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# Partner Violence as *Female-specific* in Aetiology

STEVE MOXON



*Male-specific self-inhibition of violence towards women, corresponding to an evolutionarily highly-conserved male-specific dedicated neural pathway, and a female-specific actual preference in a couple context for physically violent expression of aggression, prompted by oxytocin (the very hormone underpinning pair-bonding): these findings together indicate that a new theory of partner violence [PV] is required, with a female-specific aetiology. This anyway is apparent from the great disparity between the actual and predicted sex-differential in PV injury rates; the only plausible inference from which is overwhelming female compared to male perpetration. It is conceivable that what male-perpetrated PV there may be is by aberrant (psycho-pathological) individuals, with the remainder of male-on-female violence rather than being PV per se – directed as such, with intent to cause harm – is better understood as by displacement from male intra-sexual aggression. The basis of a female-specific PV aetiology is that pair-bonding is now known to have evolved in the female interest to maximise female fertility, and therefore at root women have a stronger interest in preventing partner defection – man-*

*ifesting in ‘controlling’ behaviour which may become violent — whereas at root men would have little to lose if not something to gain. Reviews and studies for decades have shown that PV is perpetrated at least as much by women; but now evident in data is that this is predominantly so – in many and the most important respects by multiples. This new understanding of PV is a reversion to what in former times would have been the intuitive, popular view of the phenomenon, before the imposition of an extreme ideological conception of a supposed ‘patriarchal’ [sic] ‘terrorism’ [sic] of exclusively or predominantly male perpetration. Though now comprehensively discredited, this persists, as it was created, through a need within the political-Left mindset to salve cognitive-dissonance regarding the failure of Marxist theory. In blaming ‘the workers’, envisaged as being all-male; they were replaced, as the supposed new ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘oppressed’ in need of ‘liberation’, by the generic category of all women. Consequently, it became imperative both to deny the extent and even the existence of PV that is female-on-male, whilst inflating levels of male-on-female PV and falsely ascribing to it a special perniciousness. Being in line with deep-seated pro-female and anti-male prejudice rooted in the biological imperative to control male access to sex, what would otherwise be seen as arcane political posturing, instead has appeared plausible.*

**Keywords:** Partner violence, female-specific aetiology, male-specific self-inhibition, female-perpetrated, sex differential, pair-bond, cognitive dissonance

Rather than to be violent towards women, it has long been commonly observed and assumed that men typically ‘hold back’ or ‘back off’. Just such self-inhibition is fully to be expected from an obvious biological / evolutionary principle: that the female is the ‘limiting factor’ in reproduction. Whereas the loss of most or even nearly all males through violence would still leave enough males to impregnate all the females in the reproductive group, any loss of females through violence would directly impact on reproductive output. [Note that this reproductive-group perspective does not invoke ‘group’ (‘multi-level’) selection; there being several mathematically equivalent models of mutualism, deciding between which is not an empirical question but one in philosophy of biology.] Violence that is male-on-female would be a serious risk in potentially reducing reproductive output, given the enormous hitting power of males that has evolved through male intra-sexual competition, together with the fragile female body-frame. For any individual male, it is paramount that he does not compromise his personal reproductive potential by damaging his own pair-bonded sexual partner; and therefore ‘holding back’ from violence would be particularly appropriate in this of all contexts.

There was no research to investigate whether or not such male ‘holding back’ was a real phenomenon until, a decade ago, Felson, Ackerman & Yeon [2003] discovered that men are self-inhibited from being violent specifically to their partners – and that there was no such self-inhibition in women. The significance of this not well-known study has emerged retrospectively when it was additionally found that women are not merely by contrast uninhibited, but actively choose physical violence as their preferred mode of aggression in an intimate-partner context (and that male self-inhibition applied in any situation where a woman otherwise would be the target) [Cross, Tee & Campbell 2011; Cross & Campbell 2012]. There is, then, a perfect contrast, with males being inhibited and females *disinhibited* when it comes to physical aggression within their sexual relationships. It was then further discovered that whereas men are far less violent to intimate partners than to other men, women are *more* violent to intimate-partners than to other women, with three times as many women as men perpetrating PV in the absence of showing violence to same-sex non-intimates [Bates,



Graham-Kevan & Archer 2014]. The great disparity here between the sexes shows up in the data regarding inter-sexual violence as a whole: although women generally do not physically aggress against men, and males in general are by far the more violent sex; nevertheless there is three times as much inter-sexual violence by women [Morse 1995]. A further window on what is going on is the data from same-sex couples: PV rates are significantly higher, with good evidence that rates are highest of all in not male but female same-sex couples [West CM 2012]. The data entirely contradicts the 'gender paradigm' model [Canon & Buttell in press], and has prompted a book specifically on the problem [Kaschak 2002]. PV in lesbian couples has been known for some time to be two to three times the rates for heterosexuals [Coleman 1990, Bologna, Waterman & Dawson 1987, Lie et al 1991]. Female *disinhibition* from being violent within a couple context, apparently, then, is not through the partner being male but because of the context of an intimate partnership. Male inhibition, by contrast, is dependent on the partner being female, as is shown by the rates of PV in 'gay' couples being intermediate between those for heterosexuals and lesbians.

The neural circuitry responsible for male-specific self-inhibition of violence to females has now been discovered by neuroscientists looking for crucial, evolutionarily highly conserved neural pathways as the basis of human aggression. This is a three-tier neural pathway (all of which is found only in males) thought to be common across species to include humans, producing a general near elimination of aggression, triggered by close physical contact of any kind with a female [Yuan et al 2014]. The neural pathway does not utilise other learning and memory circuitry, appearing to have evolved just for this function, indicating that this is a major adaptation. The obvious usefulness of this mechanism is to obviate the risk of any impact on a female sexual partner of displacement from common and serious male-male violence.

The hormonal basis of female preference for violence over other forms of aggression in a couple context has been revealed to be oxytocin: the very hormone underpinning pair-bonding. This prompts women (though not, or much less so, men) to perpetrate PV, notwithstanding that the effect depends on high trait aggressiveness (which generally is a quality of males much more than of females) [DeWall et al 2014]. As DeWall points out and others had found: in males, although oxytocin also prompts violence, it's against a different kind of target: out-group members – stranger males. The link between oxytocin and partner violence is particularly revealing in that it also underpins in other species maternal aggression, which, in being the evolutionarily-ancient key form of female violence appears to be homologous to PV perpetration. Supporting this conclusion is the completely different neuro-hormonal basis of maternal aggression than that of intra-sexual aggression [Gammie et al 2008], and that it is fearless, just as is female-perpetrated partner violence (in being actively preferred over employing other modes of aggression, even though the male target has huge potential to respond with far greater hitting power, and against the far weaker female body frame and facial bone structure).

Evolutionary theorists have posited that oxytocin is associated with mate-retention behaviour; and maternal aggression in defence of offspring obviously is not far removed functionally from female aggression in defence of the means of producing offspring (that is, attempting to retain the male partner). Its co-option in the evolutionary process would be a simple, minor instance of this common sort of development. With of course no male equivalent of maternal aggression, then all this strongly suggests that there is not a male-equivalent aetiology regarding PV perpetration. [Note

that this of course does not mean that there is no such thing as male-perpetrated PV, but that it is likely not PV per se: either not directed at a female target and/or not with intent, and instead is by displacement – presumably, often alcohol-fuelled. Exceptions, clearly, would be psychopathic male-on-female violence and that by otherwise psychologically abnormal males, which self-evidently indeed is PV per se, but not by ‘normal’ males.]

This begs the question as to why would women rather than men be so concerned with retaining a partner? It’s clear that women indeed do value pair-bonding much more than do men: they seek close relationship generally and in particular intimate partnership much more than men [Schmitt et al 2003], and wish a pair-bond to last twice as long as do men (on average for fourteen years as against seven), and to begin pair-bonding several years earlier [Palchykov et al 2012]. Women are twice as likely as men to develop the extremely persistent pathological courtship behaviour known as de Clérambault’s Syndrome [Brune 2001] — the attempt to insist on pair-bonding irrespective of whatever resistance there may be by the individual targeted. Correspondingly, they are also much more concerned than are men by the prospect of partner infidelity [Shattuck et al 2012], and consequently are better than are men at detecting cues re infidelity (being more alert, quicker and more accurate in this regard, and unlike men closely monitoring potential rivals) [Ein-Dor et al 2004], and, compared to men, do this more covertly as well as overtly, using such as surreptitious commitment tests [Li, Chan & Law 2012]. This is despite the fact that only the male partner is at risk of cuckoldry – the source of female concern is uncovered by examining what triggers jealousy. Whereas for men this is a partner engaging in sex, for women it is a partner forming an emotional attachment with another woman [eg, Sagarin et al 2012], because it is this rather than merely extra-pair sex which is likely to herald the male partner’s desertion.

With women valuing pair-bonding more than men, then it must be that pair-bonding has evolved more in the interests of the female than the male. This is what has been found in recent reviews. Hitherto it had been assumed that ‘marriage’ was crucial for the provisioning of offspring, and therefore also to enable the male to have control over the female’s fertility, so as to ensure he is the father of the offspring he’s provisioning; but neither of these related contentions are supported by evidence [Chapais 2008, 2011; Winking 2007, Moxon 2013] – provisioning by males was a development *in the wake* of pair-bonding. Instead, evidence points to human pair-bonding having evolved as a means of maximising / optimising female fertility [Winking 2007], and through mate-guarding [Chapais 2008], though what form this took had been unclear. As previously outlined [Moxon 2013], mate-guarding hardly can function to enable a male entirely to monopolise a female, because there is evident far too much extra-pair sex. Dunbar [2012] alternatively conceives mate-guarding in terms of a ‘body-guard’ (‘hired gun’) to assist the female in keeping at bay undesirable (low mate-value) males, as previously has been recognised [Norscia & Borgognini-Tarli 2008, Lumpkin 1983]; but this is to envisage mate-guarding as a defence against sexual aggression – serious harassment and/or assault – when social sanctioning against such behaviour ancestrally would have been so pronounced as to have been internalised in males to implicitly inhibit males from sexually aggressing in the first place. Therefore, a female hardly requires a pair-bond partner to dissuade other males from sexual aggression.

Mate-guarding instead seems to be more nuanced. There is a considerable problem for females in excessive male attentiveness – even if merely social rather than explicitly sexual, and non-



aggressive. Simple male (over-)attentiveness is recognised to have costs for attractive females even in 'lowly' species [Partridge & Fowler 1990, Long et al 2009]. In displacing attentiveness by low mate-value males, there would be facilitated access by / to males of high mate-value (that is, higher than that possessed by the 'body-guarding' male himself), who would be desirable to the female as extra-pair sex partners. Mate-guarding could not have evolved to prevent such extra-pair sex because of escalation to agonistic contest with a more dominant male, which the male 'body-guard' would anyway likely lose. Therefore, there would be no point in the male monitoring potential rivals, which is just what is found in the afore-mentioned research by Ein-Dor et al [2014]. This arrangement allows the female the flexibility to maximise her overall fertility according to circumstance.

The benefits of pair-bonding to human females do not end there. It allows a woman, in effect, to project forwards in time the peak in her mate-value, circumventing the problem of female mate-value decline with age. A woman at or close to her peak in fertility in her youth, when correspondingly she is at her most attractive, is best placed to secure a high-mate-value male. In retaining him for subsequent conceptions she can produce collectively higher quality offspring than through the alternative of promiscuous sex, where the quality of the male genes she could obtain likely would decline with each successive conception as she assortatively mates with males of mate-values corresponding with her own rapidly falling one. Given that males, by contrast, typically rise in mate-value with age (as their intra-sexual competitiveness is more fully realised in status, and thereby is revealed the true quality of their genetic complement); then in effect the female also brings forward, as it were, the peak mate-value of the male she chooses. She thus retains for herself as an exclusive sexual partner a male who would become more and more attractive to her still more fertile rivals, by whom otherwise she would be usurped in her mate choice.

The male can exploit the advantages to the female of pair-bonding in terms of this 'sex-differential mate-value trajectory' and selective 'body-guarding', only through being able to offer pair-bonding in exchange for a higher fertile female than he could hope to obtain through promiscuous sex. He acquires regular sex with the same attractive female, instead of – or, rather, in addition to – occasional sex with various less fertile females. This is not a benefit as clear as the benefits of pair-bonding to females, and anyway it is a further extension of the costs males incur in obtaining sex, in that the willingness and ability to provide and sustain a pair-bond is an additional dimension of 'good genes' the male is required to exhibit in order to sufficiently impress a prospective female partner.

With pair-bonding being of much more importance to the female than to the male partner, then it would be expected that the female would be the keenest party, with mate-guarding as formerly conceived actually how the *female* behaves; not the male. This is the basis of the 'nagging wife', who exists less in a supposed prejudicial imagination than as a 'rule-of-thumb' conclusion from repeated and shared observation. The female rather than the male would be expected to be the one trying to prevent him from straying, by exerting proprietorial control – and it is a well-researched finding that such 'control' in some circumstances manifests as physical violence [eg, Dasgupta 1999, Felson & Outlaw 2007].

So it is that women themselves report perpetrating significantly more 'controlling' behaviour than do men [Bates, Graham-Kevan & Archer 2014], echoing findings that the woman typically is the 'controlling' partner [Vogel et al 2007], and that this is the case in 90% of couples [Coleman &

Strauss 1986]. The Bates, Graham-Kevan & Archer study reveals a telling contradiction between self-reported perpetration and victimisation: whereas there was a considerable sex differential in respect of self-reported perpetration, self-reported victimisation was sex-symmetric. This is likely due to a combination of males being far less likely than females to report any victimisation they sustain (see below) and 'control' being understood only in how it typically manifests as practised by males. What is measured in studies is the occurrence of male forms of 'control' irrespective of whether this was by the male or the female partner, thereby excluding any forms that are specifically female, as would be expected to be exhibited by females (and not by males). Some studies explicitly measure 'control' in this way [eg, Graham-Kevan & Archer 2009], and all will do so implicitly. This would explain why several studies hitherto have contradicted other research in reporting a sex-symmetry in 'control': such a finding is likely to be artefactual.

The nature of pair-bonding as here outlined explains the patterns commonly observed in whether or not couples split. The woman partner's extra-pair sex simply provokes the man to abandon the pair-bond because of the high risk that the extra-pair sex had resulted in conception; which, of course, for the male would render subsequent sex with this particular female a waste of time. [Note that as an evolved implicit psychological response it is unaffected by the woman's use or not of modern contraception for her extra-pair sex.] The male thus far would not have sustained any cost, and would do so only by remaining; but furthermore, in deserting he likely benefits in then being able to acquire a replacement pair-bond partner actually of higher fertility, because a male typically enjoys rising status (mate-value) with age. The reverse is the case for the female, who would have difficulty replacing her partner with a male of an equivalent mate-value given her declining mate-value with age. Of course, this would be compounded by pregnancy (with ensuing lactation) through the extra-pair sex, for the same reasons that prompted the male partner to desert. All this serves further to make the female keen to retain her pair-bond partner. So it is that when couples are tested by infidelity, the man tends to desert whilst the woman tends to 'stand by her man'.

This sex-dichotomous pattern self-evidently translates into a corresponding pattern of the possibility of PV – PV clearly being more likely at a time of the extreme relationship stress of discovered infidelity. The male usually takes himself out of the relationship and its domestic setting, thereby greatly reducing what likelihood there was of his physically aggressing against his (now ex-) partner; but by contrast the female most often stays within the relationship and its domestic setting, thus maintaining the close proximity that may precipitate into PV the anger she very likely feels. Not only is PV by males here less likely because no significant costs are incurred by the male partner in the case of partner infidelity provoking him to terminate a pair-bond, but in any case, male anger will tend to be directed towards the cuckolding male rival, given that sexual usurpation is the ultimate in male intra-sexual competitiveness. Thus, the partner of a cuckolded male is at risk at most of merely displacement aggression, but then male-specific self-inhibition re violence towards what would be a female target means that any aggression usually would be in some form other than physical violence.

From this proper understanding of pair-bonding, thus is explained the findings above indicating that PV is in essence a female-perpetrated phenomenon. But how is it that this has not been apparent, such that the common understanding has been that PV is predominantly male-perpetrated? This has not always been the case. A mere few decades ago, the vernacular perception of the reality

of PV was encapsulated in the one non-'saucy' topic of those colourful British bawdy seaside postcards: the wife wielding some heavy kitchen utensil chasing the hapless husband. There has been a sea-change in perception through a top-down political imposition feeding usual pro-female/ anti-male prejudice. Regardless of what can properly be concluded from data, it has been systematically seriously misrepresented, and the current voluminous research by the scientific community attacking the ideological contra-factual line is still subject to blanket denial by women's advocacy organisations and the media – notably the BBC. But before an examination of the data, it is most important to fully establish how the ideology arose and developed to underpin and create the misrepresentation. Previously this has been given only a brief account with a vague history [Moxon 2011, 2008], but given how crucial is an understanding of it to appreciating how, why and the extent of the distortion of PV data, and given that there is no proper history hitherto available; then here there is a detailed, lengthy exposition – re which I make no apology for its taking up most of the remainder of this paper — before a return to the topic of PV itself.

The emotive, entrenched position of ideological PV 'advocates' in their unshakeable attachment to the bogus conceptualisation of PV as predominantly or exclusively male-perpetrated, is a stance derived from Marxian thinking [Dutton 2007, MacKinnon 1991]. It is from the ideology that came to be termed 'identity politics', which has an origin and development well documented in scholarship (see below) as a re-shaping of Marxist 'theory' that over time has become the principal feature of contemporary politics. This was generally recognised two decades ago, though written off by some as already as dead as the Marxism that had spawned it; being kept alive, supposedly, mostly in the imagination of conservative counter ideology [Hughes 1993]. This has proved to be the opposite of the case. 'Identity politics' all too apparently has grown to be accepted and predominant everywhere – not least amongst conservative politicians (whole parties, such as the Conservative Party in the UK), police forces, judiciaries, and entire government administrations — such that it is now a totalitarian quasi-religion. Critique of it had been mocked in the media in the early 1990s by the repetition ad nauseum of the jibe, 'political-correctness gone mad', to misrepresent critique as the inventing of a new 'red peril', on the assumption that the reality of the claims of 'identity politics' was self-evident and no exaggeration. 'Political correctness' has often and popularly been the ideology's tag, used not least by some scholars, but this is rather to confuse the ideology itself with what perhaps is better understood as its surface manifestation, mode of enforcement and expression of its fervency: the seemingly absurd 'speech codes' and blanket gratuitous charges of 'sexism', 'racism' and homophobia [*sic*] ubiquitous in the media, politics and the workplace. 'Political correctness' is a term with a history that although inter-twining with the history of the ideology of 'identity politics' is a separate one, with a different and slightly earlier origin – in the need to maintain a strict Party line within the Soviet state after 1917 – with its use (in more than one near-identical translation) from the 1920s [Ellis 2002]. The term quite suddenly became prominent in 'Western' politics at the turn of the 1990s when 'identity politics' started to become predominant. Having escaped the confines of academia, it had by then been in the ascendancy for over two decades (see below).

It is well understood that the replacement by 'identity politics' of what by contrast may be dubbed the politics of 'commonality' was through the realisation that 'the workers' were not going to bring about a Marxist 'revolution': "the failure of western working classes to carry out their 'proper' revolutionary (class) interests", as Somers & Gibson put it [1994 p54]. According to Cohen [2007 p196], the political-Left "despised the working class for its weakness and treachery, and condemned

its members for their greed and obsession with celebrity. In Liberal-left culture the contempt was manifested by the replacement of social democracy by identity politics". Gitlin [1993] concluded: "In large measure, things fell apart because the center could not hold, for chronologically, the break-up of commonality politics pre-dates the thickening of identity politics".

This has quite a long history. Almost a century ago, in the late 1920s, it was already becoming apparent that Marxist 'theory' did not work in practice, as evidenced by the absence of revolutionary overthrow of regimes in Europe according to Marxian prediction and prescription, even though just such a revolution had occurred in Russia a generation previously. The cognitive-dissonance [Festinger 1957, & eg, Tavis & Aronson 2007] this must have produced within the mindset of the European and Anglophone intelligentsia could only persist and grow with the continued complete failure of a political-Left ethos anywhere to effect real change in its own terms. This became especially pointed with the unprecedented rapid implosion of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the de facto capitulation to a rampant 'capitalist' model by the People's Republic of China, together with exposure of Cuba, the sole significant vestige of the 'communist' world, as a state-impooverished museum-piece which functions at all only through turning a blind eye to mass entrepreneurial activity; leaving only the embarrassing survival of the ultra-Stalinist gulag-nation North Korea. All this still further intensified cognitive-dissonance. The former dissident Soviet, Vladimir Bukovsky [2009] points out that the Soviet demise coincides in date with the almost as sudden emergence in the 'West' of the notion of 'political correctness', in a transferred resurgence of essentially the same ideology.

