

# *Man Up: Cracking the Code of Modern Manhood*

By Carlos Andrés Gómez

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Reviewed by:

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*Man Up*, Carlos Andrés Gómez's personal reflections, perspectives, and opinions about the process of constructing and affirming masculinity within today's day and age, is an unapologetic, candid, and passionate memoir concerning the trials and tribulations of manhood. As he reflects on various moments that were pivotal to the way he views the world at this stage in life, Gómez writes in a fluid and conversational manner that blends thought-provoking passages and poetry with blunt, in-your-face conversation pieces. The book is divided into three sections that highlight three main phases of how he defines masculinity within society: the early, foundational pieces of childhood and teenage life; the current intersections of life that cause conflict and confusion; and the ideas of future in which one hopefully achieves and understands about one's self.

Within the first section of the book, entitled "Little Carlitos," Gómez explores his upbringing through his family and environments in which he lived and definitive actions that defined his life before the age of 18. As the reader first meets Gómez through lens of the question, "Where Are You From?" in the first chapter, Gómez describes the early childhood of living with a father who worked for the United Nations and a mother who was an aspiring doctoral student and adjunct university instructor. Additionally, he describes his early life, as his first seven years were spent living outside of the United States in various countries and then moving into various cities in the United States. As the reader is introduced to his story, Gómez intersects the problems he experienced with the concepts of race, class, privilege, systemic and institutionalized oppression, and gender identity. The next two chapters explore these ideas within a deeper context concerning his personal experiences intertwined with two aspects of masculinity rarely discussed publicly: fear within men and the façade of what defines a man.

Within the second section of the book, entitled "On the Precipice," Gómez explores areas of young adulthood that have great effects on the way men view women, the world, and ultimately themselves. As he begins the section with an honest and personal chapter on men, sex, and love, Gómez talks openly about the transformation he has experienced, the people who directly intersected and affected his journey, and how society has perceived his transgressions. After discussing his progression from the teenager in high school to his undergraduate education, he transitions to sharing perspectives on men and the ideas of male heroism in society and viewing life actions and events as a battleground to articulate one's overall worth. He rounds out the section of the book with perspectives on the male paradigm of discovering, acknowledging, and accepting weakness within the male identity and what this means in today's society.

Within the third section of the book, entitled "Man Enough," Gómez explores areas of manhood he wishes to master throughout the rest of his journey through life. He begins the section discussing the power of finding his voice through the power of poetry and how this overall process—and the structures that complement its existence—is crucial to the development of becoming a better person and man, overall. After reflecting on the process of self-affirming activity, he transitions to perspectives on becoming a model man and husband while acknowledging the problems, actions, and tribulations that define one as a person today. He rounds out the book by discussing the overall goal of life, love, and forgiveness for not only himself but for everyone involved in their respective

life journeys. Ultimately, *Man Up* presents a holistic interpretation of the process and journey of manhood and what it means for multiple individuals involved in the process.

When reflecting on the story as a whole, there are multiple areas that can provide rich discussion. This work can be used as a centerpiece on topics within diversity and social justice, such as race, class, and gender. As many institutions have placed a value on achieving institutional diversity, many programs can utilize *Man Up* as a practical discussion piece of how diversity exists in everyday terms for both positive and negative impacts. For example, Gómez provides honest reflections—both positive and negative—on his time as being the only student of color within his Connecticut high school until another student of color moves to the community. By using this example from the book, professionals can introduce concepts of identity and process with students—the overall intent of Gómez’s writing. In addition, professionals can facilitate meaningful discussions on new students’ individual identity development, how these definitions intersect the spaces they occupy, and the overall impact these definitions can have on their time within the institution.

In addition to exploring various areas of identity, the book also provides a platform to discuss understanding culture and the world outside of the United States. Gómez provides examples of his experiences outside of the United States within various chapters of the book. Using these chapters as examples, professionals can provide a discussion about understanding the context of culture. Although many students will generally compare culture on a state, regional, and even national level, this piece allows students to process and reflect critically upon the world outside of the United States and what social constructions influence overall development. Moreover, this text allows for professionals to challenge students to think critically about the culture and environment an institution can present for international students and help provide a positive experience for all students.

