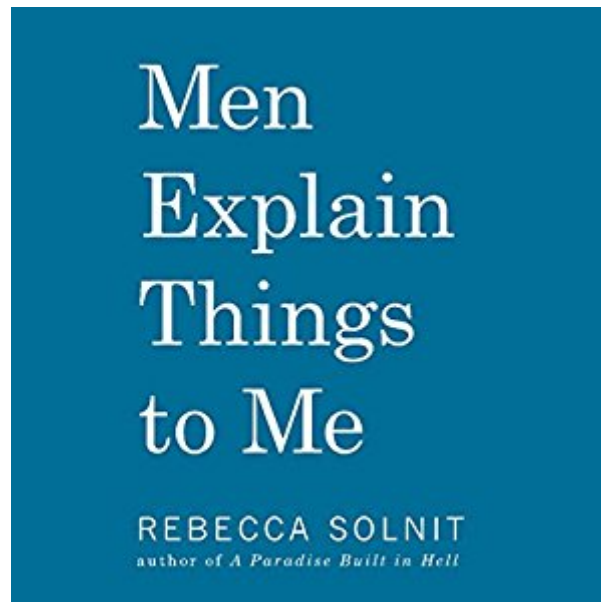




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# Men Explain Things To Me



## Synopsis

In *Men Explain Things to Me*, Rebecca Solnit takes on the conversations between men who wrongly assume they know things and wrongly assume women don't. The ultimate problem, she shows in her comic, scathing essay, is female self-doubt and the silencing of women. Writer, historian, and activist Rebecca Solnit is the author of 14 books about civil society, popular power, uprisings, art, environment, place, pleasure, politics, hope, and memory, most recently *The Faraway Nearby*, a book on empathy and storytelling. She is a Harper's Magazine contributing editor.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 2 hours 47 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: August 27, 2014

Language: English

ASIN: B00N30J5FA

Best Sellers Rank: #32 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Humor > Essays #33 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Women's Studies > Feminist Theory #79 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Politics & Current Events

## Customer Reviews

I bought this book for my brother-in-law shortly after my sister gave birth to a daughter. I thought it would be a fun "Hey, you have a daughter, this might be a good thing to start thinking about" type gift. And so he didn't feel totally alone while reading it, I bought myself a copy as well. Solnit is clearly a powerful mind and talented writer. Her prose is strong and forceful, and she writes with stirring "at times contagious" conviction. The book's most powerful essays ("Men Explain Things To Me" and "#YesAllWomen") are intelligent, clear-sighted looks at a massive, difficult, dangerous topic. It saddens me to applaud Solnit for her courage in writing this, if only because that acknowledges the typical backlash against women who speak out against misogyny, but she IS courageous and that alone warrants commendation. The book starts out with a funny, almost playful anecdote about being mansplained to by a pompous idiot at a party

in Aspen, but then quickly moves into darker waters. Solnit goes on to use politics, art, history and new media as springboards for discussing the interconnectedness of cultural misogyny and how mansplaining and rape can be viewed as existing on a continuum. Towards the end of the book she summarizes this nicely: *It's a slippery slope.*

That's why we need to address the slope, rather than compartmentalizing the varieties of misogyny and dealing with them separately. (p. 134)

It's a new way of looking at an ancient problem, articulated in a way that I don't think I've heard before, and Solnit rounds out her case by anticipating counter arguments (i.e. men being falsely imprisoned for rape) and responding to them to the degree that they deserve. So here's the part where I complain: While her arguments are culturally important and her writing is strong, Solnit's rhetoric seems, at times, deliberately hyperbolic and meant to divide readers. On pg. 57 she describes the case of Ariel Castro, a man accused of imprisoning, torturing and sexually abusing three women as being *"a vicious version of the traditional [marriage] arrangement."* Later on in the book (p. 153) she takes a similar swipe at capitalism:

*"There's more that we need to be liberated from a system that serves environmental destruction and limitless*

*consumption."* And beyond that there's a general celebration of revolution, (non-violent) anarchy, as well as Solnit's insistence that this is, indeed, *"a war."* In other words, if you're traditional / conservative / old-fashioned, then chances are you're probably going to feel pretty alienated while reading this, if not all out attacked. I don't consider myself conservative, but there were still times when I felt myself getting defensive. With that said, I was less annoyed with this on ideological terms than I was by what felt like a tactical mis-step.