With the cognitively-dissonant mindset here being in common across a large group, then it functioned as an in-group marker, and as such became still more strongly driven, receiving so much investment that any intrusion of reality into the ideology would be ever more strongly denied. And the intrusion of reality would be great, given that ideology is in essence a highly partial view of reality emphasising a particular dimension over others, which inevitably is exposed as a mismatch with reality, obliging further ratcheting up of the ideology to try to transcend what becomes a vicious circle; and the only way this can be achieved is to assert an internal consistency to the exclusion of contact with reality in a tautological loop. The ideology becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy [Bottici & Challand 2006], that in groups is subject to a 'synergistic accumulative effect' [Madon et al 2004]. Seemingly with no end, the prospect is, of course, of a catastrophic implosion when finally the end arrives; but in the meantime the stress on the belief system can lead to 'shifting the goal posts', with superficial changes over time perhaps to the extent of transmogrifying the whole ideology in effect to subvert itself – potentially so far as even to adopt an opposing position, if this can be passed off either as not incompatible or as the position actually held all along. All of this is in the service of saving face.

To try to salve their cognitive-dissonance, adherents to an ideology can try to save face by admitting neither their own gullibility nor the falsity of the ideology and instead blame others. In this way the failure of the ideology can be regarded and misrepresented as merely temporary, and the final reckoning postponed apparently indefinitely. In the present case, those blamed – the fall guys, as it were – were those perceived to have 'let the side down': 'the workers'. Collectively intended to benefit from the predicted Marxist 'revolution' (or, at least, the furthering of 'the progressive project'), 'the workers' had been designated the 'agents of social change'; but they did not respond actively in this regard [Raehn 2004, 1997].

The first attempts to explain this failure to act according to prescription and prediction were by Marxian academics working in the late 1920s onwards in Frankfurt and then New York [see eg, Lind 2004, 1997; Jay 1973]. They devised a fantasy aetiology in terms of Freud's notion of 'repression', which though now comprehensively discredited along with the rest of Freud's 'theory' [eg, Webster 1995, Loftus & Ketcham 1994] at the time it was the only framework in psychology available to them. Freudianism is as unfalsifiable as is Marxism, and therefore is in no sense science, and has long been superseded and abandoned by academic psychologists; yet readings and mis-readings of Freud persisted over the decades in being central to all manifestations of a neo-Marxism, including for all of the 'post-structuralists' and not least Foucault [Zaretsky 1994]. Consequently, as these 'theories' took firm hold across academia and 'trickled down' via the graduate professions to society at large through the enormous expansion in student numbers, there was an enormous popularity from the 1950s onwards of 'Freudian-Marxism' – as most notably in the books of Erich Fromm.

The central 'theory' was a development of the anti-family rhetoric of nineteenth century socialists taken up and further radicalised by Marx and particularly Engels [Weikart 1994, Engels 1884, Marx & Engels 1848] to conceptualise the family as an aberration resulting, it was imagined, from 'capitalism' somehow 'repressing' 'the workers', to the extent that supposedly they become psychologically dysfunctional [Cerulo 1979]. Marxism per se was supplanted by a theory of culturally based personal relations [Burston 1991], popularised later most notably by Marcuse [1955] amongst many others. The aim was to eliminate what were seen as the mere 'roles' of the mother and father, so that, it was envisaged, all distinction between masculinity and femininity would disappear, taking with it the 'patriarchy' [sic] supposedly the foundation of 'capitalism' [Raehn 1996]. This culminated in the popular Penguin book, *The Death of the Family* [Cooper 1971], from the school of a politically extreme academic psychology/sociology calling itself 'existential psychiatry', which advanced the falsehood that schizophrenia is acquired as a result of certain dynamics in a family upbringing. The early/mid-1970s was the time when the works of such as Marcuse and Fromm reached the height of their popularity with students, and as Cohen remarks: "strange ideas that began in the universities were everywhere a generation later" [Cohen 2007 p 375].

[This 'theory' re the family lacked even internal consistency. With the family mistakenly considered a product of 'capitalism' (when the family has clear homologues throughout the animal kingdom, and therefore clearly has a phylogenetically ancient evolution), then merely removing the family hardly thereby removes 'capitalism', which by the rationale of the 'theory' surely would manifest in other ways to either 'oppress' or somehow 'fool' 'the workers'. In any case, 'capitalism' ('free enterprise') is itself an empty 'bogeyman' notion in that it is merely trading (in however complicated a form), and this includes the relationship between the worker and his employer. In even its most simple, prehistoric mode, through the economic 'law' of 'comparative advantage' trading entails both parties acquiring the 'surplus' problematised in Marxism as being somehow antithetical to the interests of those supplying their labour. 'Surplus' is inherent in the market value of any labour: there is little if any labour which does not itself benefit from organisation and/or technology to be value-added sufficient to be competitive in the market pertaining. In other words, 'surplus' necessarily is of genuinely mutual advantage.]

As the head of the family, the man (husband/father) was held to be the incarnation of 'oppression' from which the woman (wife/mother) needed to be 'liberated'. So it was that 'the workers'



as formerly considered ‘the agents of change’ and the group destined to be ‘liberated’, were replaced in Marxian imagination by women, heralding the ‘feminist Marxism’ we see today [Kellner nd] – the centrality to neo-Marxism of ‘third-wave’ feminism.

This origin and development has tended to be forgotten in favour of another (though related and complementary) and later rationalisation which subsumes it in a more general conceptualisation that is also the legacy of Engels: ‘false consciousness’. [The term was first recorded in an 1893 letter from Engels to Franz Mehring.] Cohen [2007 p158] sums up that: “The Marxists of the early twentieth century took it up to explain away the discomfiting fact that the workers of the most advanced societies were not organising social revolutions as Marx had insisted they would.” Cohen elaborates [p374]: “To explain the catastrophic collapse of their hopes they have revived the false consciousness conspiracy theory, which has been present in socialist thought since the early defeats at the turn of the twentieth century, and given it an astonishing prominence. They hold that the masses rejected the Left because brainwashing media corporations ‘manufactured consent’ for globalisation”. This transparently paranoid weak ‘conspiracy theory’ – which wilfully refuses to accept the very basis of marketing in reflecting people’s actual needs and desires – is familiar still today (albeit less in favour than it was), being that it is presentable in vague sociological terms in the wake of sociology eclipsing psychoanalysis as the popular pseudo-science from the late 1960s/ early 1970s. The incorporation of Freud’s bogus ‘repression’ notion to posit a thin conceptualisation of psychological ‘brainwashing’ became less plausible – not least in its being in the narrow context of the family, from which confines anyway it was taken that everyone was escaping – and it gave way to a nebulous pan-societal conceptualisation of a sociological kind of ‘brainwashing’. Both are highly implausible (even as to mechanism, let alone efficacy), but the latter appeared less so than the former. It is lost on the Left that the notion of a society-wide ‘false consciousness’ created by an economically dominant group is precisely the basis of the Nazi notion of ‘Jewish conspiracy’ (as Cohen points out [2007 p375]).

Notions of ‘repression’ and ‘false consciousness’ were enough of a dressing-up of a volte-face from eulogising to blaming ‘the workers’ to prevent it appearing too transparently to be holding ‘the workers’ directly culpable, and it was also sufficient a departure from orthodox Marxism that its origin in Marxism was hidden, thereby aiding its acceptance. This would have been important in the USA crucible of these politics when in the aftermath of McCarthyism the political-Left was obliged to present itself differently. With purging of ‘communists’ having proved resoundingly popular with the American working classes, a far sharper sense of an ‘us and them’ vis-à-vis ‘the workers’ was experienced by the US political-Left, reinforcing its antipathy.

Here we have the core of what became ‘identity politics’, but it was not known as such until the early 1970s [Knouse 2009]. As Hobsbawm points out [1996], even in the late 1960s there was no entry at all under ‘identity’ in the *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*. This is for the very good reason that until this time there was no multiplicity of ‘identity’ labelled as ‘disadvantaged’ / ‘oppressed’. The decisive development to spur such a complete change in political discourse was the co-option by neo-Marxist ‘theory’ of a movement with which it had no connection at all. As with any fervent ideology, a hallmark of the political-Left is interpreting anything and everything in its own ideological terms to claim as a manifestation of the ideology and its prophecy – jumping on a bandwagon, so to speak; though here only to hijack it. The bandwagon here was, of course, the American civil rights movement, which though enjoying ubiquitous support within black communities – to the



point often of various forms of extremism – featured virtually nil endorsement of socialism (and even in the rare exceptions, any endorsement was equivocal). It is from the time of this co-option that ‘identity politics’ dates [Kauffman 1990]; many considering that the movement was incorporated into the Left in the wake of King’s assassination in 1968 – the major turning-point year in political-Left politics generally with the near-revolution in France and the sustained violence between student demonstrators and the army at the Chicago US Democratic Convention; both taking heart from the onset of the Chinese ‘cultural revolution’ at this time. Maoism was aped by the rapidly growing US student politics movement in its becoming militantly extremist in the huge opposition to the compulsory draft for the ‘anti-communist’ Vietnam war. This vibrant student radicalisation functioned as a melting-pot to facilitate incorporation of movements hitherto entirely separate, to be brought under the umbrella of what was more widely the ‘counterculture’. A movement famously setting itself against ‘middle-class’ norms, this was not a rebellion against their parents – which was the dynamic of a near generation before, when the young were newly prosperous and the culture was widely perceived as stultifying. It was an attack on the aspiration by ‘the workers’ to become anything else, when the goal of ordinary people was very much economic advancement (‘the American dream’). ‘Civil rights’, as the first great ‘single-issue’ campaign, served not least to provide an acceptable cloak for the Left to avoid provoking a resurgence of McCarthyism. The major social upheaval of ‘civil rights’ with its large-scale and widespread rioting was easily the nearest thing in then recent US history to look like the promised Marxist ‘revolution’, and obviously was just the practical application the ‘theory’ was seeking. Moreover, the protagonists (black Americans) were eminently separable from the now despised ‘workers’ per se, in being presentable as a new ‘group’ from outside of the former fray of ‘boss’ versus ‘worker’.

This accident of history served to add ‘black’ to ‘woman’ as ‘the new oppressed’ without any intellectual shift or much if any cerebral effort: it was on a ‘gut’ level, so to speak; implicit rather than explicit cognition. ‘The worker’ in effect was retrospectively stereotyped as both ‘man’ and ‘white’. With the inverse of this stereotype of ‘white’ being not just ‘black American’ but ‘black’ — that is, ethnic-minority generically; then notwithstanding that many ethnic groups are far from ‘disadvantaged’ let alone ‘oppressed’ – some (eg, Chinese, Indian) actually out-performing ‘whites’ in all key measures — so it was that the new ‘agents of social change’ / ‘disadvantaged’ / ‘oppressed’ were extended from women to also include all ethnic minorities. It is only with the knowledge of how this developed that sense can be made of why ethnicity is held above the myriad other possible differences that could be utilised as in-group markers, when in fact there is nothing inherent in ethnicity as an in-group marker to produce inter-group prejudice that is particularly more pernicious. Indeed, the worst inter-communal conflicts nominally between different ethnicities usually are between different cultural heritages with no discernable ‘racial’ differences of any kind – and what (non-ethnic) differences there are can be minimal; the lack of contrast actually fuelling the intensity of conflict, such is the need for groups to feel distinguished from each other. Furthermore, ethnic prejudice is anything but restricted to or even predominantly ‘white’ on ‘black’: inter-ethnic (eg, ‘black’ on Asian) and ethnic-on-‘white’ ‘racism’ can be, often is and may usually be the greater problem; and a negative attitude to a certain ethnicity does not imply a similar attitude to other ethnicities. The specific US experience, given the highly divisive politics in the wake of the American Civil War over the basis of the Southern US economy in African slavery, does not translate to elsewhere; notably not to Europe – as was starkly evidenced in the experience of World War II ‘black’ American GIs stationed in England in how they were favourably received by locals, who sided with them when they were discrim-

inated against. ‘Racial divides’ in European ‘white’ host countries are the result not of mutual antipathy but affiliative forces, principally within migrant enclaves and secondarily within the ‘host’ community; in both cases being through in-group ‘love’, not out-group ‘hate’ [Yamagashi & Mifune 2009].

Given the template of a successful incorporation of another political movement, then it naturally followed that the next cause generating nationally prominent protest similarly would be ripe for co-option. The opportunity arrived the very next year with the 1969 ‘gay’ Stonewall riots, again prompting in effect a retrospective stereotyping of ‘the worker’ by contrast as ‘heterosexual’. And just as ‘black American’ was broadened generically to ‘ethnic minority’, so ‘gay’ was broadened generically to ‘homosexual’ – to also include ‘lesbians’. This anyway was bound to ensue given that women were already an identified new class of ‘the oppressed’. Thus, ‘lesbians’ were added even though the draconian criminal discrimination and associated harassment by police had been a problem only for male homosexuals, who were the ones raising a grievance. Female homosexuals merely hung on their coat-tails, since ‘lesbians’ did not themselves have a basis for grievance as a discriminated-against, ‘oppressed’ or ‘disadvantaged’ ‘group’. ‘Homophobic’ [*sic*] bullying is fully part of group male (but not female) socialisation [Pascoe 2013], and consequently is a problem suffered far more by males than by females [Poteat & Rivers 2010], and which would be even more marked if rumour-spreading was taken out of consideration, with this – rather than direct confrontation – accounting for the great bulk of what female manifestation there is [Minton 2014]. Males in any case are more visible as homosexuals, in that male homosexuality, it is generally agreed, is roughly twice as prevalent as female; and ‘gay’ behaviour can contrast markedly with that of male heterosexuals (whereas female behaviour intra-sexually is often physically close, resembling in some respects behaviour in heterosexual intimacy).

What everyone has missed is that it was not homosexuality per se that had led to a ‘disadvantage’ and severe discrimination, but being male: the combination of being male and exhibiting an extreme difference (differences between males being amplified in male dominance contest, with such an extreme difference as a same-sex preference sending a male to the bottom of the hierarchy, and rendering him a candidate for the unusual occurrence for males of exclusion from the in-group). This calls into question not just the identification of ‘homosexuality’ *generically* as a ‘disadvantaged’ / ‘oppressed’ category, but it prompts checking of the presumption that women constitute such a category. And the conclusion upon examining all issues male/female is that not the female but the male is clearly the more ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘oppressed’ sex [see Moxon 2008, 2012 for summaries: this is a topic far beyond the scope of the present text]. This anyway has to be more than a mere suspicion given the bogus basis on which women came to be regarded as ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘oppressed’, merely as a forced replacement for ‘the workers’.

In the bringing together of these disparate strands of sex, ‘race’ and sexual orientation there was not just insulation from further McCarthyism, but a much-desired restoration of the lost sense of universalism of the political-Left ethos, now possible through demonising ‘the worker’. As Gitlin pointed out [1993], ‘identity politics’ is a “spurious unity”, and that “whatever universalism now remains is based not so much on a common humanity as on a common enemy – the notorious White Male”.

From then on, anyone 'belonging' to a 'group' according to any of the inversions of one or more of the now supposed hallmarks of 'the worker' as male / 'white' / heterosexual, was deemed automatically to belong to the newly identified 'vanguard' of 'agents of social change', and deserving of automatic protection and definition as 'disadvantaged' and 'oppressed'. These three abstracted generic groupings of 'woman', 'ethnic-minority' and 'homosexual', naturally were considered additive in conferring 'victim' status, so that a permutation of two out of the three — or, best of all, the full house — was a trump card in what has been dubbed 'intersectionality'. Given the 'grave train' this spawned, then just as would be expected, further extensions again in effect by inverting 'the worker' retrospective stereotype have since been made. Added were the disabled and the elderly; trans-sexuals, and even the obese — but on such dubious grounds as to reveal further the incoherent basis of 'identity politics' other than as a protracted agitation against 'the workers'.

The disabled suffer neither discrimination nor any prevailing negative attitude towards them (if anything the contrary): they simply have a hard life, irrespective of how they may be treated. The absence of provision such as ramps to public buildings cannot constitute discrimination, because this would be special treatment, not equitability. Indeed, it could be argued that disabled-access denudes the lives of disabled people, in that in becoming less reliant on others they have still less social interaction, when the lack of this perhaps is the key difficulty in most disabled persons' lives. The elderly likewise necessarily have a harder life, through being physically incapable of some tasks which formerly they carried out with ease; but this is an inevitability for everyone that no form of intervention can reverse or significantly ameliorate. There is compensation in usually being relatively in a good financial position, and without the onus of having to go to work to sustain it: the elderly commonly are better-off than when they were younger, and without the large expenses of younger life. They are hardly 'disadvantaged'. Far from being in receipt of any discrimination or opprobrium, the elderly usually are at worst ignored, and likely to be afforded genuine consideration. [The real phenomenon of age discrimination in employment impacts only on 'the workers', of course: it cannot apply to those over retirement age.] The only sense that can be made of the inclusion within 'identity politics' of both the disabled and the elderly is that they are non-'workers' (if not thus by definition, they are only unusually in employment).

Trans-sexuals are rare enough (roughly one in 20,000 pooled across sex) as to be effectively an irrelevance, but from the perspective of the basis of 'identity politics' their inclusion is an extension of the homosexuality category in that they revive the mantra of 'homophobia' [*sic*], and may be thought to challenge male-female dichotomy, along the lines of 'non-essentialist' feminist complaint, and the goal as above outlined; but they do not. '*Trans-sexual*' is a misnomer in that these individuals simply wish for their somatic sex to match what they strongly feel their sex to be (their 'brain sex', as it were), which usually they accomplish through surgery. [The only actual 'cross-sex' individuals are those possessing an extra sex chromosome: this is the 'intersex' condition, which is vanishingly rare.] Just as for homosexuality, only males suffer any significant 'disadvantage'. Male-to-female (but not, or much less so, female-to-male) trans-sexuals are those enduring opprobrium, and this is because they are regarded as being essentially and irredeemably male, whereas female-to-male trans-sexuals are considered to be females exhibiting gender [*sic*] flexibility. Opprobrium is most notably from (feminist) lesbians, who are at the core of 'identity politics' activism, and naturally this would be falsely 'projected' on to males as supposedly a generic prejudice. As with homosexuals, the quality attracting any 'oppression' is *maleness*, not trans-sexuality per se. Again, this is obscured in that

most trans-sexuals are male – that is, male-to-female: one in 10,000, as against 1 in 30,000 female-to-male (according to recent APA figures averaging across studies).

The obese constitute an obviously unjustifiable category within ‘identity politics’, in that being fat is not fixed and irreversible, being hardly an inescapable condition, and one which is not acquired without complicity – a failure to make a better lifestyle choice. That obesity is a ‘serious’ addition to the ‘identity politics’ cannon is shown by the actual academic ‘discipline’ of ‘fat studies’. It might be thought that sense is made of this in terms of the ‘non-workers’ basis of ‘identity politics’ categorisation, in that non-working, sedentary very-low-income lifestyles are particularly associated with sugar-rich poor diets driving obesity; but the emergence of ‘fat studies’ was not (or not primarily) a pragmatic inclusion given the very high incidence of obesity in the USA. It arose as a subsidiary of ‘women’s studies’. It would seem more pertinent that lesbians – as previously pointed out, the keenest activists within ‘identity politics’ – are more than twice as likely to be obese as heterosexual women [Boehmer, Bowen & Bauer 2007]. ‘Valourising’ the obese would be in line with the extreme-feminist notion that a female should not be judged according to her attractiveness (the female-mate-value criterion of fertility) – notwithstanding that there is no issue raised about correspondingly judging a male in terms of male attractiveness (the male-mate-value criterion of status or stature). [This may drive obesity in extreme-feminists, though for lesbians it may be based in not having to face the mate-choice criteria of males, leaving them freer to eschew the usual female concern with weight.]

The several abstracted faux groups, in entering political centre stage displaced ‘class’, because with ‘the workers’ now considered collectively *persona non grata*, then being ‘working class’ was no longer recognised as a disadvantage. Class distinction was jettisoned from the neo-Marxist ‘progressive project’. The upshot is that a woman who is highly-educated, upper-middle-class and/or belonging to a high-achieving ethnic minority (such as Indian or Chinese), and/or is (or declares herself to be) ‘lesbian’, is eligible for various forms of state and employer assistance through ‘positive action’ (an unwritten but effective quota system). By contrast, an ‘underclass’ ‘white’ male from a poor family background with neither a job nor the educational qualifications needed to acquire one, is not only offered no assistance but is actively considered an ‘oppressor’ of all those (apart from other males) far better placed than is he.

Given that Marxian ideological belief has always been in terms of a ‘power’ [*sic*] struggle between one bloc and another within society — formerly the ‘bourgeoisie’ versus the ‘proletariat’ — such that the ‘powerless’ [*sic*] are set to overthrow the ‘powerful’ [*sic*]; then it was not a large adjustment to re-envision the underlying dynamic of society as conflict between a more abstract but still supposedly dominant ‘group’ of generically men – anyone male / ‘white’ / heterosexual / non-disabled / non-elderly / non-obese – as the one *with* ‘power’ [*sic*], against the one without, being a cobbled-together melange of abstractions – supposedly generically women, ethnic minorities, homosexuals, trans-sexuals, the disabled, the elderly and the obese. Indeed, the adjustment has been seamless, as would be expected from the benefits accruing in terms of saving face. With reality held to result from whichever ‘group’ is deemed to hold ‘power’ [*sic*] [Green 2006], then it follows in internally-consistent imagination that reality is changeable in the mere assertion that a ‘powerless’ [*sic*] ‘group’ somehow is set to take the place of a ‘powerful’ [*sic*] ‘group’. This self-fulfilling prophecy is the imperative driving ‘identity politics’ that has come to be dubbed ‘political correctness’, with

its draconian fervency and focus on empty forms of words as if they have inherent efficacy.

