an effortless propensity to deeply connect with all human beings [which has been conditioned out of us]. All of these human needs are then promised to us by way of sex'

and elaborates on his analysis to portray sex as a quest for freedom for black men denied any other form of liberating power.

The widespread emotional and sexual abuse of black boys is also an influence, as is the objectification of the black male body. Hooks also quotes an interview with Cleo Manago who responds to the suggestion that there are 'perks' to the sexual stereotype of blackness negatively: 'there are no healthy benefits to being Black, sexy, or more beautiful in a society run by Whites who resent and feel challenged by your beauty, who are obsessed with controlling or dominating you in response to the self-consciouness they feel in your presence... This is a precarious place to be. I don't agree that Black men are more embodied than White men'. Hooks repeats her call for Black men to empower themselves by creating liberatory sexualities, endorsing Bearman's view that 'when sexual desire is purged of desperation, urgency, loneliness and fear, then sex can be inspired by joy and sexual relationships can be healthy and whole' and declaring that 'a free black man, at home in his body, able to feel his sexual desire and act with life-affirming agency, is the radical outlaw this nation fears'

Next, hooks tackles the crushing of the spirit that takes place in the patriarchal socialisation of young black boys, whose expressions of emotion are forbidden as 'sissy' by verbal and physical chastisement and rituals of humiliation. While the effects of patriarchal socialisation on men has been given some cultural attention, this is generally directed towards white boys: 'the violent acting out of white boys tends to be viewed as a psychological disorder that can be corrected, while black boys who act out tend to be viewed as criminals and punished accordingly. She critiques conventional calls for disciplining black boys and points out that a quiet, obedient state is not necessarily a psychologically whole one, but may simply be the result of repressed emotion. Creativity in black boys is often treated as suspect or inappropriate, making it extremely difficult for them to cultivate the ability to find a way out. Boys may also be treated as special and entitled to the point that they do not learn any boundaries.

Society encourages black men to become 'rageolics'. They are not offered spaces to speak their pain or avenues of healing from low self-esteem. Outward signs of success recognised by patriarchal society may not have any effect on feelings of emptiness experienced by emotionally damaged men who have no way to express grief for losses and abandonment experienced in childhood. Black men, hooks reminds us, creates the blues to express such feelings but 'young black males tend not to want to hear the blues. They do not want to hear an honest expression of black male vulnerability.'

Hooks repudiates and nuances the trope of the absent black father, pointing out that white fathers have a by no means better record, and that the patriarchal male can be a negative presence worse than absence, and that it is more important that children have loving male caregivers in their lives than that biological fathers stick around. She disputes that mother relationships are more important than father relationships, critiquing dictionary definitions of 'mother' and 'father' that connote one with tenderness and affection and not the other. She decries USian culture for overvaluing the two parent family when other models can be equally nurturing, as long as children receive loving care. She suggests that what many Black fathers most need to do is open communication with and seek forgiveness from those they have closed themselves off from. She urges men to see their parental roles as women do, and through 'mothering' behaviour become capable of self-healing, nurturing of others and unconditional love

The final chapters focus on 'doing the work of love' and healing that can enable Black men to divest from patriarchal masculinity and its attendant pathology of disassociation. 'Any black male who dares to care for his inner life…is already refusing to be a victim'. This section is full of detail and examples that make is practically useful as well as deeply inspiring and beautiful to read. This book is real cool.

Troy says

What I think I take away from this book, along with some things that happened to me around the time I read it, was that a lot goes into conferring what masculinity is, and its a long road ahead to get to a place where the balances of love, power, sex, and humanity are tipped correctly. I can only affect myself, though, and this book is a piece to use to figure out where I fit in and how I can get better, but most importantly, WHY.

Brandon says

I was in love with it, but then I fell progressively further out of love with it.

Chapter 7 depends entirely on the conservative, heterosexist defense of the heterosexual couple as necessary for healthy childrearing (!); the appeals to dated pop authorities like John Bradshaw are unconvincing; and the generic, diffuse spirituality advocated for loses all punch in the face of hooks' optimistic vision: People are intrinsically good, and the world is just: bad people suffer for their misdeeds, even if only psychologically or in the form of a metaphysical “soul murder.”

