ForeWord Reviews

Beyond Anger: A Guide for Men
Thomas J. Harbin
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Anger and dreaming have this in common: everybody has both, but subjective awareness runs the gamut from being oblivious to being overwhelmed. Those who find the happy medium can process what goes on inside and make good use of it, or just put it aside if they choose. Psychologist Harbin effectively brings the reader to this happy medium. He speaks from experience, and he writes well.

After ten years of marriage Harbin's wife convinced him that his own anger was out of control. He finally faced it, took an interest in angry men and after ten more years produced a model of a self-help book. His portraits of angry men bring jolts of recognition along with dismay at the harm they do—to themselves as well as others. These men are insecure, isolated, sensitive and awkward. Fear of what they may do blocks expression—even appreciation—of deep feelings and makes them avoid situations of spontaneity, ambiguity and vulnerability.

Harbin catalogs the usual suspects—competition, childhood abuse or deprivation, media stereotypes—but also points to subtler problems such as the lack of a vocabulary, the unspoken rules of male conversation and unhelpful "New Age psychobabble."

The book has four parts: self-assessment; action plans—including, paradoxically, assertiveness training; getting help (with chapters on substance abuse, depression, finding a good therapist); and "Anger-Free Families" (including a chapter on fathering). Harbin has zero tolerance for violence: don't hit, exercise, get rid of weapons, avoid alcohol. Women must be treated respectfully as equals and are advised to protect themselves, to avoid provocation and idle threats and to support constructive change.

Harbin writes with common sense backed by research and clinical experience. He offers practical exercises along with helpful analysis without jargon. This is much more than a book for angry men. It meets the highest standard for psychological advice (his own model is Harriet Lerner's The Dance of Anger) and will benefit anyone who wants a fuller and more peaceful life.

E. James Lieberman