In the absence of any external validity to 'identity politics' reasoning, there was the need for a novel intellectual underpinning, which was supplied in the confused strands of philosophy grouped together as 'postmodernism' (a term that did not share an earlier origin with that denoting a reversion to traditional or classical style in art), that in more concrete guise has a firm grip of the humanities and social sciences in the various forms of 'cultural studies' / 'critical studies' / 'theory'. The incoherence of theory in 'postmodernism' is ascribed, in an excoriating analysis by Gross & Levitt [1998, 71-92], to its being "more a matter of attitude and emotional tonality" [p71]. This is just as would be expected of what is an attempt to obscure the sophistry of 'identity politics'. At root 'postmodernism' is a taking-the-ball-home defensive ruse; a simple declaration that any and every criticism of 'identity politics' is inadmissible. As is widely and well understood, the 'postmodernist' stance is that any text is held to have no significant surface (ostensible) meaning, but an actual meaning supposedly specific to local context: meaning is said to be 'situated'. This is the 'identity politics' contention that given everything concerns 'power' relations, then all depends on someone's vantage point in respect of these — in terms of their own 'oppressed' status. Whilst all individuals from one particular 'oppressed' 'group' perspective (eg, ethnic-minority female) are deemed to have an identical experience espoused in the same 'narrative', these particular perspectives are sanctified as being entirely opaque to anyone else with a different perspective, even if from what might be considered a parallel one in 'power' relations (eg, ethnic-minority 'gay'), let alone from a non-'oppressed' angle, which in any case is held not to be worthy of taking into account. The perspective of a 'group' 'narrative' is considered to be trapped in the sub-text, rendering it decipherable only through the special technique of 'deconstruction'.

The obvious fatal flaw in this thin reasoning is that there is no reflexivity in the 'theory' in respect of the texts of the 'postmodernists' themselves. *Their* own texts uniquely are deemed to be legitimately understood according to their surface meaning; so that within this 'discipline', where it is held that no text is 'privileged' over any other, necessarily a complete exception is made for texts concerning the 'theory' itself; otherwise the 'theories' of 'postmodernism' (and its subsidiaries re 'deconstruction') could not exist. The irony is that if 'postmodernist' principles were applied to 'postmodernism' itself, then the 'theory' would become apparent as being entirely based in the very principles of 'power' relations it purports to reveal. A tautology, the 'theory' is without foundation. 'Postmodernism' is naked special pleading, amounting to a claim that there is a magic unavailable to the uninitiated, which is practised by a priesthood of the political-Left. This is raw elitist-separatism: the very attitude and behaviour that a political-Left ethos purports to be fighting against and deems immoral.

By way of an absurd extension of the circularity in 'postmodernism': with language being deemed to convey nothing but 'power' relations, by an elementary failure of logic, conversely 'power' is regarded as nothing more than language; and from this is deduced that all that is needed is a change in language to bring about a wholly new set of 'power' relations. This is a flimsy dressing-up of the self-fulfilling prophecy in 'political correctness' and 'identity politics'. Language is an explicit communication form with no access to the vast bulk of cognition, which is implicit (non-conscious); and therefore it cannot possibly be of the nature ascribed to it by 'postmodernists'. The refusal to be 'found out' on this score is, of course, through denial that there is a scientific way of acquiring knowl-



edge about implicit psychology; but this is an argument no less circular than is everything in 'post-modernism'. Gross & Levitt [1998 p75] sum up: "American postmodernism is often accused, with considerable justice, of being little more than mimicry of a few European thinkers, mostly French, who rose to prominence in the midst of the bewilderment afflicting intellectual life when the proto-revolutionary struggles in the late sixties in France, Germany and Italy fizzled out without having produced any real impact on bourgeois society." In other words, 'postmodernism' sprang from the very same place as did 'identity politics' – its symbiotic twin; or, rather, its offspring.

In the transition to 'identity politics', the quintessential form of 'oppression' [sic] in Marxian imagination changed with the family replacing the workplace as the putative key locus of conflict; transferring from 'the boss' lording it over 'the worker' to the man 'dominating' the woman. This was a politics in line with natural prejudice (see above), easy to get a handle on, and which mobilised in particular women hitherto sidelined in political party organisations, as it did people in general in these bodies – with anti-'racism' joining feminism in the new thrust of politics to fragment into related but 'single issue' campaigning — in the wake of the poor prospects for political-Left parties electorally after the 1970s. So the politics readily hit 'the pavement' where once it was mostly confined to universities.

The belief system was most apparent within the social work profession [McLaughlin 2005]. Political-Left-minded individuals seeking escape from work in commerce found not only a shelter in the burgeoning state, but a niche where they were able to act according to 'identity politics' principles. Social work became a locus of problematising social issues, most especially intimate-partner violence [PV], which was ripe for portraying as the supposed exemplification of male/female 'power' [sic] relations in the only portion of PV that anyone is concerned about – that by males against females. As PV in the female-to-male direction contributes significantly to undermining the neo-Marxist rationalisation of why 'the revolution' never materialised, then the occurrence and concept of 'non-gendered' [sic] PV had to be resolutely denied whatever the strength of the evidence. This is just as has been found to be the case [see eg, Dutton & Nichols 2005, Moxon 2011].

Facets of human psychology are fertile ground for this ideology to take hold and become entrenched. From the afore-mentioned biological principle that the female is the 'limiting factor' in reproduction: whereas she is treated as being privileged, prejudices evolved against the male through both the differential allocation of reproduction within male hierarchy [Moxon 2009] (and 'policing' associated with this) and, obviously, the close scrutiny of males by females to exclude most males in their mate choices. Making still more plausible the political developments here outlined, is the male reluctance to reveal PV against them – discussed below. There is also the self-serving utility of the contemporary political-philosophical mindset in salving cognitive-dissonance (and providing within-group status gains, not least through driving in-group-/out-group competition), which further serves as reinforcement. All of this works on the level of implicit as well as or rather than explicit cognition, given that the stronger the motivation the more *implicit* we might expect to be the associated cognition [Di Conza et al 2006].

The ideology of 'identity politics' was so readily accepted not least because it is a recapitulation of ideation from Christianity, where the future is deemed inevitable in ending in 'the promised land'. Social development is taken to be teleological: as if 'pulled' towards a 'utopia'(/'dystopia') of



equality-of-outcome. This is a secular religion, transferring the notion of a 'god' from being in man's image, via the humanistic deification of mankind, to worship of a supposed mechanism of social development, which is in no way scientific; merely an assumption that it is akin to a mode of reasoning – the 'dialectic'. After Rousseau, the individual is taken to be in essence 'good', but contaminated by 'capitalism'. This contamination is regarded as superficial yet irredeemable without the assistance of the ideology. That all this is very much a residue of Christian thinking is outlined at length by the philosopher John Gray [Gray 2007], who cites (neo-)Marxism as being the apotheosis of humanist political-philosophies, which all spring from an ostensible opposition to religion, that actually itself is a still more entrenched religiosity. This new quasi-religion seems to be as pathological as the closely related former quasi-religious 'revisionist' Marxisms as espoused by Stalin and Hitler (see below). Bukovsky [2009] warns that just as the ideological progenitor of (what he terms) 'political correctness' imprisoned him as a Soviet dissident simply for not being an active supporter, so it will be in the 'West'; the ideology building unstopably from excess to ever greater excess as adherents to the ideology refuse ever to admit they are wrong.

In sum, it is no surprise that what began as a desperate rearguard notion in academic political-Left circles to attempt to save face, has evolved over many decades into a mainstream 'given', with supporting notions, such as the previously prevailing theory of intimate-partner violence, resolutely data-proof. This is notwithstanding 'identity politics' notions as to who is 'oppressed' / 'disadvantaged' and why, having no objective plausibility and being deeply at odds with perennial common-sense from any vantage outside of the ideology itself.

With the long development of 'identity politics' over almost a century, its origin had been lost sight of, and some commentators still lazily assume it arose in the wake of well-intentioned championing of women, ethnic minorities and gays; rather than this championing being instrumental in attacking 'the workers'. Others imagine that it is merely some result of the experience of modernity; but this is merely to cite symptoms of the cynicism behind which 'identity politics' plays no small part. Commonly credited is post-colonial guilt, even though this hardly squares with the emergence of 'identity politics' initially in the USA rather than in the ex-colonial power that is England, nor the centrality of women rather than or alongside ethnicity; and in any case it would be a moral sensibility rather too rarefied to account for the emotive intensity of the politics. Also suggested is an absence of meaning [Furedi 2013], as if this had not been a major issue at the time of Marx and before; or simply a feeling of anonymity [Calhoun 1994], which, again, does not explain the fervency of the politics when a more resigned or a diffuse political stance would be expected, as in 'existentialism'.

Based on his mistaken analysis, Calhoun argues retrospectively that nationalist movements should be subsumed under the 'identity politics' umbrella, and that therefore 'identity politics' is nothing new; but nationalism could not better exemplify the politics of 'commonality'. Nationalist movements both contemporary and historical are instances of perennial assertions of in-grouping at the most obvious fully autonomous level of social organisation. This reality was the basis of the early-20th century nationalist revolutions as pragmatic modifications of Marxian 'internationalism'. As such they do share roots with 'identity politics' in that this too is a pragmatic modification of Marxian 'theory'. Indeed, on this basis, 'identity politics' or 'political correctness' could be dubbed 'fascist', as a use of that label to better reflect what actually it is. Stalin engineered "socialism in one country" for Russia in the 1920s to try to keep at bay the rest of Europe in the wake of the failure

there of early attempts at 'proletarian' revolt. This exactly paralleled the shift in position by Mussolini (who was the editor of the newspaper of the Italian socialists) a few years before, at the outbreak of World War One, in asserting the Italian 'proletariat' against that of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which it was feared was intent on swallowing Italy. 'Fascism' was 'national socialism', as explicitly labelled in the German copying of the Italian model: a Marxian splintering, not a political-Right manifestation. Revolution overthrowing elites in favour (ostensibly) of the masses was hardly any form of conservatism – and neither was 'fascism' 'racist': the 'racism' of the Nazis was bolted on as an historically deep-rooted aberration peculiar to Germany, which was not shared by Italy. That 'fascism' is the bogeyman of Marxism/socialism is through the former being derived from the latter, leaving little to distinguish them, which on the political-Left famously leads to fierce internecine conflict. All nationalism – whether emerging as a bastardisation of Marxist 'theory' or otherwise – clearly is in essence a politics of commonality, whereas 'identity politics' concerns sub-division of society into abstract categories to constitute faux 'groups' in supposed opposition to the 'group' with 'power'.

There has been wide discussion within academia that it is difficult to understand the nature of 'identity politics', but this is as would be expected of a system of thought which is not what it purports to be. Calhoun [1994 p29] reveals 'identity politics' to only ostensibly concern actual 'oppression' / 'disadvantage', when he asks: "... rather than being surprised by the prevalence of identity politics and seeking to explain it, should we not consider whether it is more remarkable and at least as much in need of explanation that many people fail to take up projects of transforming shared identities or the treatment afforded them?" The reason is that the identities in 'identity politics' do not arise within 'groups' themselves but are conferred according to what can be posited in opposition to 'the workers'. Thus are ignored actually 'oppressed' and 'disadvantaged' categories wholly or mainly comprising males, whilst included are those not in reality comprising the 'oppressed' and 'disadvantaged'; and inasmuch as 'groups' in any way are, as they purport, indeed 'oppressed' and 'disadvantaged', this is overturned either through being stretched in their inclusiveness beyond credulity (as with 'ethnic minority') or narrowed to the point of absurdity (as with the minuscule minority that is trans-sexual).

Another window on 'identity politics' as being not what it seems is a fatal contradiction that is the major criticism in academic discourse today, highlighted by many, perhaps first by Gitlin [1994]: "For all the talk about the social construction of knowledge, identity politics de facto seems to slide towards the premise that social groups have essential identities. At the outer limit, those who set out to explode a fixed definition of humanity end by fixing their definitions of blacks and women". The paradox is that the insistent political demand that all individuals are the same – not least so as to establish entitlement to equal treatment – itself negates the very purported *non*-equivalence that supposedly establishes any need that there may be for redress in the first place. And if instead it is held that there *are* major differences – as those on the 'essentialist' side of the debate contend — then equality would be better realised not by providing treatments that are the same, but by ones that are accordingly different. Yet, the firm belief that all is socially constructed pretends no difference that is not an arbitrary and merely temporary playing out of 'power' interactions, which equal treatment is intended (supposedly in time) to nullify. The circle of 'reasoning' is vicious. The feminist core of 'identity politics' is a mess of self-contradiction in just this manner: simultaneously holding that women and men are quintessentially different whilst insisting that they are exactly the same. Recognised generally by theorists of feminism as a serious and seemingly intractable problem, it is

the source of long-standing internecine fractious debate showing little sign of diminishing.

These distinct absences of internal consistency in the ‘theory’ are the direct consequence of its origination and development as an attempt to hide uncomfortable truths within academic political-Left politics; not to address issues in the real world. That it is hopelessly contradictory is beside the point to the ideologues, who rely on the contradictions to keep their juggled clubs in the air; but the lack even of internal (let alone external) consistency is a confirmation of the non-sustainability of ‘identity politics’ ‘theory’, contributing surely to its eventual demise. Yet there is the distinct possibility that this may not arrive until after ‘identity politics’ (or however else it is tagged, and whatever else to which it morphs) has grown unstopably to become yet another recapitulation of ‘the terror’. The totalitarianism continues to ratchet upwards. ‘Identity politics’ is now so entrenched across ‘Western’ society that it has a life of its own well beyond the latter-day now quite intense critique of it from within the academia that spawned it. Such critique does not, however, extend to uncovering the actual origin and function of the ideology, indicating that this is just another phase in the endless attempted face-saving by the political-Left intelligentsia.

Underlying the more proximal explanations of ‘identity politics’ and ‘postmodernism’, ultimately are the wellsprings of politics in general: what might be termed ‘competitive altruism’ masking perennial universal status-striving. Bidding for social pre-eminence is a combination of trying to acquire rank within society and also to be part of a pre-eminent in-group – one that is almost as separate from society as it is at its apex. Elitist-separatism. Implicitly (that is, beneath any conscious awareness, or in only dim awareness) this is what the political-Left foundationally, if unwittingly, is concerned with achieving. Through the ideological conceptualising of society in terms of cooperation, with any competition considered aberrational, those with a political-Left ethos are left peculiarly blind to their own competitiveness. Indeed, their ideology is very much a displaced expression of it, and explains the peculiarly vehement bigotry of its adherents, and why supposed ‘proletarian’ revolution invariably produced a tyranny, and one that is actually directed towards the ‘proletariat’, not by it. The politics espoused of egalitarianism is a competitive-altruistic feint to assist the otherwise standard status-grab. Functioning to deny the legitimacy of any rival elitist-separatists and their ethos, it dupes not only others aspiring though as yet failing to be part of an elite, but precludes even self-awareness of their own elitist-separatist aspirations by political-Left adherents themselves. It is in respect of this, ultimately, that are deployed the intense and protracted attempts to salve cognitive-dissonance so prominent a part of political-Left experience. The great paradox here is that in their strident efforts somehow to transcend human nature, the political-Left confirm its reality. Any such philosophically illiterate notion that we can ever ‘transcend’ ourselves is unlikely again to so easily hold sway, given the insulation to such a self-evidently foolish idea the political-Left in the end inadvertently looks set to gift us. A related, supreme irony is that the very charge made against ‘the workers’ of a psychological dysfunctionality in supposedly not being able to see what is in their own best interests, boomerangs back on political-Left adherents as actually *their* myopia in respect of the psychology of their own ethos. It is not that Neo-Marxism/ ‘identity politics’/ ‘political correctness’/ ‘postmodernism’ is an altruism that is in fact disguised self-interest: it’s nothing of the sort. In the service of its own ends, the political-Left ethos adopted a deception designed to fail to identify the actually ‘disadvantaged’ / ‘oppressed’, expressly so as to make their condition still worse, as a form of revenge on those regarded as ungrateful for past efforts on their behalf (though not that anyway these efforts were other than ‘competitive altruism’). It is hard to think of a political fraud as

great (as deep, wide, successful and sustained) as this in history, or even to devise one in mischievous imagination.

To return now, after a long detour, to PV, it should be obvious why the long detour was necessary. It is only with the nature of the ideology underpinning the non-scientific 'gender paradigm' model having been fully outlined that it can be seen why there has been and continues to be systematic serious misrepresentation of the topic and that it is so deeply entrenched. Being anyway in sync with perennial and ubiquitous pro-female/anti-male prejudices, it is fully to be anticipated that even data showing clear separation between the sexes in the female-on-male direction in the propensity to perpetrate PV is not going to end the misrepresentation that PV is a wholly or predominantly 'patriarchal' [*sic*] phenomenon. As previously outlined [Moxon 2011], the feminism-based 'theory' shifts to try – pretend – to accommodate findings, but never more than as a re-hash of the same notions of 'patriarchy' [*sic*], to go round in circles to posit notions already debunked. It has been hypothesised that female-perpetrated PV is unlike that by the male in being self-defence; then, when this didn't square with data, 'expressive' versus 'instrumental'. This gave way to a simple re-assertion of 'non-patriarchy' [*sic*] versus 'patriarchy' [*sic*] – despite there being no cogent theory of 'patriarchy' [*sic*], nor of a 'power' [*sic*] relation between the sexes [Moxon 2012] – in a still blunter guise: 'violent resistance' versus 'intimate terrorism'. All have been easily discredited by research directly investigating the claims, which in any case were contrary to pre-existing data that had been simply ignored. Moving further towards an unfalsifiability, the last resort of the ideologues is the notion that there is some essence peculiar to female experience of PV, of a supposed special fear and/or a special impact (notably of that reliable stand-by for victim-stancing, PTSD); but the data in no way supports either contention [see the brief review in Moxon 2011]. In addition, the ideological 'researchers' employ a variety of underhand ruses in breach of the most elementary standards and ethics in science to suppress evidence. As well as deliberate misuse of statistics [as highlighted by Graham-Kevan 2007], there is: simply not citing studies which include data on female perpetration; harassing, threatening or penalising researchers; obstructing publication; forming conclusions that do not reflect results; and not conducting studies the results of which might contradict a 'patriarchal' [*sic*] model [Straus 2007]. A case in point re this last is the complete absence of research into male restraint of (attempted) female PV – an unsurprising lacuna in the field, given that it likely accounts for a large part if not the bulk of what is taken to be male-perpetrated PV.

To distinguish from the ideological line of PV being a 'gendered' (male-perpetrated) phenomenon, researchers have felt obliged to use the label 'non-gendered' [*sic*], or 'sex-symmetrical'. It may be that the use of these terms is an attempt to avoid political battle, but, a forlorn hope that this would be in any case, taking sex out of the topic is hardly much less likely to spark extreme-feminist ire than is to point to greater female perpetration. Whilst these terms understandably are used to usefully point up a distinction, it does not accurately depict the reality, which, researchers in their conclusions concerning female PV perpetration, better reveal with expressions such as 'at least as much as' or 'similar if not greater than' or 'as much or more than' male [eg, Fiebert 2010, Archer 2000, Dutton 2012]. Even where raw data exhibits only a low sex-differential or a near sex-symmetry, researchers have long been very well aware of *the* major confound in the PV field distorting data to greatly under-count male victimisation / female perpetration.

This is the far lower rate of male reporting of their own victimisation in respect of the kind

of incidents females readily report. Within the same couples, self-report of PV victimisation by the males is less than half the self-report of perpetration by the females; whereas for perpetration the reporting disparities reverse [Stets & Straus 1990]. Males sustaining PV typically do not consider themselves to be victims, and nor do men view an assault on them by a woman as a crime; and consequently fail to report victimization [Straus & Gelles 1992]. Males fully intuit that there is a real prejudice against them and in favour of women when it comes to PV. In an hypothetical PV scenario, when the victim is male, observer participants (both male and female) view the situation as less serious, with the victim as more responsible, and are more likely to ignore the situation [Sylaska & Walters 2014]; and in a similar study, women observers of PV scenarios prejudicially attribute perpetration to males much more than to females [Rhatigan, Stewart & Moore 2011]. Men fear stigma and ridicule, realise that they are unlikely to be believed, if not mistakenly arrested on the presumption of being not the victim but the perpetrator; and in general have objective good reason to fear unfair treatment in the criminal justice response at various junctures [Shernock & Russell 2012]. The most important consideration of all is that males strenuously avoid being ascribed victim status because this completely negates their efforts to acquire rank and consequent sexual access. So strong is the effect of male under-reporting that even in anonymous survey designed to avoid evoking the various reasons males have for non-reporting (eliminating 'demand characteristics'), nevertheless males still under-report [Archer 1999]. Together, these factors underpin far lower reporting to police by males (by a sex-differential factor of three according to the (UK) 2012/13 Crime Survey [ONS 2014], or up to ten [Stets & Straus 1990]); yet consistently the Home Office in the UK records that 40% of PV victims are male [eg Thomson 2010].