On the other hand, what hooks gets right, she gets EXCEPTIONALLY right. Above all, and what makes this book worth reading, however many its flaws: bell hooks shouts what so few so-called feminist voices are willing to acknowledge: Patriarchy destroys men, full stop. She cites Kay Hagan: “[Anti-sexist men] perceive the value of a feminist practice for themselves and they advocate it not because it’s politically correct, or because they want women to like them, or even because they want women to have equality, but because they understand that male privilege prevents them not only from becoming whole, authentic human beings but also from knowing the truth about the world.” (137) This is the stuff that deserves to be memorized.

To give a few more highlights: see her critique of hiphop's strictly imaginary claims to subversive potential; the recognition that the violence of militant black power advocates directly served the interests of the white supremacist state (and in any case “black male rage is usually a sign of reactive powerlessness” (90), a profoundly Nietzschean observation); the condemnation of the claims for superiority over white masculinity as being itself patriarchal; the recognition that, in psychoanalytic terms, white men do NOT possess the phallus (psychological wholeness); the terrifying need to give up what we have in order to finally achieve health (“they fear that if they give up what little 'power' they may have in the existing system they will have nothing” (130)), the necessity of patriarchal females for the functioning of patriarchy, that anti-patriarchal men “can be somewhat disturbing to be around” (!) (137), all of this, all of this, all of this is a damned god-send in a leftist discourse sunk into a confusion of identities with persons.

Hooks also has the rare gift of being able to take the contradictions of a person or movement without complaint: she re-claims the anti-capitalist critique of black power, acknowledges MLK's anti-communism and still cites his moral authority, but without in either case needing to either morally write-off or lionize a person or a discourse. She can sift out the good from the bad without the kind of totalizing either-or functioning of today's so-called “social justice”: Whether a person or a discourse is good or bad is besides the point; she has a rare knack for salvaging what can still be used.

There's plenty of meat on this bone, though it needs a lot of salt.

Lumberjuan says

A really interesting collection of essays.

When she started introducing the ideas of role-models and the lack there-of for African-Americans I was a little confused. She brought in the realm of music as an area in which black men could express themselves fully. Where they could be honest with their feelings, emotions and the expression of pain and weakness; especially using the idea that this was a positive aspect of the blues (and jazz, referencing Coltrane), but is totally lacking in hip-hop music. I found it odd that she completely ignores soul music - an almost totally African-American music, linked strongly with the civil rights movement - that typically expresses love and tenderness, even if it can often be based within patriarchal norms.
Equally noticeable was the total lack of recognition for any socially-conscious hip-hop music, which has been developing as a movement outside of the mainstream for a decade or more.
The following almost reads like a breakdown of several of hooks' essays:

Talib Kweli lyrics from 'Joy' (2002)
"I do it for the seeds y'all, in they formative years when they need y'all
we gotta believe, in what we conceive y'all, it's deep y'all
I give them the truth, so they approach the situation, with ammunition
I keep nothing away, they hear everything, cause they know how to listen
Teach them the game, so they know they position, so they can grow
and make decisions, that change the world, and break old tradition
They put kids in jail, for a life they ain't even get to start
that's murder too, and it's breaking my heart, it's breaking our nation apart
We gave the youth all the anger, it's just
we ain't taught them, how to express it, and so it's dangerous
You can't talk to them
Unless your language is relating to what they going through
so busy ignoring them, you can't see what they showing you
And you wonder, why we called baby-daddy's and baby-momma's
when we grow up, we can't act like adult mothers and fathers, yo
I'm so blessed to have a boy and a girl, everyday they bring joy to my world"

Considering the book was published in 2004, there were several bands and musicians working within hip-hop producing socially conscious anti-sexist, anti-violent music (Michael Franti, Jurassic 5, Ozomatli, Mos Def, Black Star... etc)

Lastly, I'm aware as a middle-class English white male - ticking off almost every box in her imperialist white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy - that I'm probably not really the intended audience for this work, but found most of the problems she introduces as black problems were my own growing up in a working-class town with a depressive-father.

As an adolescent, my personal heroes were Bruce Lee and Jimi Hendrix, neither of whom was white. I almost totally rejected the Beatles and John Lennon, who were both brought up within three miles of my home. Is it not possible that young African-American men could look beyond race boundaries to look for their heroes?

Darkowaa says

!!! https://africanbookaddict.com/2018/07...

I'm glad I've finally been able to complete a full body of hooks's work instead of select essays I was assigned to read in college sociology classes. Even though it speaks predominantly about black men, bell hooks definitely wrote this with feminism soaked into every single chapter.

