



Men Explain Things to Me

Rebecca Solnit

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With a perfect balance of facts and credible emotional appeal, this is a must-read journalistic work for those who consider themselves feminist and those who don't—yet.

Same-sex marriage (aka marriage equality) is a threat to traditional marriage, says Rebecca Solnit, author of *Men Explain Things to Me*; it's a threat to marriage *inequality*: "Because a marriage between two people of the same gender is inherently egalitarian ... it's a relationship between people who have equal standing and so are free define their roles themselves." The seven essays in Solnit's book consist of politic-bending criticisms like this that expose the inner workings of patriarchy in areas of life where it dominates most, and where meaning and happiness are most often derived: relationships and family, work and the economy, and domestic and public safety.

Solnit opens with her article "Men Explain Things to Me," first published online in 2008. In it, she shares her experience of telling a man at a party that she had recently published a book on Eadweard Muybridge, to which he asked if she had heard of the "very important" Muybridge book released earlier that year. After attempting to interrupt him several times, she was finally able to explain that it was her book he was telling her about. Solnit extrapolates on this experience with wit to reveal how women's credibility is often questioned. She uses language in a confident, assured manner, and even when she applies humor, her writing offers something profound: "Explaining men still assume I am, in some sort of impregnation metaphor, an empty vessel to be filled with their wisdom and knowledge. A Freudian would claim to know what they have and I lack, but intelligence is not situated in the crotch."

While the title essay is humorous, the others are solemn, dark, and emphatic. No matter the tone, though, Solnit speaks with a voice that is simultaneously intimate, personal, and authoritative. She gives quantitative facts and qualitative experiences equal weight, and her sharp writing ability asserts the inarguable credibility and significance of both. For instance, she writes that "we still haven't really talked about the fact that, of 62 mass shootings in the US in three decades, only one was by a woman, because when you say *lone gunman*, everyone talks about loners and guns but not about men."

Solnit has obviously done her homework, and she combines her scholarly acumen with her intimate depiction of women's experience in this convincing call to action.

AIMEE JODOIN (Fall 2014)

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