Notwithstanding the serious problem of male under-reporting, recent data nonetheless has revealed substantial predominance of female perpetration. Women show a threefold greater propensity to strike a partner in a hypothetical provocation scenario, and almost every woman in the sample (96%) expected no disapproval should they do so (compared to just 24% of the men) [Bartholomew et al 2013]. The female is twice as likely to initiate in reciprocal PV, and three times as likely in non-reciprocal PV [Whitaker et al 2007]; replicating previous studies/reviews of a sex-differential in unilateral PV of at least twofold [Williams et al 2001, Anderson 2002, Ehrensaft & Vivian 1999], rising with the seriousness of the violence to fully threefold [Stets & Straus 1990] or sixfold [Magdol et al 1997]. Looking at all studies examining unidirectional PV, it is always more by women in all sample types bar police reports [Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Selwyn & Rohling 2012], which last are invariably highly biased against male reporting (as above-discussed) – and correspondingly biased in favour of female reporting: not least in facilitating false accusation ploys in custody and other disputes. Overall, pooled prevalence of rates of female perpetration are significantly greater than that by males [Desmarais et al 2012b], irrespective of the type of sample or study; consistent with previous reviews. The victimisation data by contrast, as would be expected because of male under-reporting, reflects still more profound methodological issues, being inconsistent *even as to direction* according to sample type and country, with a predominance of male victimisation in all studies investigating recent PV (over just the previous year, when it would be more easily recalled); and the data is of much greater variation (the full range, from 0% to 99%) [Desmarais et al 2012a].

Perhaps the best window on the actual extent of the large preponderance of female over male PV perpetration is the enormous disparity between recorded and predicted sex-differential rates of injury resulting from PV. Intuitively, in the shadow of the ideological 'gendered' misrepresentation of



PV, injury rates would be anticipated to be several-fold greater for women compared to men, yet they are roughly equivalent: parity [George 2003], a difference too small to be statistically significant [Carpaldi & Owen 2001], or a very small difference of less than a 3:2 ratio female:male [Archer 2000, Mirrlees-Black et al 1998]. Narrowing consideration to only serious injury, it might be expected that sex-difference widens still further, but the reality is if anything the opposite. Even without controlling for the usual major factor of male under-reporting, and anti-male recording biases, according to an analysis of US data there are substantially more *male* than female victims [Felson & Cares 2005]. In another major study, albeit that males are not in the majority they are 40% of the victims [Hoff 2012]. Yet the contradiction of intuition is nothing in comparison to the contradiction of objective prediction. This would take into account the factors of female body-frame and facial bone fragility – leading to much greater susceptibility to injury — and male far superior upper-body strength and throwing velocity – affording far more hitting power. Some of the contributory factors here translate from arithmetic (linear) to geometric (exponential) impact; for example, an addition of as much again in throwing velocity produces a quadrupling in punching power. These factors multiply together to tend to push a calculation of the anticipated sex-differential to as much as twenty-fold [Dixon 2012]. That is, women would sustain 95% of all the injuries, and that is even on the assumption only that that the sexes are equally responsible for PV; but on the ideologically-driven assumption of males perpetrating far more PV than females, then the disparity in injury rates would be predicted to be far in excess even of 20:1: to two orders-of-magnitude and more.

Not merely the only plausible but the only tenable way to account for the enormous disparity between the predicted and actual sex-differential in injury rates is that in reality PV overwhelmingly is perpetrated by women – whether through men ‘holding back’ in degree and type of physical aggression, if not ‘backing off’ altogether; and/or women exhibiting ‘no holds barred’ violence. This being the case, PV clearly would have to be regarded as a female-on-male phenomenon; the male-on-female direction being an aberration. With the difference in degree so extreme, then it would appear that only female-perpetrated PV should be considered aetiologically as PV per se, leaving the relatively insignificant amount of male ostensibly equivalent behaviour as likely displacement from a different mode of violence; presumably springing from aggression in male intra-sexual competitiveness.

If focus is moved beyond even serious injury to partner murder, then intuition would be that the sex-differential would polarise still further; not least through reinforcement by the ideological endless repetition in media that each week two women are killed by their partners. [For ease of distinguishing between the sexes, and in recognition that data is mostly of spousal murder, then reference to male and female partners will be as ‘husbands’ and ‘wives’, with the collective data termed ‘spousal’.] Again, however, this is wholly contradicted. The calculated predicted sex-differential is not greater than for injury, remaining at roughly 20:1 [Dixon 2012], and not only is there similarly almost no sex-differential in the recorded data – almost half of police-recorded spousal murder victims are men [Ferguson 2003] – but many or more likely *most* male victims are missing from the data, because of a combination of the hard-to-detect modes employed by wives and police recording conventions. Whereas husbands who murder their wives often do so without attempting to conceal the crime – not least in a fit of rage and/or in conjunction with suicide — this is much less the case for wives who murder their husbands, given female indirect aggression styles serving female goals to maintain the remainder of the family otherwise intact, posthumously funded by the husband’s assets.



As is well-known, wives tend to murder either by proxy – a lover, male friend, male relative or hired ‘hit-man’ — or by subterfuge (classically by disguised poisoning or contrived accident); in both cases in effect assisted by pro-female / anti-male prejudice allaying suspicion. The subterfuge often will be successful, but even when detected, the third-party cases are recorded either as being both perpetrated and instigated by the third-party male, or – and *even if the wife is found to be implicated* – as a ‘multiple-offender’ killing without reference to a wife (this in the USA) [Farrell 1999]. Thus is mariticide under-counted to the likely extent of a small fraction of what would be the actual total. The disjuncture between data and prediction in respect of partner-murder may be considered further widened by including PV-related suicide, at least some of which can be attributable to female partner’s violence/ abuse. Taking all PV-related deaths together, then even on the wholly inadequate official data, the total number of male deaths well exceeds that for females [Davis 2010].

There is a telling shadow of male-on-female PV that may be the best of all pictures of its reality or otherwise: the implicit (non-conscious) expectation women have of the likelihood of sustaining violence from males. There are two sources of evidence for this: the content of women’s nightmares and the persecutory delusions of female paranoid schizophrenics (and sufferers of other mental illnesses featuring abnormal ideation). Both provide major insight into what women have long evolved to fear. If PV was never a significant risk for women, then neither nightmares nor delusions would be expected to feature violent males. This is just what research into nightmares reveals [Schredl 2010]; and instead of malevolent familiar males, female persecutory delusions feature familiar *females* as ogres [Walston, David & Charlton 1998]. Male violence towards women – PV or otherwise – apparently was not salient to women as a meaningful threat throughout evolutionary history, indicating that it is not part of (normal) male nature.

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Steve Moxon is an independent researcher based out of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. He is a cross-disciplinary researcher in the biological roots of human sociality, with a special interest in the sexes. He can be reached at [stevemoxon3@talktalk.net](mailto:stevemoxon3@talktalk.net).

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# Gender-Related Schemas and Suicidality: Validation of the Male and Female Traditional Gender Scripts Questionnaires

MARTIN SEAGER

LUKE SULLIVAN

JOHN BARRY



## *Abstract*

*Background: The issue of whether gender-related attitudes underlie the sex difference in suicide has been relatively unexplored. This study sought to validate questionnaires measuring traditional male and female gender scripts in order to test the hypothesis that scores on these questionnaires predict suicidality.*

*Methods: The responses of 348 women and 170 men were analysed using factor analysis and hierarchical multiple regression.*

*Results: After controlling for other variables, two male gender subscales predicted risk of suicidality (Fight & Win,  $P < .001$ ; Mastery & Control,  $P < .042$ ), and one female gender subscale predicted reduced risk of suicidality (Family Harmony,  $P < .003$ ).*

*Conclusions: These novel findings have implications for understanding and predicting suicidality in men and women, and may be valuable in the clinical context.*

**Keywords:** suicidality; gender; social script; sex difference; questionnaire validation.

## Introduction

Although suicidal ideation is reported far more often by females than males<sup>1</sup> in general three to four times more men commit suicide than women (17 vs 5.3 per 100 000; ONS, 2012). This represents a large sex difference in behaviour, yet explanations based on gender differences have received surprisingly little research attention.

A Danish sample found that predictors of suicidal behavior were unemployment, retirement, being single and sickness absence.<sup>2</sup> In addition, in UK samples, other predictors of suicide are being aged over 45,<sup>3</sup> and deliberate self-harm, in both cases moreso in men than women.<sup>4</sup> Besides being male, another the leading predictor of suicide in men and women is mental illness.<sup>5</sup>

An exception to the general gender/suicide rule is China, where high rates occur in women, especially impulsive suicides in young women in rural areas.<sup>6</sup> This is said to be due to harsh economic and social conditions in these areas, and as the conditions have improved in recent years, so the female suicide rate has fallen.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the wealth of evidence showing that the strongest predictor of suicide is being male, there has been surprisingly little research exploring what it is about men that creates a vulnerability to suicide. The near absence of research on gender-based explanations for male suicide suggests that our culture has yet to become fully conscious of the possible influence of gender schemas in the suicide. There may be taboos around acknowledging male vulnerability<sup>8</sup> which impede a gendered exploration of suicide. Such taboos may be enculturated through unwritten rules and social scripts about what it means to be masculine, and how 'real men' are supposed to behave. If this is the case, then such rules themselves need to be the subject of careful research so that their influence may be understood. As the most fundamental step towards elucidating this problem, it is therefore necessary to hypothesise what form such deep-seated masculinity rules might take. The present research attempts to do just this by validating a working definition of what the rules of masculinity might look like and testing this in the general population. This research also tests a hypothesized set of rules of femininity that may act as a buffer against suicidality.

The aims of this study are to:

1/ Validate the two Gender Script Questionnaires and



2/ Test the hypothesis that the Gender Script Questionnaires will be related to suicidality

## Materials and Methods

### Design

This study is a cross-sectional online survey analysed using factor analysis, multiple regression and ANCOVA. The psychometric properties of the Traditional Gender Scripts were analysed using factor analysis with expectation maximization. Concurrent validity between the Traditional Gender Scripts and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire was assessed using Pearson's correlations.

The variables that predict the dependent variable (Suicidal Ladder scores) were analysed using hierarchical multiple linear regression. The main model consisted of demographic variables in the first block (e.g. Age and Gender), other background variables in the second block (e.g. Substance Abuse) and in the final block the Male Script scores and Female Script scores.

### Variables

#### *Dependent variable*

The primary outcome measure is the Suicidal Ladder.<sup>1</sup> This is a 5-item hierarchical checklist of suicidality, with higher scores indicating more suicidality. The items range from 'Have you ever felt that life is not worth living?' (score = 1) to 'Have you ever made an attempt to take your life?' (score = 5). According to a review of short scales with high clinical validity, the Suicidal Ladder is one of the better scales available for measuring current suicidal severity.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Predictor variables*

##### Gender Script Questionnaire

Variables relevant to suicide were used: age, sex, presence of depression, previous suicide attempts, alcohol abuse, psychiatric problems, poor social support, plan for suicide, isolation from relations, poor health.

#### *Control variables*

Positive state of mind was measured using the Positive Mindset Index (PMI).<sup>10</sup> This scale consists of six items (happiness, confidence, being in control, emotional stability, motivation and optimism). The PMI shows good internal reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.926$ ) and good concurrent validity ( $r = .678$ ) with the psychological subscale of the SF-36. The norm for the PMI is 3.30.

Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ).<sup>11</sup> This scale assesses the degree to which participants identify with stereotypical gender identity (40 items). There are five subscales, each with eight 5-point



bipolar items. The two subscales most relevant to this study are the measures of stereotypically feminine traits (e.g. 'helpful to others'), and stereotypically masculine traits (e.g. 'very active'). This PAQ is not intended to measure immutable gender characteristics, but is used as a measure of abstract personality traits that are seen as gender-traditional.

Geographical region, substance use and other relevant variables was assessed from free text responses.

## **Participants**

Participants were recruited between Oct 2012 and June 2013 from several websites, including the *Men's Health Forum*, *Psychology on The Net*, and *Men's Minds Matter*.

Ethical approval was granted by the University College London Graduate School Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was given by the participants before filling in the questionnaire.

### ***Exclusion criteria***

- i. Not completing the consent form
- ii. Being under 18
- iii. Not giving key information (gender, Suicidal Ladder responses).

### ***Sample size and statistical analysis***

The sample size required for questionnaire validation is a minimum of 5 participants per item.<sup>12</sup> Thus for 39 items (the final total of the Gender Script Questionnaires combined), a minimum of 195 participants was required. For multiple linear regression, the sample size required if the model consists of nine predictors is  $50+8m$ , thus 122 participants were required in the present study.<sup>13</sup> Concurrent validity of the Traditional Gender Scripts was assessed by measuring the Pearson's correlation between the Traditional Gender Scripts and the PAQ. For concurrent validity, a correlation value of  $r \geq 0.5$  is considered moderate.<sup>14</sup>

For multiple regression, variables were entered into the model if (a) there was a basis, either theoretical or from previous research, to hypothesise that it would contribute to suicidality, or (b) if the variable showed a significant difference between men and women (see Table 1).

## **Phase 1: Questionnaire Development**

### ***Development of Final Gender Script Questionnaires***

Items for the hypothesised 'masculinity script' and its counterpart, the 'femininity script' were based upon three sources of evidence. Firstly, a wide qualitative examination of how the psychology of men and women have been portrayed throughout history in art, literature, culture and science was conducted.<sup>8</sup> From this examination a basic pool of script items was defined. This pool was modified from discussions with various groups, including professional psychologists across the NHS and workers at the Terence Higgins Trust. The final pool of items was selected and refined

through discussion amongst the three authors (MS, LS, and JB), phrased as questions, and 6-point Likert scales added. Through this process, items that formed the basis of the two questionnaires were derived: the *Male Script* with 20 items, and the *Female Script* with 19 items. The questionnaires were administered to the three authors. Suggestions for revisions were made e.g. clarification of phrasing.

The male script consisted of three domains: *Fight & Win* (e.g. 'When the team I support lose it really hurts'), *Provide-Protect* (e.g. 'I feel ashamed if I can't provide for my kids') and *Mastery & Control* (e.g. 'if you need help you are weak'). The female script consisted of three domains: *Be glamorous / attractive* (e.g. 'I feel more alive when I look attractive'), *Bear children* (e.g. 'I won't be truly happy until I have produced a child') and *Nurture children and family life* (e.g. 'Raising a happy family is my true goal in life'). Higher scores on the likert scale indicated more agreement with the item.

A factor analysis of the two scales was conducted to examine the factor structure of these questionnaires. In each case the factor analysis used Varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization, with extraction by principal components or maximum likelihood estimation, as appropriate. Extraction and retention of factors was based on visual examination of the scree plot and eigenvalues of  $> 1.0$  were retained. The threshold for the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.6.<sup>13</sup>

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and average inter-item correlations were assessed to measure the internal reliability of a questionnaire. The usual threshold for acceptability for Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is 0.7. A factor loading threshold of 0.40 was applied to ensure reasonable strength of factors.<sup>15</sup>

## **Phase 2: Initial Validation**

### ***Initial Validation of Final Gender Script Questionnaires.***

For the initial validation of the questionnaires, various suitable websites were contacted and invited to post an invitation to the survey on their website. Most sites agreed. Table 1 shows the demographic and other background characteristics of the participants.

### ***Initial Validation Analysis***

As a first step in validating final questionnaires, the construct validity of the questionnaire was tested by assessing differences in scores between groups who are known to be different in a relevant ways. The two groups used for this validation of the Traditional Gender Scripts were men and women. For this comparison, mean scores on the two questionnaires in the two groups were compared using independent groups t-tests. In each questionnaire, a higher score indicated greater identification with the script. All statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS statistical software for Windows, Version 21 (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp).

A further step in validating new questionnaires is in testing how much they are in agreement with existing validated measures measuring similar constructs. This is known as concurrent validity, and acceptable concurrent validity is indicated by a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.5 or more.<sup>14</sup>

The criterion by which the new questionnaires were measured was the masculine, feminine and masculine-feminine subscales of the PAQ.<sup>11</sup> Missing data were deleted pairwise, so that where a participant gave some answers but had not given responses on all items in the questionnaire, data for the responses they gave could be included in the analysis.

## **Results**

67% (348 of 518) of the respondents were women. There were three transgender participants; this number was too small to use for statistical purposes, so these three participants were omitted from further analysis. Table 1 shows the demographic and other background characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the male (N = 160) and female (N = 340) respondents.

		<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Test statistic</b>
Age, mean (SD)		42.2 (12.9)	36.2 (12.0)	$t = 5.105^{*****}$
Socioeconomic background	Management	55 (32%)	95 (36%)	$\chi^2 = 3.095$
	Intermediate	55 (32%)	142 (39%)	
	Manual	60 (35%)	123 (34%)	
Alcohol units weekly, mean (SD)		9 (5.3)	3.5 (2.1)	$t = 3.081^{**}$
Ever been in trouble due to drink	Yes	56 (33%)	71 (20%)	$\chi^2 = 11.19^{**}$
Currently on illegal drugs	Yes	13 (7.7%)	28 (7.8%)	$\chi^2 = 0.001$
Others say I have a substance abuse problem	Yes	19 (11.2%)	30 (8.3%)	$\chi^2 = 1.112$
Support from family <sup>a</sup>		2.62 (1.0)	2.44 (1.0)	$t = 1.957$
Support from friends <sup>a</sup>		2.37 (1.0)	2.39 (0.9)	$t = -0.277$
Quality of health at present <sup>a</sup>		2.84 (1.1)	2.38 (1.1)	$t = 4.656^{*****}$
Ever diagnosed with mood disorder	Yes	97 (57%)	270 (78%)	$\chi^2 = 23.406^{*****}$
In a relationship	Yes	111 (65%)	202 (56%)	$\chi^2 = 3.757$
Quality of relationship <sup>a</sup>		2.59 (1.5)	2.96 (1.6)	$t = -2.104^*$
Divorced	Yes	15 (8.8%)	60 (16.7%)	$\chi^2 = 5.902^*$

<i>Live with partner</i>	Yes	95 (56%)	149 (41%)	$\chi^2 = 9.930^{**}$
<i>Live with a relation</i>	Yes	24 (14%)	79 (22%)	$\chi^2 = 4.457^*$
<i>Have children living at home</i>	Yes	55 (32%)	111 (32%)	$\chi^2 = 0.001$
<i>In employment</i>	Yes	111 (65%)	193 (54%)	$\chi^2 = 6.684^{**}$
<i>Job satisfaction<sup>a</sup></i>		3.74 (1.4)	3.75 (1.4)	$t = -0.101$
<i>Full time student</i>	Yes	17 (10%)	57 (16%)	$\chi^2 = 3.228$
<i>How much father was present in childhood home<sup>b</sup></i>		3.55 (1.4)	3.58 (1.3)	$t = -0.267$
<i>Victim of hate crime</i>	Yes	36 (21%)	82 (23%)	$\chi^2 = 0.183$
<i>Victim of violence</i>	Yes	88 (52%)	166 (46%)	$\chi^2 = 1.411$
<i>Age first became victim of violence</i>		11.59 (8.1)	12.53 (8.4)	$t = -0.858$
<i>Victim of sexual abuse</i>	Yes	36 (21%)	133 (37%)	$\chi^2 = 13.515^{***}$
<i>Age first became victim of sexual abuse</i>		12.74 (7.6)	12.09 (8.0)	$t = 0.444$

\* P<.05, \*\* P<.01, \*\*\* P<.001, \*\*\*\* P<.0001, \*\*\*\*\* P<.00001, \*\*\*\* P<.00001 (two tailed).

<sup>a</sup> On a 6-point scale where 1 represents worst outcome (e.g. least support, worst health, worst relationship, lowest job satisfaction).

<sup>b</sup> On a 5-point scale where 1 represents 'never present' and 5 represents 'always present'.

## Development of Final Gender Script Questionnaires

### *Development of the Male Gender Script Questionnaire*

The Male Gender Script Questionnaire consisted of 20 items. The stimulus questions were answered 6-point Likert scale from 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, to 6 = *Strongly Agree*.