'We Real Cool' (the title is taken from a Gwendolyn Brooks poem!) is an important, critical take on how the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy (yes, its a mouthful lmao) affects the souls of black boys & men - and by extension black girls & women. Layered with many pop culture references and voices of various black authors and social workers, bell hooks unapologetically asserts that black masculinity is a reflection of white domination and provides some alternative ways/solutions black men AND women can work together to overcome the damage and hurt, with love.

There's so much to say about this dense, complex book which ultimately aims at critiquing, loving and attempting to heal the hurts of black men from a black feminist lens. Its a lot to absorb, but its important. This is a gem. Feed your soul and read some hooks!

Aunnalea says

"Ironically, the imperialist white-supremacists state, which claimed the black family would be healthier if black men headed households, had no difficulty taking men away from households and sending them far away from families to wage war, to sacrifice their lives for a country that was denying them full citizenship." p. 13
"Unlike patriarchal thinking, which insists that the presence of a father is needed in family life because men are superior protectors and providers, healthy parenting is rooted in the assumption that because we live in a world where there are two genders, children need to be able to make emotional connections with both." p. 112
"Collectively black males have yet to intervene on the negative cultural representations of the black male body because they simply cannot change how they are seen (as brutes, beasts, bastards) without challenging patriarchal notions of manhood as well as white-supremacists notions of black make identity." p. 138

Rianna Jade says

Necessary but not her best in my opinion, don't read this book and not follow up with The Will To Change and her other books that focus on black feminism which are just as important.

Trevor says

Hooks is such an interesting writer and this is such an interesting book. In summary you could say that the things hooks finds most objectionable in the world relate to the ‘white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy’ – a phrase she has more or less made her own. The problem is that we live in a society where all three of these elements of oppression are presented as both inevitable and commonsense. As such, not only is each corner of this triad presented as self-supporting, but those who are clearly disadvantaged by one or other of the corners are often encouraged to seek their solace in one of the other supports to the system of oppression. For black males capitalism is always available in theory as a means to success, while it is patriarchy that is available in practice. As hooks makes clear, real liberation requires being liberated from all three of these systems of oppression and that it is not possible to be liberated from one while being oppressed by either of the others.

This book is a deeply personal account drawing heavily on hooks’ life, she is an interesting and powerful academic particularly for the way she does precisely this – illuminating her points from lived experience. But what I found most interesting about this book was the discussion of the differences she sees between Rap and Blues music. For hooks, Blues was a liberating force in Black American society as it allowed a space for Black males in particular to engage with their emotions and to be vulnerable. The patriarchal thinking that appears to offer solace for the oppression of living in a white-supremacist society, such as the United States, has its own strictures and constrains. Interestingly, many of these strictures help reinforce society’s paradoxical vision of Black males as castrated, sex-obsessed, violent, emotionally stunted, over-grown children. The very little Rap music I’ve ever listened to has been strikingly misogynist, obsessed with the possession of status symbols at any cost, violent and angrily anti-intellectual. Bell hooks makes it clear that such music is symptomatic of Black oppression, not a solution to it, it is a kind of false consciousness where ‘the best you can hope for’, the desires you are encouraged to have, merely reinforce your prison walls.

At one point in this hooks makes the point that when asked what sex and race people would like to come back as in their next life, people overwhelmingly say ‘a White male’. People aren’t stupid, they can recognise unearned privilege when they see it. And why wouldn’t you want the free ride white skin and a penis offer? Few people are silly enough to want to come back as a Black woman, say. On the spectrum of human disadvantage, being coded Black and Pink sits at an extreme end.

Black male bodies are a screen upon which society projects its insecurities and fantasies. Myths of Black males as sex machines, as kinds of animals, of being in possession of natural sporting abilities – all present Black males as bodies without minds. Success is defined as either sporting or musical prowess, while intellectual pursuits are too often considered a mark of shame, particularly for Black males. But, as was made clear by Du Bois so long ago, the path to freedom finds its shortest route through schools. The prison-industrial-complex in the US, something which disproportionately discriminates against Black males, is only encouraged and justified by the values endorsed by Rap music – values that stress hyper masculine and hyper capitalist desires where it doesn’t matter how you make it, a Rolex watch, a fast car and an endless string of attractive women on your arm is the very definition of success. Clearly, this was anything but the message of the Blues, where a song is infinitely more likely to be about the pain and loss of being left by a lover than it is to be about fucking bitches in roofless Cadillac.