Although the book is rich with discussion opportunities for students, there are multiple areas of concern that arise concerning using the book for a new student reading program. It is possible that students of various gender identities will not receive the book’s word choice, narrative, or poetry in a positive manner that fosters an overall connection. Gómez writes in a manner that is natural to conversation and dialogue that mirrors his day-to-day interactions—including vulgar language and mature content. Furthermore, there are multiple instances in which he writes from a lens of pain concerning actions and conversations in the past. This presents a professional concern, as students could potentially not feel any personal connection and ultimately reject the book as a positive new student reading. Professionals need to consider whether their student population will critically consider and visualize the bigger concepts that Gómez is articulating or only understand the surface-level dialogue and writing that is on the page.

Additionally, the largest professional concern stems from the overall idea of intent versus impact of the book as a new student reader. The book has the potential to create intentional discussion around issues that could potentially cause dissonance around a campus in addition to allowing students to challenge the contexts in which they have lived. However, the impact of using this book could pan out to be negative, as students, faculty, or even staff may not understand the process of examining the book outside of the individual lens. Gómez’s experiences and travels around the world are unique and hard to connect to all types of individuals; therefore, there has to be a concerted and continuous effort in communication concerning the overall goal of using the book within the campus. Also, there will need to be resource guides to continue conversation both in and outside of the classroom, in addition to crisis management and de-escalation plans if conversations do become heated.

Although there are established positive and negative aspects of using the book, there are unique perspectives that Gómez offers. As a former social worker and current writer and speaker, Gómez’s unique travels and interactions with people help provide a diverse perspective on life in general. He uses these instances to communicate the power and presence of human interaction and

how people's lives are filled with instances to make lasting and positive impacts. Also, Gómez understands the value of synthesizing diversity and social justice issues and how they can ultimately affect the socialization of a person. As the book discusses the value of self-reflection and understanding the impact of one's words, ideas, and actions, it is important to note that he continually intertwines these ideas with a narrative that is easy to understand and process. Ultimately, his diverse experiences and passion for talking honestly about these topics help propel this book into many conversation pieces.

Based on these perspectives, there are multiple avenues in which the book could be implemented into new student programming. The overarching theme—in regards to application of the book—is to really place a strong focus on the process of defining one's individual self and its meaning to others, the institution, and the world. Departments that focus on new student programming should potentially explore avenues that help challenge the world that students currently understand in addition to affirming their experience concerning what it can contribute toward their futures. Initially, there should be multiple focuses on student organization events, sponsored university dialogues and speaking spaces, and a keynote address that helps the process of overall synthesis. However, it is important to provide spaces, events, and opportunities that help connect the events and speakers outside of the institutional environment. Overall, a comprehensive focus on understanding a student's future path will produce a longer-lasting impact and give more relevance and usage to the book.

Moreover, it is equally important to have established relationships with campus partners to achieve maximum efficacy with the new students. It is important for these departments to work heavily with multicultural affairs departments on training, education, and preparation for using the book. As the book will provide a platform to talk about issues that intersect with this functional area, these professionals will be a soundboard and resource to providing programmatic pieces, strategic planning, and preparing for potential negative instances on campus. Additionally, departments could also work with international education departments to provide programs and events that focus on culture and its context within the institution. Finally, it is important to collaborate with university career services, university counseling services, and campus crisis managers. These departments will experience conversation and dialogue that focus on outside-of-the-classroom application and synthesis.

Ultimately, I would recommend *Man Up: Cracking the Code of Modern Manhood* as a book to use for a new student reading program. Although there are many instances to consider and evaluate concerning campus climate and culture and student populations, the unique opportunities and avenues the book can take are worth the time investment. Overall, this book challenges students to critically examine and consider not only their upcoming institutional experience but also how they can impact the experience of others as well.