After incomplete responses were eliminated, there were 518 participants in this analysis, 348

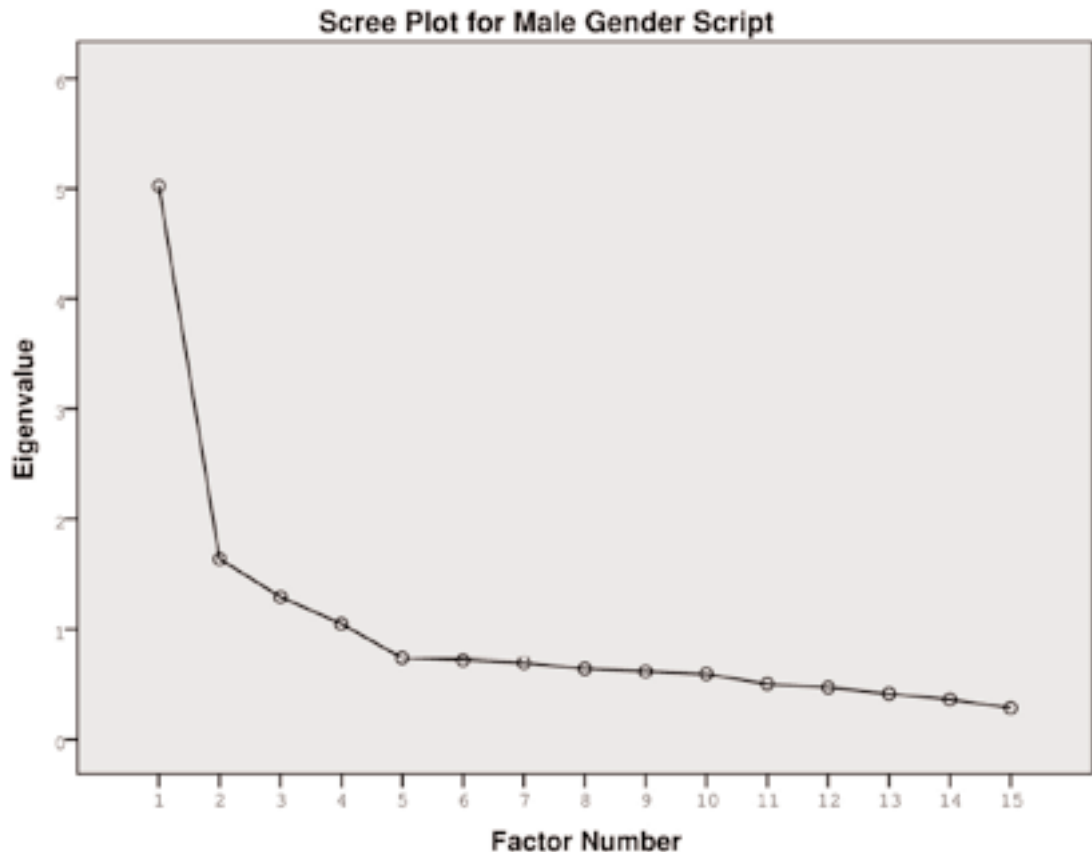


women and 170 men. The maximum likelihood estimation resolved in six iterations. Together, these accounted for 42.77% of the variance in scoring after extraction. In order to reduce the influence of the large number of relatively weak items (five items with factor loadings  $<.4$ ), the factor analysis process was repeated with the weak items removed from the analysis. This extraction resolved in five iterations and the four resulting factors (see scree plot, Figure 1) accounted for 47.99% of the variance in scoring after extraction. The observed KMO of 0.871 indicated sound underlying factors. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2 = 2363.617$ ;  $df = 105$ ;  $P < .000001$ ) indicating good factorability of the correlation matrix. The factor loadings are shown in Table 2. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability for all items was 0.862.

**Table 2.** The 15 items and their factor loadings for the Male Gender Script Questionnaire.

Subscale	Item	Factor loading
<i>Fight &amp; Win</i>	It's important to get promotion or the best salary	.732
	In life it's important to keep ahead of the competition	.660
	The salary is the most important thing about a job	.628
	It's dog eat dog, so you have to be top dog	.589
	A big house or a big car shows that you're a winner	.522
	Being a breadwinner makes me what I am	.484
<i>Mastery &amp; Control</i>	If you need help you are weak	.824
	You should be able to cope with problems on your own	.765
	It's important to be seen to be in control of your feelings	.616
	If you don't know the answer to a question you look foolish	.509
	Life is what you make it - if it goes wrong you've only yourself to blame	.480
<i>Racing</i>	If I pull up next to another car at a set of traffic lights I feel an urge to race	.986
	I don't like being overtaken on the roads	.410
<i>Protect</i>	Women and children should come first	.653
	If a burglar comes into our house it's me that should take responsibility for protecting the household	.455

**Figure 1.** Scree plot showing the loadings of the four Male Gender Script Questionnaire factors



### *Development of the Female Gender Script Questionnaire*

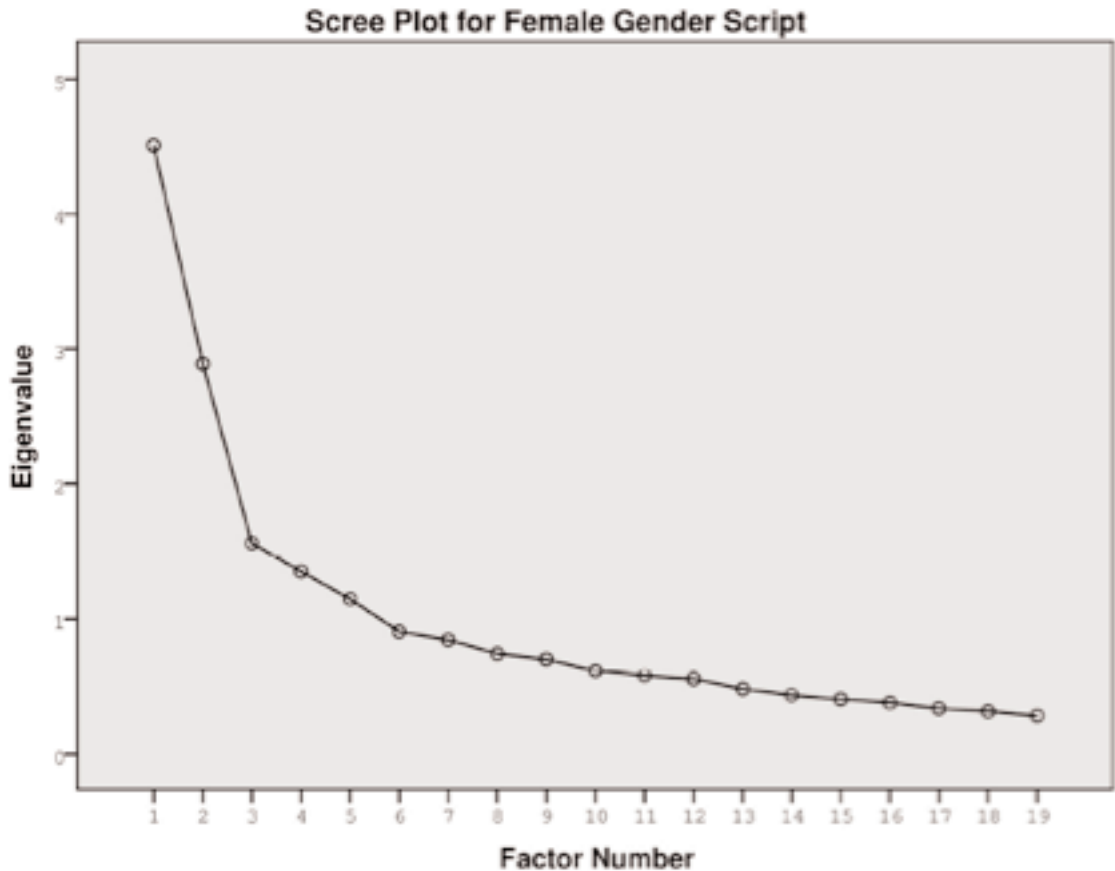
The Female Gender Script Questionnaire consisted of 19 items. The stimulus questions were answered 6-point Likert scale from 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, to 6 = *Strongly Agree*.

After incomplete responses were eliminated, there were 508 participants in this analysis, 347 women and 161 men. The maximum likelihood estimation resolved in eight iterations. Together, these accounted for 44.82% of the variance in scoring after extraction. One of the 19 items had a loading weaker than 0.4, and this was omitted from further analysis. The scree plot (Figure 2) shows that five factors were found. The observed KMO of 0.816 indicated sound underlying factors. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2 = 2739.617$ ;  $df = 171$ ;  $P < .000001$ ) indicating good factorability of the correlation matrix. The factor loadings of the 18 included items are shown in Table 3. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability for all items was 0.788.

**Table 3.** The 18 items and their factor loadings for the Female Gender Script Questionnaire.

<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Factor loading</b>
<i>Looks</i>	I feel more alive when I look attractive	.710
	People should do whatever it takes to enhance or preserve their looks	.558
	I feel annoyed if I see someone who is more attractive than I am	.561
	I don't like to leave the house unless I have made sure that I look good	.556
	I feel that there is too much pressure on me to be attractive	.512
	People who are attractive have more advantages in life	.421
<i>Fertility</i>	No matter how successful you are at work, if you don't have children you will never really be happy	.752
	It is a law of nature that people should produce at least one child	.704
	An infertile person can't reach their full potential as a human being	.615
<i>Family Harmony</i>	Raising a happy family is my true goal in life	.683
	There is no greater joy than holding your own new born baby	.663
	I won't be truly happy until I have produced a child	.571
<i>Parenting</i>	Nobody can care for their children like the biological parent can	.627
	The mother and child have a special bond that can't exist between father and child	.489
	Children suffer by being put into day care	.442
	The importance of traditional family roles is overrated	.383
<i>Family pressure</i>	I feel that society unfairly pressures me to have children	.846
	Family members annoy me by putting pressure on me to have children	.607

**Figure 2.** Scree plot showing the loadings of the five Female Gender Script Questionnaire factors



### ***Initial validation of the Male and Female Gender Script questionnaires***

To test for known-groups validity, the four Male Questionnaire subscales and five Female Questionnaire subscales were compared between groups of men and women, controlling for any effect of age using ANCOVA. Table 4 shows that in six of the 11 variables, men and women scored significantly differently in the expected direction. These differences provide support for construct validity. Racing, Family Harmony, and the total score for the Female script had similar scores in both groups, but three variables scored in the opposite direction to that predicted: women scored non-significantly higher for Fight & Win and men scored significantly higher for Fertility and Parenting.

**Table 4.** Mean and SD scores of men (N=135) and women (N=284) on the Gender Script scales and subscales, controlling for the effect of age using ANCOVA.

Scale or subscale	Gender	Mean	SD	F
<i>Fight &amp; Win</i>	Male	3.1437	1.02087	2.57
	Female	3.4310	1.17568	
<i>Mastery &amp; Control</i>	Male	2.8605	1.03528	7.76**
	Female	2.6144	.94702	
<i>Racing</i>	Male	2.6556	1.26294	2.15
	Female	2.5370	1.21513	
<i>Protect</i>	Male	4.3074	1.14928	65.67*****
	Female	3.3415	.98284	
<i>Attractive</i>	Male	3.1185	.77878	8.58**
	Female	3.4971	.89391	
<i>Fertility</i>	Male	2.1185	1.14494	7.21**
	Female	1.8333	1.04455	
<i>Family Harmony</i>	Male	3.2370	1.19969	0.61
	Female	3.3415	1.36948	
<i>Parenting</i>	Male	2.9500	.92629	5.30*
	Female	2.6259	.91452	
<i>Pressure to have children</i>	Male	2.3296	1.09129	5.43*
	Female	2.7289	1.36219	
<i>Male Gender Script</i>	Male	3.2418	.77078	13.63***
	Female	2.9810	.74384	
<i>Female Gender Script</i>	Male	2.7507	.67347	0.195
	Female	2.8053	.65189	
<i>Positive Mindset Index (PMI)</i>	Male	2.7211	.95184	13.59***
	Female	2.3574	.89992	
<i>Suicidal Ladder Total</i>	Male	6.5817	5.38469	4.87*
	Female	7.9662	5.23598	

\* P<.05, \*\* P<.01, \*\*\* P<.001, \*\*\*\* P<.0001, \*\*\*\*\* P<.00001, \*\*\*\*\* P<.000001 (two tailed).

The Suicidal Ladder and Positive Mindset Index (PMI) were strongly negatively correlated ( $r = -.539$ ,  $n = 508$ ,  $p < .000001$ ).



**Concurrent Validity**

A Pearson's *r* of 0.5 indicates moderate concurrent validity.<sup>14</sup> Table 5 shows that the correlations between the Male and Female Gender Script scales and the PAQ subscales are relatively weak. The male and female PAQ subscales were significantly positively correlated ( $r = .211, n = 464, P < .000005, 2\text{-tailed}$ ). The Male Gender Script and Female Gender Script were significantly positively correlated ( $r = .517, n = 445, P < .0000005, 2\text{-tailed}$ ) (data not shown in Table 5).

**Table 5.** Correlations (Pearson's *r* values) between the Male and Female Gender Script scores and the Male and Female subscales of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) for all participants (men and women).

	PAQ Male	PAQ Female
Male Gender Script	-.162 <sup>***</sup>	-.217 <sup>****</sup>
Female Gender Script	-.139 <sup>**</sup>	-.069

\*  $P < .05$ , \*\*  $P < .01$ , \*\*\*  $P < .001$ , \*\*\*\*  $P < .0001$  (two tailed).

**Validity of the Gender Script / Suicidality theory**

This was tested using hierarchical multiple regression with the Suicidal Ladder as the outcome variable. There were three blocks: block 1 consisted of demographic variables, block 2 consisted of other relevant background variables, and block 3 was the gender script scores. The Adjusted R Square changed at each block from 8%, to 32%, to 38%. All tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics were well within the acceptable parameters of  $>0.2$  and below 1.0, respectively.<sup>16,17</sup> Table 6 shows the contribution of the Gender Script subscales in the third block when the other variables that were entered were held constant.

**Table 6.** Third block of the hierarchical regression. The contribution of the nine Gender Script subscales to the Suicidal Ladder score, with other variables held constant, is shown at bottom of table.

Variable	$\beta$	$t$
Age	-0.114	-2.26*
Gender	0.017	0.348
Socioeconomic Class (SEC)	0.009	0.239
Ever been the victim of violence	-0.116	-2.60**
Ever been the victim of sexual abuse	-0.043	-0.96
Sexual Orientation	0.067	1.61
Alcohol in a usual week	0.010	0.25
Has drinking ever caused trouble with the law etc	-0.024	-0.60
Currently using any illegal drugs	-0.057	-1.50
Ever diagnosed with mood disorder	-0.238	-5.92****
Support from family	-0.117	-2.78**
Do you live with your partner	-0.046	-0.73
Do you live with a relation	0.001	0.03
Health quality at present?	-0.219	-5.13****
In a relationship at present	0.067	1.15
Are you divorced?	-0.014	-0.34
Number of children in household at present	-0.075	-1.77
In full time education	0.064	1.43
Employed	0.132	3.18**
<b>Gender script subscales</b>		
Fight & Win	0.161	3.36***
Mastery & Control	0.108	2.04*
Racing	0.059	1.37
Protect	0.073	1.58
Attractive	-0.010	-0.20
Fertility	-0.002	-0.04
Family Harmony	-0.148	-2.96**
Parenting	-0.031	-0.66
Pressure to have children	-0.036	-0.83

P<.05, \*\* P<.01, \*\*\* P<.001, \*\*\*\* P<.0001 (two tailed).

## Discussion

This study tested whether the traditional Gender Scripts predicted suicidality in a large sample of men and women. The questionnaire development process produced a traditional male and a traditional female questionnaire that can be summarized as follows:

A man must:

1. Be a fighter and a winner
2. Be a provider and protector (especially of women and children)
3. Have mastery and control (over his emotions)

A woman must:

1. Be glamorous / attractive
2. Bear children
3. Nurture children and family life

Overall, there was support for the hypothesized scripts associated with masculinity and femininity. Table 4 shows that six of the nine factors were scored by men and women in the expected directions. For four of these six factors (“Mastery & Control”, “Protect”, “Attractive”, and “Pressure to have children”) the differences were statistically significant. The other two factors (“Racing” and “Family Harmony”) were scored in the expected direction but non-significantly. Scores on two of the remaining three subscales, however, were in the opposite direction to that predicted, with men scoring significantly higher than women on “Fertility and Parenting” and women scoring non-significantly higher than men on “Fight & Win”. As hypothesized, men scored significantly higher on the overall male script than women. However, there was almost no difference between men and women’s scores on the overall female script.

One possible explanation for the unpredicted findings is that traditional gender scripts have been evolving and changing as a result of social and political changes over the last century. Alternatively, it may be that the scripts have underestimated the importance of certain values and norms shared by both men and women, specifically parenting and fertility for men and fighting and winning for women. Indeed “fertility and parenting” might be an important part of traditional masculinity in the sense that sexual potency and the fathering of offspring may be a key part of masculinity and masculine status, not to mention survival itself.

After the control of other variables in hierarchical regression, three of the eight Traditional Gender Script variables (Fight & Win, Mastery & Control and Family Harmony) remained significantly related to suicidality. Specifically, a greater endorsement of the Fight & Win and Mastery & Control scripts was associated with more suicidality, whilst a greater endorsement of Family Harmony items was associated with less suicidality. Women reported higher scores on the suicidal ladder than men, which supports previous research whereby women report or experience greater degrees of suicidal thinking. Women also showed less of a positive mindset than the men, a pattern which is in line with previous findings using the PMI. Both men and women scored below the PMI norm

of 3.30, with the mean score for women probably around the threshold for clinical levels of scoring.

From the perspective of clinical psychology, the findings of significant correlations between subscales and Suicidal Ladder scores have important implications for how we understand cognitions related to suicidality. A man or woman breaking the traditional rules might feel that an irreparable transgression has been made. Perhaps especially for those aspiring to traditionally masculine values, the pressures of not living up to the rigid demands<sup>18</sup> of the male script might, under certain conditions, cause extreme psychological distress. For example, someone who is the main wage earner in a household may feel a failure because of their belief that they should always be able to provide for their family. In contrast, according to the femininity script, someone who aspires to a happy family life more than a happy work life may lose their job but still find fulfillment in the home.

The degree of concurrent validity found in this study raises interesting questions about the nature of traditional gender scripts. Table 5 shows that although the correlations between the Gender Script scales and the PAQ subscales are statistically significant, the correlations are relatively weak. These findings therefore do not provide evidence of concurrent validity of the Gender Script scales with the PAQ, and indeed the findings might provide evidence of discriminant validity regarding the PAQ. This suggests that the Traditional Gender Script scales are measuring something other than what is being measured by the PAQ. The PAQ is a measure of typically masculine and typically feminine attributes or traits, whereas the Traditional Gender Script scales are measuring attitudes to prescriptive norms regarding specific aspects of life. The present findings highlight the complexity of gender constructs and suggest themes that future research may follow.

### *Strengths*

A key strength of the present study is that it is one of the only studies which has examined suicide from a gender sensitive perspective. The Traditional Gender Scripts appear to have some good psychometric properties, for example, good internal reliability and adequate factor loadings. Known-groups validity was good for overall male script scoring, on which men scored significantly higher, but there was little sex difference in scoring on the female script. Similarly, although most of the subscales were scored in the predicted direction, some were not, notably women scoring significantly higher on Fight & Win, and men scoring significantly higher on Fertility and Parenting. These results probably demonstrate the complex patterns of how men and women today relate to traditional gender scripts. It is unlikely that the unexpected findings are a result of the low power of statistical tests, as all were sufficiently powered. It would be interesting to see whether scores would be more in line with the predicted direction if the survey were administered in a more traditional culture.

### *Weaknesses*

The sample obtained was somewhat limited in its representativeness of the general population. Participants for the study were recruited from websites directed towards mental health themes. This may have led to a sampling bias in which we picked up more people with an interest in, or personal experience of, mental health problems. Furthermore, men are less likely to volunteer for studies of this kind than women, thus it is possible the men in this survey are less traditional in their views

than men who did not volunteer to take the survey. Also, the men who volunteered for this study of suicidality may identify less with traditional gender stereotypes by virtue of their experiences of distress. These sampling issues may have contributed to the unexpected findings on some subscales.

Suicide is a rare event and rare events by their very nature are difficult to predict. The survey measured suicidal ideation (a cognition rather than a behavior) on which women tend to score higher than men, and although suicidal ideation is a risk factor it is not necessarily predictive of actual suicide. Indeed we should not expect to see the sex difference in suicide replicated in a study of the relationship between traditional gender scripts and suicidal ideation. Whilst there is a correlation between Traditional Gender Scripts and Suicidal Ladder scores this is not necessarily predictive of actual suicide. Furthermore, although the Suicidal Ladder showed strong concurrent validity with the Positive Mindset Index suicidal ideation may be composed of various facets not assessed by the Suicidal Ladder such as fluctuations over time.

### ***Future directions for research***

The Male and Female Gender scripts need further validation. The scripts and the underlying theory should be further developed in light of the findings from this study. This might involve comparison with other measures of traditional/hegemonic masculine norms from the US, such as the Masculine Role Norms Inventory.<sup>19</sup>

Also future research might explore exactly how scripts lead to increased risk of suicide. For example, if someone strongly believes that they must have ‘mastery and control’ we might explore exactly which situations lead to greatest risk. Similarly, the context in which Family Harmony factor may be protective should be explored, for example, how much it relies on a sense of social support. Processes and pathways through which these scripts contribute to increased risk needs further investigation.

### ***Clinical applications***

There is some evidence to indicate that scripts associated with gender may be important in determining how people respond when faced with difficult times or increased cognitions and behaviour associated with an increased risk of suicide. Understanding how these scripts work could offer some support to clinicians when presented with clients who are suicidal. For example, this study found that the “Mastery & Control” aspect of male gender-specific thinking is connected with an increased suicidal thought. This means that clinical interventions could potentially be targeted towards helping men by either challenging this rule or applying it differently in their lives. For example, a man could be helped to see that by seeking help they are taking more control and attaining more mastery than if they fail to seek help.<sup>20</sup> Such an approach could help to reduce the sense of shame in those men who do seek help and could also influence the way that health services (statutory and voluntary) are advertised to the large numbers of men who are at risk of suicide but who might otherwise avoid seeking help. Equally, there is evidence from this study to show that it could be important when working with both men and women in therapy to assess the extent to which they are subject to the pressures of the “Fight & Win” rule in their lives. Deconstructing these traditionally male pressures in therapy might help both men and women feel more tolerant of their own vulner-



abilities and mistakes and thus in turn become less at risk of suicide.