At the end she quotes the Isis and Osiris myth – where Osiris is hacked to pieces and the parts of his body scattered across the world and where, out of sheer love, Isis travels the world collecting these pieces and then painstakingly putting them back together again. The last paragraph of the book being:

“This glorious myth, the tale of Isis and Osiris, reminds us that no matter how broken, how lost we are, we can be found. Our wounded souls are never beyond repair. Black females and males can use this myth to nurture the memory of sustained connection with one another, of a love that has stood and can stand the test of time and tribulation. We can choose a love that will courageously seek out the wounded soul, find you, and dare to bring you home again, doing what must be done to help put the bits and pieces together again, to make us whole. This is real cool. This is real love.“

But it is also up to Black males to stand by Black females, not merely to offer support, but because patriarchy is a symptom of all of our oppression and so overcoming patriarchy is, thereby, a task on all of our paths to liberation. She talks of how many men are learning this lesson and who challenge sexism when they are confronted with it.

So, I finished reading this book yesterday and then last night went to a talk by an author discussing his latest book. The author was Michel Faber. A lot of the talk was harrowing – he lost his partner a couple of years ago to cancer while writing this book. The discussion of both topics merged and mingled and was painful in many ways, in fact, painfully confronting. At the end there was time for people to ask questions. The first from a man and then three women. Michel then said, ‘Are there any questions from someone without a womb?’ I couldn’t really tell you much about what happened after he said this. I wanted to leave, but since he had been so open about his grief I found the implied insult of my walking out before the talk was over impossible to contemplate. Three more questions where asked, all by men (unsurprisingly), none of them referred to his bizarre preference for being questioned by males. I left feeling violated, complicit and angry – I left incredibly unlikely to ever buy or read one of his books again. Those of us with all of the benefits of white male privilege need to be held to account for how we exercise or choose not to exercise that privilege. In remaining silent I condoned what ought to be unforgivable. I can find endless excuses, I’ve used some of them above, but that brute fact remains.

Michael Strode says

There are times when one enters into a text blindly knowing not what to expect. One sets no expectations that their present opinions will be confirmed or refuted. They simply are on a journey and reaching out for other input about the direction of their walk. I came to locate this text at while browsing the Chicago Public Library and am delighted that I chose to add it to my present reading list. She calls it "radical black masculinity" though by the time you reach the end of the text you realize that she is seeking a certain return of a black masculinity that we once held which is now lost to many of us.

Upon reading such chapters as "Gangsta Culture" and "Schooling Black Males", I saw glimmers and glimpses of my formative years pass by. I recall one instance where I was in the car with my mother and I decided to play the tape in my Walkman which was by a group called the Luniz and an album titled "Operation Stackola". In the particular song I played, "Put The Lead On Ya", a rapper named Dru Down utters the words "and if you're a woman / don't think i still won't put the lead on ya / bitchhhh". My mother without pause snatched the tape out of the deck and tossed it from the car window. Why did I think this sort of material was acceptable to play either for my mother's ears or my own? Why was I obsessed with emulating the sexual lothario and street combativeness that I saw emanating from my brother's daily existence? How did I come from the place where I previously lived to the ground where I now stand? I credit the women.

Whether it was my mother snatching that tape from the car and clearly showing me that certain language and actions were entirely unacceptable or my daughter now who cautions me to both censor myself until the practice becomes a lifestyle and also to stop trying to shield her in ways that might make her consider patriarchy and paternalism the manner all men should exhibit in her future. There are many other women in between who have shown me how "quaint" some of my assumptions were and helped to groom and grow me forward. For their presence I am forever grateful.

After my daughter was born, I was known to say that it was probably a good thing that I didn't have a son because I would not know how to teach him how to be a man as I perceived the world to see them. I don't play the usual sports or watch them. I enjoy the kitchen and cooking and poetry. Had I a son, he might suffer a terrible time during his schooling years subscribing to some the ways I live at present, but I am wholly aware of what a fool's errand that statement was now. There are many ways to be cool as hooks' offers to us now and they don't have to be rooted in the dying patriarchy of the past, but a brilliant, bold, and creative manhood of the future. One that subscribes to the notion that men mustn't always be stoic, they can be open and vulnerable and self aware. They can say the things amongst friends that others have chosen not to say because of masculine groupthink and they can find more innovative ways to be cool that don't involve sexual exploits, physical combat and domination, or monetary gain. We too cool to be caged by white supremacy. In other words, we off that.

