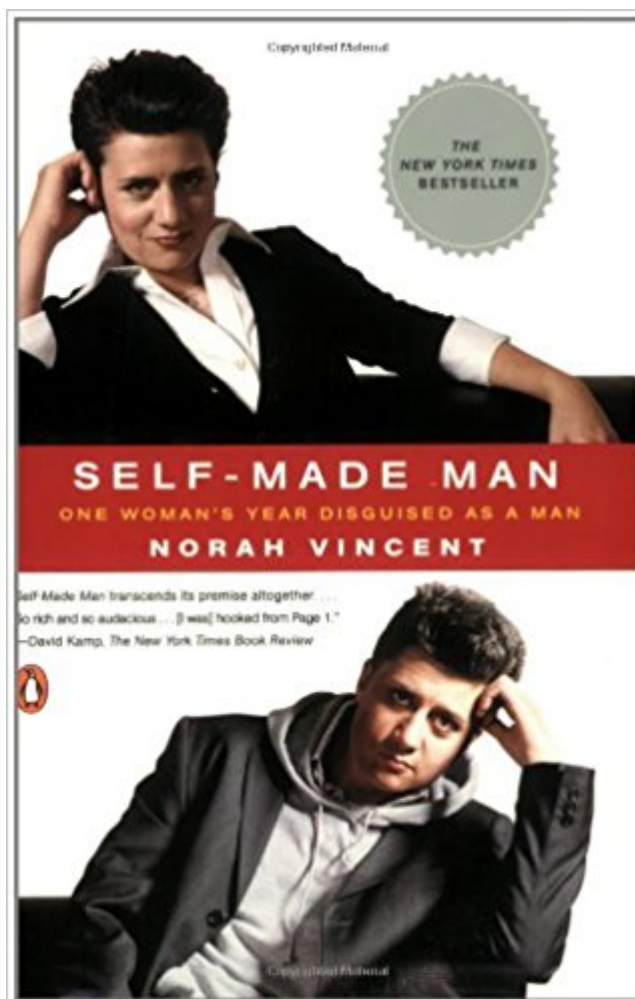


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# Self-Made Man: One Woman's Year Disguised As A Man



## Synopsis

A journalist's provocative and spellbinding account of her eighteen months spent disguised as a man. Norah Vincent became an instant media sensation with the publication of *Self-Made Man*, her take on just how hard it is to be a man, even in a man's world. Following in the tradition of John Howard Griffin (*Black Like Me*), Vincent spent a year and a half disguised as her male alter ego, Ned, exploring what men are like when women aren't around. As Ned, she joined a bowling team, took a high-octane sales job, went on dates with women (and men), visited strip clubs, and even managed to infiltrate a monastery and a men's therapy group. At once thought-provoking and pure fun to read, *Self-Made Man* is a sympathetic and thrilling tour de force of immersion journalism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The disguise that former Los Angeles Times op-ed columnist Vincent employed to trick dozens of people into believing her a man was carefully thought out: a new, shorter haircut; a pair of rectangular eyeglasses; a fake five o'clock shadow; a prosthetic penis; some preppy clothes. It was more than she needed. "[A]s I became more confident in my disguise... the props I had used... became less and less important, until sometimes I didn't need them at all," Vincent writes. Gender marking, she found, is more about attitude than appearance. Vincent's account of the year and a half she spent posing as a man is peppered with such predictable observations. To readers of gender studies literature, none of them will be especially illuminating, but Vincent's descriptions of

how she learned, and tested, such chestnuts firsthand make them awfully fun to read. As "Ned," Vincent joined an all-male bowling league, dated women, worked for a door-to-door sales force, spent three weeks in a monastery, hung out in strip clubs and, most dangerous of all, went on a Robert Bly "style men's retreat. She creates rich portraits of the men she met in these places and the ways they behaved "as a lesbian, she's particularly good at separating the issues of sexuality from those of gender. But the most fascinating part of the story lies within Vincent herself "and the way that censoring her emotions to pass as a man provoked a psychological breakdown. For fans of Nickel and Dimed "style immersion reporting, this book is a sure bet. (Jan. 23) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** Vincent's first experiment in cross-dressing came on a dare from an acquaintance who was a drag king. When she experienced the intoxicating invisibility and safety that came from wearing the disguise, she wanted to learn more. For 18 months, she disguised herself as a man, renamed herself Ned, joined a men's bowling league, visited strip bars, and dated women. Along the way, she found that the freedom and privileges enjoyed by men were counterbalanced by a constant testing and severe limits on emotions. She also found women to be distrustful, ever ready to criticize men for being emotionally distant yet clearly preferring men who met stereotypical images of strength and virility. Vincent is frank about her experiences--the hard business of sexual transactions devoid of emotions, the easy bonding between men, fear of sexual attraction among men, and, ultimately, the explosion of her own notions of sex roles. She also explores the guilt she feels about her deception. Writing from the perspective of a gay woman who had a view of the male world that women don't get to see, Vincent finds unexpected complexities in the men she meets and in herself as well. Vanessa Bush Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is one of the more interesting books I've ever read, even though I didn't really learn anything. It seems strange to say so, because the perspective is so different from my own. However it's rather like looking at your back yard with a new friend; it calls attention to things you were aware of but didn't pay much heed. I think Ms. Vincent learned a lot from her experience, and I think a lot of women, especially those who know little of men save the stereotypes that they constantly strive to make real, could learn a great deal from it. While I gave it five stars there was a single disappointment, and that was in the language. I don't mind profanity much, but I seriously dislike

crudity, and in this case it's embedded in otherwise excellent 'conversational' prose. It jars me out of the reverie of reading, which is why I dislike it. Despite that caveat I recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn a little more about the differences between the sexes, rather than claiming superiority for one or the other.