Incorporating our understanding of gender into suicide training could also help to further develop clinicians' understanding of the importance of gendered differences in suicidal thoughts and behaviour. It could increase clinicians' effectiveness in intervening, thus reducing the chances that someone may take their own life. There may be opportunities to begin to develop preventative interventions that reframe suicide in relations to gender scripts to encourage more protective ways of responding to suicidal ideation.

### ***Conclusions***

Trying to understand the factors which lead to people taking their own lives is a challenge. However, gender remains the most obvious risk factor for suicide and yet is one of the least researched areas within the field. This study has taken some first steps in generating hypotheses for explaining these gender differences and in providing preliminary supporting evidence for these.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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John Barry, PhD, MSc, BA, Chartered Psychologist and Research Associate at UCL Medical School, London.



Martin Seager is a consultant clinical psychologist and an adult psychotherapist. He is a clinician, lecturer, campaigner, broadcaster and activist on mental health issues. He studied at Oxford University, Edinburgh University and the Tavistock Clinic and worked in the NHS for over 30 years and was head of psychological services in two large Mental Health Trusts. He has been an honorary consultant psychologist with the Central London Samaritans since 2006 and is also a member of the Mental Health Advisory Board of the College of Medicine. He is also an activist on male gender issues and a founding member of a male psychology research group and chairs an annual conference on male psychology issues.



Luke Sullivan is a chartered clinical psychologist and creator and director of Men's Minds Matter. His specialist interest in men's mental health began in 2004 when he discovered how little there was in terms of services for men or information and research that considered the specific psychological needs and experiences of men and boys. He can be reached at [luke@mensminds-matter.com](mailto:luke@mensminds-matter.com).

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# Making a New Male Studies Class: Lessons Learned from Developing and Teaching an Online Male Studies Survey Course

PETER B. GRAY AND TIMOTHY MCHALE



*The aim of the present paper is to discuss the process of designing and teaching a new online male studies class and to share the lessons learned throughout the process. We provide our own commentary in conjunction with perceptions of student engagement. We hope this paper will benefit instructors and possibly other audiences by discussing the merits and challenges of teaching a male online course. Our pedagogical approach relied on use of a breadth of topics with an overarching interdisciplinary bend. We assigned a mixture of books, articles, and media that were sufficiently accessible for the student audience. Both male and female students appeared to benefit from taking this course judging by their insightful analyses and enthusiasm for course content.*

**Keywords:** male studies, online, teaching, pedagogy, interdisciplinary

## Introduction

In fall 2012, the senior author of the paper participated in a two-day mini-conference in New York sponsored by the Foundation for Male Studies. It was a stimulating and inspiring experience. A small group of scholars shared their views on various topics central to the scientific study of human males. However, in the wake of that mini-conference, it was not clear what to do with those conversations. What kinds of tangible contributions could ensue? In contemplating this question, one answer was to create a new survey class on males to teach at a large U.S. state university (where we are based). Some of the initial discussion also included the possibility of making the class a MOOC (massive, open, online course), though various considerations such as expense and technical requirements pushed instead toward an online class restricted to our host university.

The aim of the present manuscript is to discuss the process of designing and teaching a new online male studies class. This has been a rich and interesting experience to us authors—one of us a tenured faculty member and the other a PhD student who assisted in the administration of the course, particularly with grading student assignments. We use the term “we” throughout though we largely filled different and complementary roles in designing and teaching the course.

As the field of male studies represents a recent amalgamation, we suspect that the audience of this journal may find the lessons learned from designing and teaching this online course to be of use. Some readers may be in the process of envisioning their own courses or a broader male studies curriculum. Some readers may wonder about relative merits teaching an online versus in-person class. Still other readers may be curious about the reactions of students to taking the class, such as whether they appeared to enjoy or find materials problematic. Moreover, some readers may wonder specifically about any political concerns raised by students, a possible concern given some of the media hype surrounding contrasts between “male studies” and “masculinity studies.” The creation of a male studies curriculum at the University of South Australia has also garnered political attention. We hope that the items we note in the present manuscript address these and other questions that may be of interest to readers.

## What kind of class to create?

Various considerations arose when conceptualizing this male studies class. One of the first questions was whether to design a class for an in-person or online format. The decision was made to go with an online format for several reasons. One is that the senior author wanted to leave open the possibility of adapting online materials to a potential MOOC, if logistics were to make that feasible. Another consideration was enrollment. In order to be taught, a minimum enrollment is required at the large U.S. state university where the class originated. It was pure guesswork whether any or enough students would enroll in a first-time male studies class to enable even teaching it; an online class format, because of the more flexible scheduling inherent to them, was thought to be helpful in addressing enrollment concerns. At the same time, it was felt early in the process that the topics and materials of a male studies class would benefit from face-to-face discussion. Spontaneous exchanges are more feasible in an in-person format, sensitive questions can be addressed and potentially charged issues defused, and the ability for students to compare their own views and experiences with others’ is enhanced in face-to-face discussions. These comparisons between the benefits and concerns over in-person versus online formats represent perceived trade-offs in the delivery of contents.



Another major consideration was the nature of the class—to be taught as a “survey” course. A survey class would need to cover a breadth of topics under the umbrella of male studies. This would privilege breadth over depth. Without previous experience offering a class on male studies at our host university, it was not only unclear whether enrollment would be adequate for a survey course, but whether demand would be sufficient for more specialized offerings on topics such as male legal concerns or fatherhood.

Still another consideration was the student audience. We are in an Anthropology department. Our home academic department, combined with our training, compel us to emphasize concepts and examples that might differ from those of scholars in other disciplines. Most notably, we feature evolutionary and cross-cultural perspectives on any set of phenomena, including males. Yet we wanted to design a class that could reach a wider and interdisciplinary audience. Enrollment concerns were one reason to seek a wider student audience inside and outside of Anthropology. Another reason is the belief that the field of male studies is inherently interdisciplinary. While different disciplines may have different emphases, there is still a core of theory, methods, research, and applications that can be drawn from an interdisciplinary landscape to make up what amounts to male studies. We wanted to attract students from other social sciences, but also potentially from humanities and biomedical backgrounds. Accordingly, class materials such as examples, readings and media selections were intended to draw from a broad spectrum. Moreover, because we teach in the U.S. we wanted to ensure that assignments and resources were chosen to be of relevance to students’ lives.

To draw in students of wide backgrounds for a survey class on male studies, it was best to teach such as class without requiring an undue array of specific prerequisite courses. The class was offered at an academic level that required students to effectively have taken the equivalent of a survey class in their particular field (such as Psychology or Gender Studies). This requirement equivalent ensured that students had some previous coursework but also did not need to have taken many specific courses.

### **Putting together a syllabus**

With some central questions about the aims and audience of the course addressed, many new questions were raised in the effort to craft a syllabus. What books and articles would be assigned as class readings? What topics would be addressed? How would students be graded? Different scholars might pursue different answers to these kinds of class logistical questions, but we also imagine that there would be overlap among scholars teaching within the scope of male studies.

The class syllabus employed in spring 2014 is included as an Appendix. By including it here, readers can readily discern the topics, assigned readings, and graded materials, among other core issues. A handful of male studies syllabi can be found through online searches, enabling some comparisons (e.g., a search reveals that Miles Groth teaches a class in Psychology at Wagner College in which Gilmore’s and Baumeister’s books are also assigned). Toward determining the topics and readings to employ for the class, the senior author drew upon his 15 years of experience conducting research and teaching, including with a research emphasis on the evolutionary, endocrine and cross-cultural approaches to human male social behavior. He also solicited input from several colleagues, including Ed Stephens and Chris von Rueden.

We perceive the need for some kind of text that could serve as a central resource to a male studies survey course. There currently is no single book that serves that function. We assigned a mixture of books and academic articles (articles that were uploaded as PDFs and available to students

on a university library website). The books were chosen because they complemented each other, were topically relevant and viewed as sufficiently accessible for the student audience. The Baumeister book addresses a host of male concerns from social psychological and to a lesser degree evolutionary perspectives. The Gilmore book features ethnographic accounts of manhood in variable cultural settings from around the globe. The Gray and Anderson book is an integrative book on fatherhood, incorporating evolutionary, cross-cultural and other topical insights. The Kimmel book focuses on young adult American male (e.g., ages 16-24) concerns, making it of topical relevance to the student demographics at our university. We considered many other books but found them wanting in various respects, such as in being dated, too topically restricted, insufficiently integrative, or otherwise.

We only used a few assigned articles. As an alternative to assigning books, more articles or other kinds of reading could be employed in such a class. We identified a few readings that helped fill conceptual and empirical gaps in the books assigned; examples include the papers on Pittsburgh young men's mental health, and the brief review of Australian male health. The Farrell reading, taken from the inaugural issue of "New Male Studies," was assigned because of Farrell's seminal writings on males, with the article a useful entrée to the general subject and in place of the somewhat-dated book upon which the interview drew ("The Myth of Male Power"). We believe that there exists a large body of research on what can be labeled as "male studies." However, the body of articles in which that work is published is not available as a reader at the moment, and assembling such a reader would entail a significant amount of interdisciplinary reading and integration.

### **Putting together the class contents**

In an in-person lecture class, an instructor typically prepares an outline and contents, often aided by PowerPoint or a related technology such as Prezi. For an online course, the class contents have similarities and differences. As far as similarities, the array of topics may be similar, as may many of the assigned readings. But there are differences in the way contents are prepared, including greater use in online courses of electronic media such as websites.

Toward preparing the online course contents, the senior author distilled notes on the topics identified in the syllabus from books, articles, websites and through discussions with the junior author and two undergraduate male volunteers. Approximately 40,000 words of written content were prepared for the class, making for a significant amount of work. For a given topic (or module, with one module addressed in each week of class), an outline, aims, and key features were presented, with an attempt made to create relevant, current, and compelling content.

While an attempt was made to ensure the American students enrolling in the class would have their interests in males addressed directly, a limitation of the available materials was in ensuring a consistent international and cross-cultural scope as well. Much of the impetus for male studies has been in just a few Western countries, and this is reflected in the availability of relevant resources. Gilmore's book ("Manhood in the Making") was published in 1990, but draws upon earlier ethnographic materials. While it has interesting cross-cultural material, it is somewhat dated, and more qualitative and quantitative data on male issues in cross-cultural and international scope are sorely needed. We provided links to international websites (e.g., on crime and education) to facilitate the inclusion of an international view of males, but the data in these websites (such as Interpol) do not bring males to life in the same way that richer, focused studies do.

One of the strengths of teaching an online male studies class is the ability to draw upon ex-

isting Internet resources. Some of these sites are specific to work on males such as the GoodMen-Project.com. Other sites provide data of relevance, as in the UN and CDC websites that make available information on sex differences in educational attainment and longevity. Links can be readily embedded in online contents, and useful websites also noted. Images, however, pose their own challenges. Many are subject to copyright, which led us to largely rely upon open access sources, particularly Wikimedia.org. Different institutions have variable capacity to generate their own online course materials (such as interactive figures) and variably subscribe to other services (e.g., Corbus) that offer use of copyrighted images, which is relevant to putting together visuals and interactives to complement the written contents for each module.

The field could benefit, however, from a resource that compiles studies, websites, images, videos and relevant stories in the news. While a number of web resources provide such material, they are scattered. An instructor can provide links to the most useful set of these to help students locate them, and possibly incorporate them into class exercises and discussions. Online resources give one lots of freedom to explore the inclusion of creative avenues, but the search efforts can be time-consuming, costly and limited by access.

The use of relevant videos can be a major addition to an online course. Our university subscribes to several streaming video resources (e.g., Films On Demand) and has purchased access to an array of videos. We scanned the set of streamed videos to which our institution had access, seeking ones that were relevant and interesting. This yielded several videos that students were required to stream including one on ape violence and another on testosterone and male social behavior. There are a few other video resources that can be streamed. YouTube provides a massive amount of content, including short clips that can be inserted in the body of prepared written contents for a given module to help break it up. As an example, we used a brief clip available on YouTube of Richard Dawkins interviewing Randy Nesse about the evolutionary-based reasons why males tend to live shorter lives than females. A few TED talks are of relevance, including one used in the class featuring Simon Baron-Cohen discussing the extreme male brain. If the field of male studies were able to bring together a set of leading scholars to record brief TED-like presentations for use in such courses, this could prove quite useful as a resource. Short videos of the senior author were recorded for watching at the start of each module. These short videos were restricted to 2-4 minutes in length in order to state the key topics for a given module, but without repeating written contents. The short duration of these videos nonetheless requires technical capacity for recording and editing them, and the short duration was at the advice of our online education staff who noted that students tend to be little interested watching a professor speak at length in a recorded video.

### **Class topics and take-home points**

The set of class topics explored is given in the syllabus. In the wake of having taught the class in spring 2014, we did not perceive any glaring topical omissions among this set. However, there was more to be said about some topics than others. Collapsing family relationships to a single week proved quite daunting, and necessitated many assigned pages for that module. Far less material was available for the modules devoted to mental health and legal dimensions. In seeking to apply class concepts to contemporary issues, new questions were raised about the relevance of these applications to different student audiences. As an example, discussion of the legal dimensions of male studies featured cases such as Title IX that have contemporary relevance to U.S. audiences but not necessarily elsewhere. Indeed, much of the work (e.g., Warren Farrell's foundational contributions) is geared toward Western countries like the U.S. and Australia, but proves limited when acknowledging gaps in a more international view of manhood (e.g., what do male soldiers perceive are the benefits and

costs of their roles? How does the rhetoric of male crisis translate in a country where males are the majority of college graduates?).

The topics were generated through readings, syntheses, and a sense of what would be key arenas of personal and contemporary importance to males generally as well as students enrolled in the course. Much of the discussion concerning a need for male studies centers on several key domains in which male indicators lag behind those of females: education, work, and health. These topics thus appeared to warrant their own foci in respective modules. Other topics appeared to stand out as needing their own modules because males predominate demographically (e.g., most violent crimes are committed by males) or these topics are central to how males organize their lives (e.g., friendship, sports and family relationships). A survey course needs to ensure its breadth covers those topics that could be explored in more depth in subsequent programs too (e.g., entire classes can be devoted to the study of male health, as recognized by a program for male studies in Australia).

In the concluding module to the course, our goal was to provide the class a set of 18 take-home points that reinforced key elements and central themes raised throughout the male studies class. We share these 18 take-home points here.

*There are different perspectives on males.* The study of males is an inherently interdisciplinary effort. Among the perspectives under which males can be viewed, these include social constructionist, biomedical, activist, and common sense or popular cultural representations.

*An integrative, evolutionary approach offers one means to understanding males.* By this view, humans can be understood with respect to complementary aspects of phylogeny, function, mechanism, and development (i.e., Tinbergen's framework). Humans are most closely related to other primates, particularly apes, and most specifically chimpanzees and bonobos. Ancestral males have been subject to evolutionary processes, including selection. Many sexually dimorphic human traits evolved under the influence of sexual selection. Yet males change across the life course (development), with a study of mechanism helping elucidate how those physiological changes take place.

*Sex differences in human anatomy, physiology and behavior exist.* While differences in reproductive anatomy may be readily apparent, differences in brain and hormonal systems also exist, and both regulate and respond to features of the social world such as competitive and mating encounters. Importantly, sex differences are only averages, with variations between males and females potentially exhibiting major overlap. The magnitude (or even lack thereof) of some sex difference differs across traits. Many sex differences are understandable when viewed within ancestral patterns of reproductive competition and success (e.g., why males have higher oxygen carrying capacities, which is helpful for fighting).

*Males vary.* There is lots of variation in males, with males often displaying greater variation in traits (such as height or IQ) than females. Males vary within- and between-groups. Each of us is truly unique, but also part of wider patterns of variation.

*Males must be viewed in context.* Male physiology, behavior and meaning vary by context. There may be cross-cultural or international differences (e.g., in the definition of masculine ideals). There may be differences among U.S. ethnic groups. There may be differences with respect to social status (e.g., as indexed by socioeconomic status in the U.S.). This variation among males also arises through the interplay of mechanisms across an individual's life course (e.g., learning social cues about appropriate behavior) in context. The evidence of male plasticity adjusting to contexts belies

any simplistic deterministic views.

*The study of males recognizes an inherent politics.* Males may have competing agendas with other males within groups. Male coalitions may have competing agendas with other male coalitions. Males and females may have different viewpoints. There may be male-male political tensions with respect to other factors like age. There may be tensions between individual and group interests. The variation among males belies any simplistic view that males have it good (e.g., the fallacy of male privilege recognizes that some males have it good and others have it bad).

*How sex differences in outcomes are assessed is important.* Sex differences may be viewed as evidence of bias; they may also be evidence of sex-specific preferences. In a related vein, males and females may have similar capacities, but different motivations. Throughout class, we have seen examples in which sex differences in outcomes such as mortality, jobs, or income exist, but how these are interpreted is a crucial question.

*Males cooperate and compete.* Males form alliances and coalitions, sometimes to compete against other alliances or coalitions. Male social capacities show a proclivity for engaging in coalitional activities (e.g., nationalism, identification with a favored sports team). Male friendships can be emotionally rewarding and adaptive.

*Males strive for status.* That makes sense for a social primate, given the linkages between male status and positive outcomes such as health measures and reproduction. For humans, males may specialize in protection, politicking, and providing valuable economic goods such as food. Male status-striving can be conceptualized as work, with males often undertaking risky kinds of work that yield public goods (such as group protection). Male status may be achieved through dominance interactions, but may also be freely conferred by others recognizing one's reputation and prestige.

*Males are sexual beings.* Males advertise to and court particular individuals, with important attributes including attractiveness, age, sexual orientation, personality cues, and otherwise. Sex may be short-term, as in hooking up, or longer-term, as in lifelong sexual partnerships. Males tend to have higher sexual desires than females, although male sexual desire is contingent on various factors including age, health status and cultural context.

*Males tend to engage in family life.* Long-term reproductive bonds may have arisen within the past two million years of hominin evolution, with paternal care a defining feature of our species. At the same time, the specifics of family life can vary cross-culturally and historically, as in the kinds of investments fathers make (e.g., livestock vs. helping with homework).

*Males can be violent.* In our close relatives, chimpanzees, males sometimes kill other males. In humans, most killings between- and within-societies involve men killing other men. Young males are most likely to be involved in love triangles that take a homicidal turn. Another common motive for violent encounters is revenge. Many features of male anatomy and physiology (e.g., upper body musculature) appear designed to aid success in fighting. Males may engage in sexual coercion both of females and other males (e.g. in gay male partnerships).

*Males often watch and play sports.* An appreciation for sports can begin with male-male physical play and aggression in other species (e.g., "rough and tumble play"). Sex differences in playing sports cross-culturally and in the U.S. exist, especially for team sports. Cross-culturally, sports have often served as training grounds for success hunting or in warfare. Males tend to watch more sports than females.



*Males often specialize in crime and punishment.* The more violent the crime, the more likely a male is to have committed it. Male crimes and punishment vary cross-culturally, with respect to age, and other factors such as socioeconomic status (e.g., “white collar crimes” in finance). There may be adaptive evolutionary foundations to crimes, such as theft. Most protective services (e.g., private security) against crimes are provided by males. Males are the vast majority of those in jail or given severe punishments such as the death penalty.

*Males learn, sometimes in schools.* The learning environments of hunter-gatherers typically included mixed age and sex groups. Cross-culturally, males have learned within variable social environments, including by observing (rather than formal teaching) older individuals, as in apprenticeships. In an evolutionary or historical scope, schools are a recent kind of institution. There are sex differences in various school-related outcomes, including males more often being expelled from school. In the U.S. and a majority of countries, women earn more college degrees than men, but there are also countries where men earn more college degrees than women. Fields of study in school show some sex differences, such as males more often focusing on engineering.

*Males are mortal.* Consistent with slight polygyny among our ancestors, human males have shorter average life spans than females, although aspects of family life may be protective. There are some male-specific health concerns such as sexual or reproductive health (e.g., prostate cancer). Males tend to use fewer health resources. Mental health outcomes also show some cases in which males have higher prevalence, including ADHD, autism, personality disorders, and substance abuse disorders (such as drug or alcohol abuse).

*Males meet the law.* There are various legal dimensions with a male-specific angle. These include family law (e.g., divorce, child custody), circumcisions, workplace safety, Title IX, violence, and sexual behavior (e.g., more laws have proscribed male-male sexual behaviors than female-female sexual behaviors).

*For the topics considered in class, there is social and contemporary relevance.* The applications are too diverse to list here. Yet some include concerns over male work (e.g., un- or underemployment, death professions), family involvement (e.g., why are some dads involved, but others not), the military (e.g., incorporating males and females in various roles, including along the front lines), and sports (e.g., how Title IX impacts university sports offerings to students).