Jessica says

You, like many people (me, anyway), might be a little frightened of bell hooks, and understandably so. Hooks is going to yell at you. Well, okay, there I go enforcing racist, sexist stereotypes of strong black women: of course she's not actually going to yell, but she is also not going to go too gentle. Hooks is going to let you know straight up what the problem is, and part of that problem is *you.* She is going to call you and your imperialist white-supremacist capitalist sexist society on all of your shit, and she's likely going to get you feeling very uncomfortable about any number of of terrible things you probably didn't even realize you were doing or thinking. And she's going to do all this in a way that might be fairly unpleasant, in a form you're not that comfortable with. There won't be any footnotes (there's not even a BIBILIOGRAPHY, though hooks cites many works [is that even *legal*???!!!]), and hooks will often make sweeping statements and very provocative generalizations without citing any hard evidence for her point of view. You might get defensive and stop listening, or you might feel chastised and guilty and just accept that you're a privileged jerk, and stop really thinking critically about what she's saying and hoping if you just nod enthusiastically and say something nice about how smart and right she is about everything, that maybe she'll stop being mad at you and let you off the hook (hah hah hah, hilarious pun totally intended). This applies not only if you're a straight white man who runs an oil drilling project in Nigeria or develops luxury real estate in "upcoming neighborhoods": IMO no matter who you are and which boxes you happen to check on the census form, if you're paying attention hooks is eventually going to hit something pretty personal in you, and you're going to feel it. And also, she's going to carry on quite a bit about how screwed up things in the world are. Even if -- hell, especially if -- you've already noticed that, you might get a bit tired of hearing her repeat it.

For all these reasons, if you read just half of what bell hooks is saying and then stop listening, it could be real tempting to throw up your hands and shout, "It's all such a mess! White supremacy! Patriarchy! Everyone's mad at me and things are so screwed up no matter what I do, so why even bother?! I'm gonna go Netflix a South Park and some really offensive interracial porn and just call it a day."

And honestly, that'd be a shame, because the thing is that hooks is NOT just complaining about bad we all

are and how screwed up everything is. Not at all! First she describes the problems, and then she provides clear and concrete solutions, and that, my friend, is a beautiful thing. Hooks -- especially, I think, more recent hooks -- is all about LOVE. Love! Didn't you get her memo? Love and healing and all that sweet and softy stuff! Not mean or scary or hopeless at all; in fact, quite the opposite! And for me, that's kind of what was most interesting about my own reaction to this book. Some of my Booksters already know that I'm a social worker, and that I also really hate reading about psychology and am not at all a self-helpy, therapyish type of girl, perhaps to a rather surprising degree given my chosen profession. So in way, it's sort of surprising to me that I wound up liking what's essentially a self-help book for black men. But I did mostly like it, probably because hooks arrives at the personal place that she does via a deeply political route, and also because as a white social worker who's worked predominantly with black male clients, I found her approach and conclusions really resonated with many of my own observations, and gave me some context I did not otherwise have.

Being neither black nor male, I'm not in the best position either to support or refute many of hooks's assertions in this book. Basically, her starting point is this very common refrain we've all heard about the various crises of black men in America. Hooks is calling bullshit on the popular exhortation that many black men need to clean up their acts and become better patriarchs. Patriarchy isn't the solution, hooks says: it's the goddamn *problem,* and here's why, and here's what to do about it. And then she tells you! God, I love that. I am so, so sick of people complaining about things without coming up with any actual solutions, and hooks doesn't do that at ALL. *Here's what needs to be done,* she says, *and here's how to do it. Step by step. Here. Like this.* I love that!

For me, the second half of this book was stronger than the first. Hooks articulates some very crucial points about black male sexuality, violence, and parenting that are perhaps not exactly revelatory but which I'd never been able to think about myself this coherently. I really do agree with a lot of what she says about how patriarchy hurts men, and how the intersectionality of race and gender creates very special problems for a lot of black men. It's not like I never noticed any of this stuff before -- I probably think about it more than most people -- but hooks gives a good framework that really ties the macro-level racism and patriarchy stuff to the personal experience and psychological impact of these forces on individuals. I often find this connection between the political and personal realms a bit of a black box, and its mechanism is one hooks seems to understand and explain better than most other writers. Maybe that's partly because of this same form that I find so frustrating: her observations usually aren't based in hard evidence, just in her personal experiences and observations, and things (often memoirs) that she's read. This book is mostly just someone who's thought very deeply about these questions sharing her insights, which is probably what makes reading hooks both especially difficult and so rewarding for me. It drives me crazy that there are no endnotes and no bibliography, but the way hooks so frankly and disarmingly reveals personal experiences from her family and romantic life is much of what makes her writing so truthful and real.