I really like this book - as a woman I'm very interested in the world of men that we don't get to see. The author gained a lot of sympathy for men, and I think readers will as well. It will also make women take a look at their own attitude/behavior around men. I'll be giving it to friends to read as well.

Reading *Self-Made Man* was an unexpected pleasure, although perhaps not always for the reasons I expected. As a rule, Vincent's approach and writing style is superbly balanced between sensation and analysis, accessibility and intelligence. As the book unfolds, Vincent plunges into the world of male sociability. She creates her own male persona, Ned, joins a bowling league, goes to strip clubs, dates and has sex with women, explores the world of work while in character, and even briefly infiltrates an all-male religious society. What impressed me about Vincent was her deep capacity for empathy, a trait that was reflected in the incisiveness with which she pulled apart her experiences and the emotions they triggered. I was especially moved, perhaps surprisingly, not by her insights into the male mind - which I found a bit simplistic and, in particular, overly concerned with sex - but by the insights she gained into the mind of heterosexual women (Vincent herself is gay). The rather ugly, somewhat taboo side of female sexual power is revealed when Vincent starts dating, and it disrupts many of her easy assumptions about male privilege: "Dating women as a man was a lesson in female power, and it made me, of all things, into a momentary misogynist, which, I suppose was the best indicator that my experiment had worked. I saw my own sex from the other side, and I disliked women irrationally for a while because of it. I disliked their superiority, their accusatory smiles, their entitlement to choose or dash me with a fingertip, an execution so lazy, so effortless, it made the defeats and even the successes unbearably humiliating. Typical male power feels by comparison like a blunt instrument, its salvos and field strategies laughably remedial next to the damage a woman can do with a single cutting word: no." I was especially startled by a further revelation, in a passage a little further on, of the widespread prejudice that only women are desirable, so that even heterosexual women must surely be looking for a man who, inside, resembles a woman. Vincent writes: "I was most surprised to find nestled inside the confines of female heterosexuality a deep love and genuine attraction for real men. Not for women in men's

bodies, as the prejudicial me had thought." Passages like these abound in the book, surprising to me because they reveal, in my view, just how anti-male modern society really is. Vincent also repeatedly takes the tools of feminist criticism, applies them to men, and is startled to find that they face many similar problems, from emotional repression to physical objectification. The only disappointment for me, and the reason why I can't quite bring myself to give this book five stars, is the ending. Norah Vincent learns so many valuable lessons and shows such deep empathy for the plight of both men and women throughout the book, and yet her final response to this adventure/experiment felt to me like she had turned her back on all that she struggled so hard to learn in this course of its unfolding. That was kind of depressing - that someone could come so far, gain so much insight, and then decide that really, it was all just an intellectual exercise after all.

Being a man, I wanted to read this to see how the author, a woman, sees the world of men. She did a very good job describing a lot of what goes on between men, and in a man's universe. How we bond with, honor, and communicate our boundaries around other men. The author intuitive and got the language of men down pat very quickly. It was very well written and clear to read. I was very disappointed with how this book ended. The author talks about how men are scary. And stresses it as though she were implying; men are threatening. Given all of the Author's work to break-through into the world of men, study them, as a man herself, and discover for herself what is at the source, her statement about men being scary short-changes a lot of the hard work and effort she put into discovering them, disguised herself as a man. I felt it contradicted the sum of all her efforts and hard work to pierce the veil of secrecy into the world of men. Otherwise, an excellent book on many levels. I recommend reading it if you want to see through the eyes of a man, or want to know what kind of world men are immersed into around other men. It hit the nail on the head many times.

Can't add much to what's been said in praise, other than, I wish I could've read it 30 years ago. Talk about a NEWS-FLASH. This book is so enlightening, it should read by anyone who has to even just speak to the opposite sex. Buy the book.

In fairness to the author, the book is exactly what she says it is - her own personal, biased, first-hand account of what she did and how she felt. It's an interesting experiment, although I would have liked a chapter, written by an independent third party having interviewed all of her "subjects," to find out how well her ruse actually came across. I suspect less well than we are led to believe. Still, some good insights - the eye contact bit was especially well sussed out. Other parts though,

seemed like a lot of left leaning projection, and miss the mark quite widely.

The writing is so natural, considering it's a woman who identifies as a man, sharing how it feels being treated as a man... Well, I am a female reviewer, but I speak from the point of being human, regardless of being male or female, how a common decency would be hoped for, which draws you into the situations. I've bought a few copies as I had to replace the ones that I have loaned out!

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