## **Class Mechanics**

How were students graded? They took two exams, a midterm and a final. Questions for those exams were multiple choice and true/false in order to enable automated grading. Questions drew upon the full array of assigned materials—prepared contents, streamed videos, and assigned readings. To provide more dynamic and interactive graded assignments, several other exercises were employed. Students were asked to participate in regular discussion forums. For each module, two or three questions were posed to students. Students were required to participate in at least ten such discussion forums in at minimum five different modules in order to garner participation points.

To illustrate discussion forum questions, here are the three employed during the module devoted to sports, which also happened to coincide with the U.S. college basketball tournament: 1) The world of sports encompasses a tremendous variety of competitive athletic games. Briefly discuss some of the cross-cultural patterning in sports. Perhaps you could identify a sport that differs from those typically played and watched in the U.S., including the cultural context in which that sport is

embedded. You might also consider some of the most common functions served by sports participation cross-culturally. 2) Discuss your experience playing a sport. What sport did you play? What did you get out of playing that sport at the time, and what might be some longer-term consequences of your having played that sport? 3) Lots of people like watching sports, as noted in the present module, including pages assigned in Kimmel's book. Since it's basketball tournament time, even the president has chimed in, sharing his picks (e.g., on the White House website and on ESPN). Why do so many people enjoy watching sports? What are some of the demographics of who watches sports, including different types of sports (e.g., individual vs. team sports; sports with and without physical contact; etc.)? What might be some downsides of people watching sports?

Discussion forums are one of the brightest elements of online courses. They ensure that students less likely to speak out in class have their voices heard. They enable students to see what their colleagues think of a specific issue. By virtue of requiring a written post, discussion forums can also require students to formulate their ideas clearly and ideally in expressive writing. We were consistently impressed by the caliber of student posts in discussion forums, particularly in content. Indeed, some of the most compelling comments drew upon personal or related experiences of relevance to class topical discussions. With a number of students having served in the military, they had opinions on male military roles informed from firsthand experience. Many students had travelled or had family from international backgrounds, contributing to the cultural scope of discussions.

In addition to responding to the discussion questions posed for a given week, discussion forums offered students a unique opportunity to comment directly on their fellow students' posts they found most compelling. Such replies created an ongoing thread between one or more classmates. The threads were often expanded by students to include additional reflections building upon the original post that typically included incorporating shared life experiences or similar opinions to add greater depth and analysis. Interestingly, these exchanges were highly positive and were most often characterized by students giving positive feedback and encouragement to one another, commending their original insights. Despite the inherent limitations of an online course in terms of face-to-face interaction, the discussion forum and additional thread postings appeared to foster an environment in which students could still freely exchange ideas and build a sense of camaraderie between male and female students alike.

The remaining graded activities consisted of a male movie exercise, male interview exercise, and a male-themed blog entry. The male movie exercise required students to watch a movie of their choosing that featured a male or group of males as the focus. Examples include "Fight Club," "Fast and Furious," and "The Good the Bad, and the Ugly." Students were required to write 2-3 pages of text, double spaced, briefly describing the movie and focal male(s) and describe two key aspects of male thinking and/or behavior featured in the movie (e.g., male violence, male risk taking; paternal roles), with specific examples given. Students were encouraged to address how male thinking and behavior might have changed across time or vary cross-culturally and how male patterned behaviors might be interpreted from an evolutionary perspective. The male movie exercise was chosen because male-centric films provide students the opportunity to use general themes presented in the class to address the question of why several male archetypes and stereotypes appear ubiquitous, all the while identifying underlying variation within a contemporary setting. Students appeared to have a real enthusiasm for writing about their favorite male film and this exercise appeared to instill a deeper understanding of male behavior. For example, several students said their understanding of male risk-taking behavior was observed in a new light since taking this class and that it makes sense why men are more motivated to choose riskier professions and be portrayed as the hero in cinema. This exercise forced students to begin to think about broad patterns in male thinking and behavior that

may be traceable all the way back to our evolutionary history as a species. As such, this exercise was intended to have students begin to consider a number of potential factors (e.g., social, evolutionary) that may be responsible for reinforcing male-patterned behavior within a deeper context.

The remaining two exercises assigned for the class were designed in such a way as to facilitate a more personal and experiential interpretation of male thinking and behavior. Students were required to conduct a semi-structured interview with a male of their choosing and submit a short write up (~400-500 words) summarizing the results of the interview. The aim of this assignment was to report a firsthand, contemporary account of how a male of their choosing experiences the world. Students often asked similar questions that related to manliness. For example, some questions included: "What do you think it means to be a man? How do you define what it means to be masculine?" The majority of the written interviews were quite insightful and very interesting to read. Many students expressed common themes uncovered during their interviews that paralleled nicely with class themes. For example, interviewees often were described as saying that boys should "toughen up" and "hide pain." Also there was a central focus on duty such that "Real men sacrifice for others and their family." Additionally, there was a lot of individual variation that led to men to struggle to achieve their goals and to become "a success." It was interesting to see the student's reactions to the reported sex-specific social pressures and stressors that men face in their everyday lives (e.g., the need to be a provider). Based on the commentary, we found this assignment to be illuminating for many of the female students in particular. Several of the female students stated that after completing this assignment they have a better appreciation for the struggles faced by men, and about which they were previously unaware.

The last written exercise required students to compose a 600-1000 word blog entry that focused on some aspect of males. Several blog links were provided to students as references to give students a feel for what a polished blog entry should look like. The idea was to have students choose a topic of their liking that related to one or more class concepts discussed throughout the course. Given that this was the last written assignment, this exercise was designed to have students show us they were now capable of synthesizing one or more class concepts and their own personal reflections into a creative and thoughtful analysis. Again, we found this assignment not only highly rewarding to the students but to us as well. The blog entries raised several interesting themes that were fascinating to read as a grader. For instance, several students identified that today represents a changing environment of masculinity in terms of what it means to be a "man." These definitions may be quite different from how previous generations would have interpreted masculinity. Yet within this changing social climate there still remained many parallels between the previous generation's stressors and the struggles men face today. Moreover, students identified that 21<sup>st</sup> century social dynamics require us to embrace changing definitions of traditional gender roles. More gender equality provides the impetus for a shift in traditional maternal and paternal roles, especially as we see a continual rise in women as bread winners and more women college graduates. How men cope with their new roles, such as stay-at-home dads, is another area that is of great curiosity for many of the students. One of the most consistent themes raised in this exercise was the observation that men, in addition to women, can be victimized as well. For example, many students raised the question, "Why is breast cancer awareness so highly publicized when men suffer and die more often from prostate cancer in comparison?" Additionally, several injustices were noted in the judicial system when it comes to custody battles (e.g., women receive custody 90% of the time compared to men) and the disproportionate longer sentencing of men compared to woman when committing the same crimes. Taken together, the biggest revelations in this assignment often were best expressed by women in the class, many of whom stated that this course provided them with a deeper appreciation for the struggles faced by men. Thus, the experience of taking this male studies course allowed them to have a better

understanding of what it is like to “walk a day in their shoes.” Here are a few quotes of particular relevance provided by three female students that sum up their own personal reflections:

- 1) “Since this course, I look at them (men) in new eyes, with a different reasoning into why they are the way they are.”
- 2) “After taking this class, I have realized there are more to men than I thought there was. Which also aides into the fact that men are just as complicated as women (Ha I knew it!).”
- 3) “How deeply engraved it is in society that we don’t give it a second thought, however, there is not only sexism toward females but also towards males.”

### **What did we learn from teaching this online male studies class?**

Apart from the quality of student engagement in discussion forums and graded assignments, we learned much by teaching this new online male studies class. One of the first surprises was in the student demographics. While being unsure whether enough students might enroll in such a class to enable teaching it, we allowed a maximum of 80 students to enroll in it, and more might have if the maximum were allowed to have floated higher. That number meant it was not possible to respond to individual student’s discussion posts; instead, the senior author replied to students generally, pointing out themes and further points of discussion. That number also stretches the limits of grading generally. The use of automated exams and exam scoring helps offset the amount of time required for grading written exercises. How many written exercises can be graded depends on how long those take to grade, how many students take a class, and the personnel involved in grading.

Of the 80 students who enrolled in the class, we estimate based on names that about two-thirds were females. This surprised us, given the topical focus on males. However, in an initial discussion post soliciting reasons why students chose to enroll in the course, many female students mentioned having taken women’s studies classes but wanting to learn more about males. If one of the arguments for a male studies curriculum is to engage males directly, then this argument is weakened if more females than males enroll in male studies classes. Reasons why various student demographics might enroll in male studies courses is itself a topic worthy of study. The majors of students were also quite varied. This demonstrates that the interdisciplinary scope of the class, including in requirements, was mirrored in the variable majors from which students were drawn. The most common student majors were Anthropology (11), an interdisciplinary studies concentration (9), Criminal Justice (9), Psychology (8), Biology (5), Art (4), and Sociology (3), with other majors represented including Hospitality, Business, History, Human Services, Art History, Computer Science, English, Communications, Pre-nursing, Early Childhood Education, Theater, Philosophy and Political Science. The distribution of majors among enrolled students also means that, despite having originated in an Anthropology department, the course drew only a small fraction of students majoring in Anthropology.

Our experience designing and implementing this course surprised us in many ways. For one, the enthusiasm and engagement with the material and the quality of work produced by the students provides further impetus for the need for more male studies university courses. Men and women both benefit from being offered such a course, with women often having articulated the most insightful reflections in response to the material. Ultimately, a male studies course provides a logical balance to more female-oriented studies, which in turn provide students a deeper appreciation for the behavioral sex differences and the struggles faced by each sex. This experience has shown us that

students can develop a deeper understanding how sex differences emerge in response to differing social and adaptive problems and this in turn raises awareness that males and females still face injustices today. Offering a new male studies course provides a window into the lives of the male, one in which is not often given even in today's higher academic institutions. Students who participated in this course consistently showed a shift in their perspective that expanded compassion and a deeper appreciation for both sexes.

### **What did students get from class?**

In the last module of the course, students were asked about their big-picture assessments of the class, such as what they found most and least interesting. The answers were illuminating. Many answers juxtaposed what had been learned from women's studies courses. This class, with its focus on males, offered a balance against those many classes focused upon females. Several also noted the tone of this male studies class: that it was blunt at times in articulating what could be positives and negatives about males, but also presented data and allowed students to develop their own beliefs. This differed from a female-as-victim narrative that a number of students had heard in women's studies courses.

As far as the topics and elements of class students appeared to most and least enjoy, these topics varied across students. Some most enjoyed the topical focus on education, while others least enjoyed it. A number commented on the friendship module being a favorite, while that on legal aspects of males garnered mixed views. Many comments enthusiastically embraced the spectrum of topics and the class as a whole. Judging by comments, the class appeared to be a general success. A number of students said that discussion forums were highlights, enabling them to comment on topics of contemporary importance, but also see what their colleagues felt about an issue. One of the most poignant of comments was by a non-traditional student who commented upon understanding why her deceased police officer husband had engaged in a risky act of altruism to save a would-be suicidal male—this was part of the discussion in a module devoted to males and work, and the reasons and consequences why males predominate in the 'heroism' professions. That said, several students expressed desires to view more videos, and the amount of reading was either seen to be at or exceeding a maximum amount for students' tastes. Kimmel's and Baumeister's books also appeared to be more polarizing than the other readings. Some loved Kimmel's "Guyland," while others felt the opposite, for reasons including writing style, relevance and views of male sexual coercion. Some felt Baumeister was repetitive and advocated points with which students disagreed, while others liked his informal and direct tone. A suspicion is that many of these variable views of the assigned readings would cluster by discipline (e.g., more sociology or interdisciplinary studies majors embracing Kimmel's book) though we do not have quantitative data on this potential alignment.

Understanding the male story is not always a black or white answer. Several students cited revelations that males appear to be equally complex as females even though they are wired somewhat differently. Students often reflected on several of these differences which gave them a better appreciation for understanding males. For instance, a female student wrote that she was surprised to learn that men often do not talk about their problems or emotions. Originally she suspected this was solely due to social pressures that shaped male behavior for concealing emotions but after taking this class she now she thinks that society is only partly to blame. She contends that perhaps men are more susceptible to conceal their emotions due to social pressures and because of a deeper evolutionary story in which it could have been viewed as adaptive in ancestral environments to conceal emotional pain for men. Several other students commented that they learned more from the interview assignment than any other part of the course, while others championed the discussion forums as a wealth



of information. Rather than relying on just ethnographic accounts depicting what it means to be a male, students applauded the complementary approach employed in which actual data from a variety of sources were used to support claims. One such arena was the use of statistics to report male health indicators compared to women. In this view, males appear to be the most vulnerable sex given that they have higher mortality in several life stages during their life course. By the end of the course most students commended the use of qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive view of the male perspective. Based on student's comments, the use of an integrative approach was most useful when approaching the complex nature of male behavior.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of his paper has been to discuss the process of designing and teaching a new online male studies class and to reflect on the lessons learned throughout the process. This process proved interesting, rewarding and sometimes surprising. We hope the insights shared from this process are of use to instructors considering teaching a class on male studies or to wider audiences. We conclude by offering some suggestions for any instructor seeking to offer a male studies class.

Start early. It takes a considerable amount of time to read, synthesize and determine what and how you will present class contents. Unlike many fields in which introductory textbooks are readily available, streamlining an instructor's thought-process, this is not the case for male studies. The contents should be topically relevant but also relevant to students' lives, fostering the highest level of engagement. Use of technologies (e.g., online formats and websites) offers ways to connect with a larger audience and in more rapid ways. Use of media (e.g., streamed videos, youtube clips) can draw out points more viscerally than a long recorded lecture. Designing a class so that students can learn from each other (whether in online discussion forums or in face-to-face discussions) may enhance the emotional experience of a class, but also encourages a student to see how his/her views and experiences do or do not resonate with others'. The body of male studies material speaks for itself, without needing to take an overt political stance: presenting data, frameworks, and letting students exchange ideas helps them formulate their own views. In light of the enrollment numbers and breadth of student majors enrolled in the course, there may well be a niche for online and in-person male studies courses on other campuses too, though expect a varied student audience and lots of women.

## **Appendix:**

### **Spring 2014 Class Syllabus**

#### ***Anthropology 361: Making Mankind: Sex, Status, and Male Studies***

Instructor:

Office:

Office Hours: TBA, or by appointment

E-mail:

Phone:

Web page:



## Catalog Description:

This class undertakes an integrative account of what it means to be a man. We draw upon comparisons with other animals, insights into the physiology of social behavior, cross-cultural accounts of masculinity, and U.S. studies of male behavior, all within an overarching evolutionary perspective. Topics focus on central concerns over masculinity: friendship, sexuality, politics, violence, education, work, sports, fatherhood, and health. Discussion highlights the relevance of male studies to individual and social meaning, and informs contemporary societal concerns over men.

## Course Objectives:

Students will grapple with current theoretical and empirical evidence concerning the integrative study of males. Students will gain insight into the similarities and differences in behavior between human males and males of other animals and cross-culturally. Through readings, students develop critical thinking skills to assess research on males. Through writing assignments, students have the opportunity to apply course theory to topics of particular interest and course relevance.

Upon completion of the course, the successful student will be able to:

Identify cross-cultural variation and patterning in male behavior and experience

Critically evaluate reasons underlying differences and changes in male behavior and experience, both in the U.S. and internationally

Describe, analyze, and evaluate central features of masculinity

Synthesize evidence, understand arguments, and draw logical conclusions

## Reading:

Assigned readings derive from four texts that can be purchased in the UNLV bookstore or online. The four assigned books are: 1) Baumeister RF. 2010. *Is There Anything Good About Men? How Culture Flourished by Exploiting Men*. New York: Oxford University Press; 2) Gilmore DD. 1990. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.; 3) Gray PB and Anderson KG. 2010. *Fatherhood: Evolution and Human Paternal Behavior*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.; and 4) Kimmel M. 2008. *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*. New York: Harper.

## Grading:

Grades will be based on a midterm exam (25%), a non-cumulative final exam (25%), a life history interview exercise (10%), a critique of a movie based on application of class concepts (10%), a draft of a blog entry (10%), and participation in online discussion forums (20%). Makeup exams are not permitted without medical documentation. Late assignments will not be accepted.

Please ensure you address all components of those assignments; writing quality and structure also count. To gain full participation points, you are required to post comments to discussions at least ten times across the semester, and from at least five different modules (e.g., full participation points are awarded for posting one comment in each of ten modules, or even two comments in each of five modules). To be credited for participation in a given module, you must post a comment during the time in which that module's discussion thread is open (i.e., 'back-posted' comments don't count); this facilitates active engagement. The last day to post a comment for it to count toward participation

is noon May 9. You are welcome and indeed encouraged to actively participate in discussions beyond this minimum. Participation scores will be tallied at the end of the course.

### Course Outline:

*Week 1:* Introduction: History, Issues, Importance

Baumeister: pp. 1-80

Farrell, W. (2012). The myth of male power, Part II. *New Male Studies: An International Journal*.

*Week 2:* Theory: Evolutionary, Biocultural Approach.

Gilmore: pp. 1-29, 99-122

Gray and Anderson: pp. 1-30

Baumeister: pp. 109-158

Video: "Science of Men" (2007; 50 min)

*Week 3:* Work

Baumeister: pp. 187-220

Gilmore: pp. 169-200

Gray and Anderson: pp. 158-177

*Week 4:* Male Bonding: Friendships and Coalitions

Baumeister: pp. 81-108

Gilmore: pp. 123-145

Kimmel: pp. 1-69

Male Movie Assignment Due Wednesday, February 12, 11:59 PM

*Week 5:* Sexuality

Gilmore: pp. 30-55, 78-98, 146-168

Kimmel: pp. 169-216, 242-264

*Week 6:* Family Life: Partnerships, Fatherhood

Gray and Anderson: pp. 31-223

Baumeister: pp. 220-248

*Week 7:* Making War and Enemies: Violence

Baumeister: pp. 159-186

Gilmore: pp. 56-77

Kimmel: pp. 217-241

Video: "The Demonic Ape" (2004; 50 min)

*Week 8:* Midterm: Must be taken between 12:01 AM Tuesday, March 11 and 11:59 PM Wednesday, March 12

*Week 9:* Sports: Spectacle, Ritualized Violence, Training

Kimmel: pp. 123-168

*Week 10:* Crime and Punishment

Duntley JD and Shackelford TK (2008). Darwinian foundations of crime and law. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 13: 373-382.

Life History Interview Assignment Due Wednesday, March 26, 11:59 PM*Week 11: Education*

Video: "The Problem with Boys: Falling Behind in School and Life" (2000: 41 min)

Kimmel: pp. 70-122

*Week 12: Health: Mortality and its Causes*

Gray and Anderson: pp. 224-242

Streamed youtube clip of Randy Nesse discussing evolution and male mortality

Harris MF and McKenzie S. (2006). Men's health: What's a GP to do? *Medical Journal of Australia* 185: 440-444.

*Week 13: Mental Health*

Loeber R et al. (2001). Male mental health problems, psychopathy, and personality traits: Key findings from the first 14 years of the Pittsburgh Youth Study. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 4: 273-297.

*Week 14: Legal Dimensions*

Gray and Anderson: pp. 243-255

Blog Assignment Due Wednesday, April 23, 11:59 PM

*Week 15: Course Wrap-up and the Future of Males*

Baumeister: pp. 249-280

Gilmore: pp. 201-231

Kimmel: pp. 265-289

Final Exam: Must be taken between 12:01 AM Tuesday, May 13 and 11:59 PM Wednesday, May 14

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Dr. Peter B. Gray has a passion for understanding various aspects of human reproduction from an integrative, evolutionary perspective. That's a sensible scholarly passion too: in a Darwinian world, the ultimate currency is reproductive success. Peter Gray earned a PhD in 2003 in Biological Anthropology at Harvard University. He subsequently bulked up his clinical research and androgen side through a postdoc in Los Angeles. Since 2005 he has been an anthropology professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). He is part of an ongoing collaborative study focused on Jamaican fatherhood, and he engages in research on various aspects of human reproduction, including having lead-authored a 2013 book entitled, "Evolution and Human Sexual Behavior," published by Harvard University Press.



Timothy McHale is a second year Biological Anthropology Ph.D. student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). He had earned his MSc in Evolutionary Anthropology from Durham University, United Kingdom, and a B.S. in Biology and B.A. in Philosophy from the University of Central Florida. His interdisciplinary training has led him to focus on investigating various aspects of human behavior from an evolutionary perspective.

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# Misogyny versus Misandry: From “Comparative Suffering” to Inter-Sexual Dialogue

PAUL NATHANSON AND KATHERINE K. YOUNG



*One reason for the current polarization between men and women—a situation that has become worse, not better, over the past two or three years—is the lack of any moral or philosophical paradigm for moving beyond polarization. The obstacle is a paradigm, comparative suffering, that leads inevitably toward the mobilization of resentment between various sexual, racial, ethnic, economic, religious or linguistic groups. From this deeply cynical perspective, groups compete in the public square for both moral status and political power by claiming that they alone deserve the status of collective victims and therefore that their adversaries alone deserve the stigma of collective victimizers. This presents*



*the latter with a very difficult problem: how to establish and maintain a healthy collective identity in the face of pervasive prejudice. At the moment, men are experiencing this problem as acutely as women ever did but without the academic and political resources that feminism has generated during the past half century. One solution would be to replace inter-sexual debate with inter-sexual dialogue.*

**Keywords:** feminism; egalitarian feminism; ideological feminism; misandry; misogyny; rape culture; autonomy; victim; victimizer; comparative suffering; mobilization of resentment; identity; vulnerability; masculine identity; fatherhood; motherhood; single parenthood; inter-sexual debate; and inter-sexual dialogue.