In light of our recent Jack Kerouac/"cool" brawl on here, I must note that hooks does quote Kerouac directly (and non-judgmentally) in reference to "his fascination with black male cool." She also delineates her own theory of cool, which I personally found excellent:

Once upon a time black male "cool" was defined by the ways in which black men confronted the hardships of life without allowing their spirits to be ravaged. They took the pain of it used it alchemically to turn the pain into gold. That burning process required high heat. Black male cool was defined by the ability to withstand the heat and remain centered. It was defined by black male willingness to confront reality, to face the truth, and bear it by not adopting a false pose of cool by feeding on fantasy; not by black male denial or by assuming a "poor me" victim identity. It was defined by individual black males daring to self-define rather

than be defined by others (p. 147).

Mark Ballinger says

This is a tough book to review, because it's so uneven. The first three chapters are just awful. Weak arguments, defeat of straw man after straw man. Quotations from sources that are way out of date, and this includes the author using giant block quotes of her own prior work. I paid particular attention to the chapter of schools, and it seems like she never bothered to find out what's actually happening in schools. She takes old TV shows as evidence of social realities.

Then, in later chapters the writing sharpens, the arguments point to things that really matter. She writes movingly about the ways black men are held back from strong relationships and authentically expressing themselves. "from angry boys to angry men" is powerful stuff, as is "healing the hurt". The violence young boys face is heartbreaking, and the more we can talk about it and work on solving the problem without dwelling on the "ists" and "isms" of society the better.

Jamia says

Hooks explores why American culture “does not love black males” (Hooks, xi). According to Hooks, “Black males in the culture of the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy are feared but they are not loved.” Hooks argues that the historic dehumanization and devaluation of African-American men resulted in devastating their individual and collective self-esteem, confining and containing their emotional, social, and spiritual progression.
Approaching her analysis of black masculinity from a feminist perspective, Hooks insists that dominant culture’s notion of patriarchal masculinity serves as a menace to black community growth and solidarity, hindering progress in the fight against oppression. We Real Cool is a nurturing but tough love letter from the author to her community, providing solutions to questions other books on the subject (mostly written by conservative black men) have left unanswered.Hooks focuses on solving problems instead of communicating negative messages without solutions.
Hooks explores the history of the systems that perpetuate violence, sexism, unhealthy consumerism, and barriers to education in the black community throughout the book. Providing readers with an academic theoretical framework, some colloquial language and pop cultural references, Hook’s book resonates with the community she aims to impact politically as well as scholars. Noting the absence of books that provide meaningful social critique and opportunities for real introspection and empowerment for black men, Hooks urges African-American men to follow the self-reflective and empowering formula black feminists used to organize, spread the word among themselves, and heal in order to literally and figuratively release themselves from patriarchal prison. Even though her approach is critical, she draws upon the strengths of black men in her personal life and the community at large, exploring the positive possibilities and opportunities that could occur with the abolition of patriarchal masculinity in the African-American community.
In ten well-organized chapters discussing various representations of black masculinity, Hooks considers black masculinity in relation to slavery, “gangsta” culture, public education, violence, sexuality, anger, parenting, and love relationships. Careful not to speak for black men directly, Hooks explains that her political goal is to educate black men about the impact of patriarchy on black society, in hopes that more black men will cease believing that their survival depends on their right to fulfill patriarchal roles.

Hooks practices what she preaches, taking the role of leadership she asks from the men she aims to reach. .Hooks maintains that black men will ascend from the negative space white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy reserved for them, by rejecting sexist and oppressive religious norms. In We Real Cool, Hooks does not promise to solve the problems caused by the xenophobia, hate, and sexual objectification black men experience. Alternatively, Hooks puts theory into nurturing practice, offering a proactive and therapeutic approach to conquering racial and gender inequality by promoting messages of self-love, gender equality, community building, and the abolition of religious fanaticism. With We Real Cool, Hooks provides the foundations for healing black men and society as a whole, providing a holistic but effective method for confronting systems of domination with love and solidarity.