Simply put: This is a wise book. This is an important book. A lot of people should be reading it and absorbing it's message. And I could suddenly feel thousands of readers • good people whose minds are ready to be expanded • fleeing from it's very positive message, because they were being lumped in with rapists and murderers. I was frustrated because I felt like the book was preaching to the choir and, in-so-doing, entrenching conservatives deeper into their current belief systems. One could argue that this book isn't intended to convert and so it's unfair to judge it by those standards; that it's already been accomplished in the fight for gender equality, and that now it's up to someone else to write the gentler, more

palatable book that eases *The Other Side* into progressive thinking. And you know what? That may very well be the case. In the meantime, I encourage conservative thinkers who are interested in reading this to do so with an open mind instead of just looking for things to disagree with. Because the fact of the matter is that the vast majority of what's discussed in this book really has nothing to do with superficial left / right politics and everything to do with how we want our nieces/daughters to be treated as they grow up in the world. And that feels like something we can all agree on.

I've read this essay and others by Solnit all prior to their inclusion in this slim little tome with the exactly right-sized lettering on its cover. I am hugely adoring of her writing, so this review is less about the essays themselves (all fantastic) than the fact that it is a discrete volume you can, and should, be toting around in public. Ladies, read it on the subway. Two nights ago I was coming home from a lovely summer's walk to a favorite bookstore, where I snapped up the book. I took it out of my bag at 10:30 p.m. on a sublime Saturday night in New York, on the G train. I was standing, but a Latina woman with her daughter on her lap craned her neck to try see the title of the book. Next to her, two other women who seemed to be out on the town for the night, were whispering to each other, "what does it say?" The Latina woman cocked her head further and spoke up, "Men Explain Things..." I spun on my heel and showed off the cover. "Men Explain Things to Me.' It's great." "What is it about?" asked one of the women out on the town. I could tell by the tilt of her eyebrow that she thought its premise was dubious. She did not want *Things Explained* to her. I scooped over to where they were sitting, and gave them a short precis of the essay's key narrative moment, closing with: "and you ladies know what she's talking about right? Has that ever happened to you?" "Mmm-HMM." "You know it has." And a few little cheers and murmurs erupted from the half-dozen women in the train car. We all smiled. I went back to the book, and the women who were out on the town started talking about how Frankie was doing the exact same thing last week, and had no idea what he was talking about.

Unique and well formed perspectives on feminism and society. The book left me feeling encouraged and emboldened, troubled but also more well informed. As a man, I should have read this and other books on this topic decades ago.

Read Rebecca Solnit's "Men Explain Things to Me." It explains a lot of things.

Warning: you might get hooked on Solnit's books, lots more good reading. Also "A

Paradise Built in Hell," different topic. Still much to learn from both books.

Great writing, my first read from Solnit, but I'll definitely read another. All of the essays tied in well to one another and contained compelling arguments. I'm probably not the target demographic, but I would recommend that other men read this, too, as it's eye opening.

Rebecca Solnit's writing is clear, logical, and leads to surprising places. This book clarified my thoughts. She is an intelligent and eloquent guide.

Ms. Solnit brings to top of mind the feminist issues that many of us thought were long gone, but when examined are very much still with us. Why do we spend so much time teaching women how to be safe instead of teaching their male counterparts not to be violent? Why do women still feel compelled to take their husband's name? Why is it okay for a man to grope a woman in a public place? Why aren't the traits displayed primarily by women valued in the workplace? Why do we not name the gender of violence? Why do so many men feel the need to stifle, disregard, disrespect, and erase their female counterparts? I hadn't thought about these issues in a long time, but this book has reawakened a desire to make a difference in women's lives. And in addition, she is an excellent and entertaining writer...

Goes a lot beyond Mansplaining to topics such as sexual assault being a men's issue. (I encourage you to read the book, "The Macho Paradox" if you want further info on that topic). This book was really powerful, especially considering how small it is. (Just 7 essays.)

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