## Introductory Note

The following text was originally written to be read as a contribution to a meeting in Detroit, Michigan, on July 27-28, 2014, billed as the First International Conference on Men's Issues, sponsored by "A Voice for Men." It is presented here in a revised version.

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My colleague in research on men is Katherine Young. She is not here today, at least not in corporeal form, but she has collaborated with me on all five volumes in a series of books on misandry—that is, the sexist counterpart of misogyny.<sup>1</sup> When I say "I," therefore, I usually mean "we." Her interest in men emerged from her research on women in India, finding that she could not see the gender norms of one sex adequately without also seeing those of the other. What she needed was "stereoscopic" vision. My interest in men emerged from personal experience as a gay man. But both of us are academics in religious studies, or comparative religion, a field that includes comparative *ethics*. We rely ultimately, though not entirely, on the latter.

## Introduction

Ten or eleven years ago, a journalist interviewed me about misandry for an article on relations between men and women. But first, she told me that not all of her friends, male or female, were eager to read her anything more about this overexposed topic. Why, they asked, would anyone be preoccupied today with either misogyny or misandry? The culture wars, they said, were over. Women had made great gains in the world of work, and men were spending more time on household chores. Feminism had done its job, right? Well, I thought, guess what. They were wrong. But they were not wrong for the supposedly obvious reason: that women remain unequal to men in various ways, which means that feminism had yet to complete its job. They were wrong, I suggest, for two other reasons—two intellectual and moral mistakes.

One of these mistakes originated, as Christina Hoff Sommers noted in the title of her most famous book,<sup>2</sup> when extremists "stole" the movement from egalitarians. I would add a particular aspect of the historical context. What had begun in the 1960s as an egalitarian movement had turned by

the 1980s into an ideological one. In other words, this change of direction had a slightly earlier prototype: the transition from the Civil Rights movement to the Black Power movement. Both led from liberal politics to identity politics. Not everyone has embraced these transformations, by any means, but those who do tend to have great influence in the public square—especially academics, who produce what they call “engaged scholarship.” This is not the place to explore the larger context of Postmodernism in detail, but I will note one ironic anomaly. Postmodernists claim to “expose” or “subvert” all cultural biases, but they actually provide a protective umbrella for the cultural biases that they consider legitimate. And these biases usually coincide with those of some ideology. We have adopted a working definition of ideology: *a worldview that relies on a systematic re-presentation of reality in order to attain social, political and economic goals.*<sup>3</sup> More specifically, we have outlined eight of its characteristic features. Among these is dualism: a worldview that sees all of history as a titanic conspiracy of “them” to oppress “us.” Another is the fact that ideologies can function as “secular religions,” fundamentalist ones, of both the political right and the political left.

At the risk of generalization, I suggest that Postmodernism rejects the notion of objective truth and therefore of the need even to seek it. Rather, they say, academics should focus on “deconstructing” the illusions of all those who *pretend* to seek it. The result has been to legitimate the notion that scholarship amounts to nothing other than a profoundly cynical—but *selectively* cynical—battle between “our truth” and “their truth.” Every group has its own truth, its own story of collective victimization. And what we call “ideological feminism” (as distinct from egalitarian feminism) is no exception. Many or most feminists claim to know nothing of ideological feminism; for them, feminism is about sexual equality, not about some implacable urge of men to oppress women. Other feminists are aware of the ideological approach and even stay away from it themselves but nonetheless end up condoning it in public debates for “pushing the envelope” and therefore expanding possibilities for women.

The second mistake of feminists originated in their assumption that men have such godly power, such complete “hegemony,” that nothing can possibly harm them. Take it like a man! From that initial premise, it would seem to follow that women can say whatever they like about men, do to men whatever they consider necessary in the interests of women, without worrying about the consequences for men—and thus, ultimately, for their own sons, for society as a whole and even, indirectly, for women. But most boys and men are *not, by definition*, alpha males. They are indeed vulnerable to social and political forces that either ignore them or attack them. I could discuss in detail one or more of the problems that boys and men encounter in American society. Their suicide rates and school drop-out rates far exceed those of girls and women, for instance, and they are the victims of violence far more often than girls and women (although you would never know that by hearing or reading only about “violence against women”). But discussing this double standard would distract me from my *primary* concern: the moral implications of using what we call “comparative suffering” to promote what we call the “mobilization of resentment.”

In this paper, I will discuss the following topics: (1) comparative suffering; (2) the mobilization of resentment; (3) the effects of both on identity in general; and (4) on masculine identity in particular.

## Comparative suffering

The best way for me to introduce “comparative suffering” is to describe another interview. A few months ago, I was asked to discuss the problems of men on a Canadian radio station.<sup>4</sup> I intended to begin by defining “misandry,” because few people are familiar with that word. (Almost everyone, by contrast, is familiar with the word “misogyny”).<sup>5</sup> And I intended to illustrate my discussion of misandry by referring occasionally to my own experience of being either unwilling or unable to exemplify conventional masculinity and to the price that I paid for not doing so, especially as the victim of bullies at school. But I never got an opportunity to do any of those things. The interviewer asked me immediately why anyone would take seriously the idea that men had any problems at all, let alone that they were oppressed—even though I had never used the word “oppressed,” because misandry is not always the direct result of hostility. To say the very least, she added, no problems of men could ever amount to very much when *compared* with those of women. Was I aware that women still earn 73 cents on the dollar, she asked rhetorically, and still hold only a few positions of political power? Men do not have those problems, she asserted, not do they have even *comparable* problems. Instead of allowing me to discuss misandry, therefore, she made sure that I could discuss only misogyny. I had to defend the very idea of *concern* for boys and men. And I had only six minutes to do even that.

Otherwise, I would have explained that the children who bullied me in school included both boys and girls in roughly equal numbers. This, too, caused me to wonder about the difference between sex (maleness or femaleness) and gender (masculinity of femininity). Even I somehow believed that girls were “nicer” than boys—despite evidence to the contrary that I encountered in my own daily life—until I reached high school and began to think carefully about what was going on.

I would have answered the question about women still earning less money than men do. To do that, and thus present a counter-intuitive argument, I would have had to rely on some academic language. The usual statistic cited is that women earn approximately three-quarters (“seventy-three cents on the dollar”) of what men earn. Millions of people, including many men, interpret this to mean that *every* woman earns only three-quarters of what *every* man earns. But the figure is an aggregate number. It includes the staggeringly high salaries of a few alpha males, a fact that skews the total earnings of men upward considerably. Moreover, it includes the low salaries of women who work part time, a fact that skews the total earnings of women downward considerably. In addition, it omits the fact that younger women really do earn as much as the male counterparts, because they have the necessary graduate degrees, specialized training and so on. Finally, it omits the fact that boys and young men are dropping out of school at an alarming rate, which means that they will eventually become an economic underclass and earn considerably *less* than women

I would have added that, even though more men than women go into politics and therefore dominate legislatures, we need to credit women with the ability to make choices. Not all women want to be mothers, sure, but not all women want to be politicians. More women than ever before are becoming politicians, nonetheless, and maybe they will eventually be just as common or more common than men in legislatures. Whether this would improve our lives is another matter. I am not convinced that sex or any other innate feature, such as race, makes some politicians better than others. Nor am I convinced that female politicians are necessarily better for women than male politicians

are. Anyone remember Sarah Palin? In any case, I am not convinced that men cannot be trusted to take the needs and problems of women seriously and therefore to represent women fairly. That would be too cynical for me. And if that were the case, then people of *neither* sex could represent the other. We would need two legislative assemblies, one for men and the other for women, which would surely be a very disturbing sign of social fragmentation and political polarization.

I would have mentioned some legal problems of men, laws that discriminate against men in cases of not only of domestic violence, sexual harassment or military service but also of divorce and custody. I am convinced that most young men would never marry women or even live with women, let alone have children with women, if they actually knew that the legal deck is stacked against men, heavily, in connection with divorce and custody.

I would have noted that those who profess indifference to the needs and problems of men in general are not always consistent. They do usually consider the needs and problems of their own sons or grandsons, after all, who must live in a world that is anything but “patriarchal.” Somehow, they manage to separate their own men from men in general.

I would have argued that many boys and young men become cynical enough to abandon or even attack a society that has no room for them except as prisoners or as the trained seals of women and thus refusing to take them seriously as people. They are committing crime at much higher rates than young women. Other boys and young men become pessimistic enough to give up on school and therefore professional careers. They are dropping out of school at a much higher rate than young women; some universities report that only 40% of their students are male. Still other boys and young men become hopeless enough to abandon life altogether. The male suicide rate is much higher, as I say, than the female rate.<sup>6</sup> It is true that more women than men *attempt* suicide, but this requires an explanation. Many more women attempt suicide because of a need to solicit help, not because of a real desire to end their lives. Why do men mean business when they attempt suicide? If they are so happy with all of their alleged advantages, after all, why are they ready to kill themselves (and sometimes others as well)? And why is society so intent on ignoring the sexual differential that many newspaper reports on suicide rates fail even to mention it? Could it be the result of a double standard? When women attempt suicide, apparently, it is because they are victimized and therefore deserve sympathy; when men do the same thing (and often succeed), however, it is because they are violent and therefore deserve no sympathy. For that matter, why do we hear so little about research on the disturbing fact that women in advanced industrial societies outlive men by five or six years? Grants for medical research seldom include funding for studies on the difference between male and female life expectancies. It is hard to imagine that situation if the differential favored men, not women; protest marchers would clog the streets and demand an immediate end to “gynocide.” In these ways, though not in all ways, American society is clearly indifferent to the fate of boys and men per se.

I would have said that ideological feminists refuse to acknowledge their own misandry, and even some egalitarian feminists are motivated by political expediency to condone the misandric fallout from ideological feminism. Those who do not simply deny the existence of misandry, for instance, often try to excuse it as nothing more than men getting their comeuppance. But this is revenge, not justice. And justice means very little unless it entails reconciliation. This explains the importance that Young and I attach to the specifically moral dimension of relations between men and women.

Whether you define misandry as “hatred” or “contempt,” which is how we do define it, or as something that sounds milder and less provocative, it refers to an *inherently* evil phenomenon. (It is one of the very few; even killing, after all, is justifiable in some circumstances.) In short, two wrongs do not make a right.

Finally, I would have stated that dialogue lies at the heart of my research with Young, and that dialogue is not a euphemism for debate. Debate is about winners and losers, which is why it can be useful in contexts such as the courtroom or the classroom (unless it devolves into two sides ranting at each other). Dialogue is about reconciliation, however, through carefully cultivated empathy or compassion.

But I *should* have taken the initiative right from the get-go by ignoring my interviewer’s obvious political agenda and referring to what troubled me most of all about the interview: her utter lack of moral reasoning. No society worth living in can endure if its citizens are either unwilling or unable to acknowledge fundamental moral questions. Given the fact that I had to *defend the whole idea of concern for one group of human beings*, let alone the notion that we should behave toward others as we would want them to behave toward ourselves, I would say that we are entering a new dark age.<sup>7</sup>

By “comparative suffering,” in short, I mean *competitive* suffering: a contest in which the suffering of one group should take precedence, especially when it comes to legislation and public policy, over that of another. This is the very *first* obstacle in the search for any solution to sexual polarization. Inherent in this paradigm is the *mobilization of resentment*, after all, because for every “oppressed” group that suffers there must be an “oppressor” group that inflicts suffering. Both women and men can play this game. Until very recently, though, men have seldom done so, at least not publicly, for fear of ridicule. The very definition of masculinity in our society, after all, forces boys and men to deny their own vulnerability; to acknowledge their vulnerability, therefore, would be tantamount to admitting fear and thus abandoning any claim to masculinity. This fear of shame has allowed women to convince even some men, at least the alpha males, to ignore the ways in which society makes *men* disadvantaged. (I will say more about that in due course.) By now, public rhetoric assumes the priority of breaking down every barrier to “women’s equality” (a slogan that is not, by the way, quite the same thing as “equality of women *and men*”). Whichever group indulges in this game, it encourages members to make extremely heavy emotional investments in it. Being a victim, at least in the past, has become a primary marker of both personal and collective *identity* not only for women but also for many other groups. Any challenge to their identity as victims simultaneously challenges assumptions about those who victimized them, in short, and thus brings the conversation to an end.

I will now discuss the following aspects of comparative suffering: (a) applying quantitative criteria to suffering in general and (b) applying these to the suffering of men and women in particular.

**Suffering in general:** Most people, by far, assume that comparing the suffering of one person or group to that of another is both morally legitimate, a very dubious assumption in many cases, and rhetorically effective, a very dubious assumption in many cases.<sup>8</sup> It is true that you can do so in connection with *identical* or *very similar* forms of suffering. An ordinary headache due to the stress of everyday life and one that is due to a brain tumor are both medical problems, but the former really



is less painful and always much less serious than the latter. Even this kind of comparison works only at a very superficial level, though, because people always *experience* suffering in connection with both subjectivity and cultural expectations. Two patients who suffer from the same form of cancer, for instance, might not actually suffer to the same degree. Some cultures condition people to ignore pain, after all, or at least not to complain about it. Some people have higher pain thresholds, moreover, than other people. In any case, we have no reliable way of *measuring* pain for comparative purposes.

More important, though, is the fact that people can suffer in very *different* ways. It makes no moral sense at all to argue that being an inmate of some concentration camp was either harder or easier than being a slave on some plantation—not unless you compare *death* in a concentration camp with *survival* on a plantation. With this in mind, we should be able to conclude, simply, that *both* have suffered historically from severe dehumanization at the very least. The question of *degree* is irrelevant for moral purposes, I suggest, though clearly not for political purposes. But not all black Americans or Jewish Americans use historic suffering, in itself, as an excuse for making political demands. Rather, they use *current* suffering. For many black Americans, this could mean *continuing* to lack economic opportunities due to *continuing* racial prejudice against them. For many Jewish Americans, it could mean *continuing* to endure existential threats in Middle Eastern and some other countries due to *continuing* racial or religious prejudice against them. It is worth pausing here to consider this extreme but revealing analogy more closely.

I grew up in a Jewish home and went to a Jewish day school. At school, during the 1950s, we learned not only about our history as victims of persecution in general but also about the Nazi “Holocaust”<sup>9</sup> in particular. And yet my teachers presented the persecution of Jews as one historical pattern but by no means the only one in Jewish history. They encouraged me to form a strong Jewish identity by emphasizing the achievements of Jews, not the suffering of Jews. During the 1960s, though, this approach began to change. Those who had experienced the death camps were no longer eager to “forget” about their suffering in order to get on with their lives; they were beginning to realize that both their children and the world needed to remember what had happened. But it took the publication of a highly controversial book, Richard Rubenstein’s *After Auschwitz*,<sup>10</sup> to catalyze discussion.

Rubenstein argued that belief in the God of history, who intervenes to reward the righteous and punish the wicked, was no longer tenable after the death camps. Assuming divine intervention to be the only kind of religion that monotheism can support (which was a false assumption),<sup>11</sup> he argued that Jews should reject monotheism and find their way back to polytheism. Not many American Jews cared about Rubenstein’s theology or any other version of Jewish theology, but they did care about Jewish *identity* at a time of rapid assimilation into American society. Many began to see themselves as *archetypal victims* and even to replace Judaism itself with what amounts to “Holocaustism.”<sup>12</sup> But being archetypal victims is hardly attractive in itself, even among those who believe that it confers some kind of moral superiority. Being victims would never have become an enduring focus of Jewish identity, therefore, had it not been for the *reverse* pattern, the antidote to despair: being heroes in the re-establishment of a Jewish state.

Emil Fackenheim crystallized and legitimated this way of thinking in a book that proclaimed collective survival as a divine commandment that equaled or even superseded the commandments

that Moses had received on Mount Sinai.<sup>13</sup> This reversed the paradigm of Judaism. Earlier, the Jewish people had been a means to the greater end of perpetuating Torah. Now, Torah was one means (among many) to the greater end of perpetuating the Jewish people. Jews began to replace Judaism not only with Holocaustism, therefore, but also with Israelism (which goes way, way beyond patriotism or vicarious patriotism).

To maintain their own identity as archetypal victims, at any rate, some Jews feel a subconscious *need to diminish the victimization of other groups* (although Jews are hardly the only Americans who resort to identity politics). Since the 1960s, at any rate, Jewish Americans and black Americans have competed with each other and with many other groups for a coveted status: Jews as the world's most victimized group and blacks as the nation's most victimized group. Who suffered *more*, then, Jews under twelve horrific years of Nazi genocide and periodic persecution in earlier times or black Americans under three horrific centuries of slavery, segregation and lynching? Anyone who feels a need *even to answer* this question, I suggest, has failed to understand that, apart from any other problem, its initial premise is gravely flawed. Back now, then, to the same premise in connection with the topic of this conference.

**The suffering of men and women in particular:** Women have indulged very effectively in comparative suffering, although some men now try, less effectively, to do the same thing. Anyone who enters the blogosphere either knows or soon learns that writing about the needs or problems of men inevitably draws ferocious hostility not only from many women but also from some men.

Women often argue that the needs and problems of men cannot *compare* with those of women; a lengthy list of the latter inevitably follows—even if a blog's topic might not have much to do with women per se. Besides, many items on the list apply only to women in Afghanistan, say, or to other remote societies with very *different* cultures and very *different* histories. Why ignore these differences? Because ideological feminists believe fervently that *all* cultures and *all* societies are virulently “patriarchal.” An “honor killing” in some societies, therefore, is no different from a rape in our own society. Never mind that those societies *demand* honor killings, and that our society *punishes* rape. Never mind that those societies require fathers or brothers to kill the *men* who dishonor their daughters or sisters and thus condemn the men of future generations to blood feuding as a result.

It is the very idea that men could *have* any problems, let alone serious ones, that rankles many feminists. This is because the *underlying assumption*, which provides the *raison d'être* of ideological feminism and finds support even among many egalitarian feminists, is that men have “all the power.” Otherwise, how could anyone legitimately demand *exclusive* concern for women? So, it is a zero-sum political game. Supposedly, taking the needs and problems of men seriously—not those of “alpha males” alone but those of a vast and highly differentiated group—means trivializing the needs and problems of women. Again, “comparative suffering” is an ironic euphemism for *competitive* suffering. Why compete? The answer is clear: to gain sympathy for your own cause and mobilize resentment against that of your political adversaries.

## The mobilization of resentment

Comparative suffering leads inevitably to the mobilization of resentment. Why “inevitably”? I say that, because the *logic* of comparative suffering *requires* not only victims, who deserve sympathy and help, but also victimizers, who deserve denunciation and punishment. I will discuss (a) resentment against women, briefly, and (b) resentment against men.

**Resentment against women:** Some feminists insist not only that misogyny is a characteristic problem in every patriarchal society. Moreover, they insist, our own society was and still is profoundly patriarchal. This is not easy to demonstrate, except to true believers in feminist ideology, because our society has so quickly (in historical terms) rejected misogyny in every conceivable form and eliminated every legal disability that ever afflicted women. And yet misogyny does exist, probably in every society. Its severity has varied greatly from one time or place to another, but no legislation can actually eliminate misogyny or any other form of hatred. The only question is whether misogyny coexists with misandry. That would be a contradiction only for those who assume naively that society, let alone human nature, never allows ambiguity or inconsistency. Our research, at any rate, indicates that modern American society has not yet overcome its own historic forms of hatred, including not only racism but also sexism of both kinds: misogyny and misandry. But because so much has been said for so long about misogyny, I see no point in repeating any of that today.

**Resentment against men:** More and more men are becoming *aware* that they are in trouble, collectively, due to the mobilization of resentment against them. How could it be otherwise, especially on college campuses? Even the most passive male students find blatant evidence of the pervasive belief that every woman belongs to a class of victims and the equally pervasive belief that every man belongs to a class of victimizers? (Some egalitarian feminists deplore this belief, because the focus on women as victims could undermine their collective confidence in the struggle against men, but ideological feminists advocate it because without a firm belief in their own enduring victimization by men, women would have no reason to continue struggling against it) Being an academic, I see more than a little evidence of this at my own university. But the problem is pervasive. Male students can hardly cross the campus without reading or hearing over and over again that they are either naturally or culturally inferior to women—that is, predisposed to evil. Everywhere, they find brochures from women’s centers or women’s studies departments about the prevalence of misogyny, notices of lectures on the meaning of “consent,” announcements of “take back the night” rallies, reports on administrative efforts (or lack of them) to punish male students for failing to observe ever-more-stringent codes of political or sexual correctness, articles in student newspapers about the countless ways in which men “objectify” and “oppress” women, required courses on the sexual harassment of women by men and so on.

Recently, for example, ideological feminists have revived the rhetoric of colleges as centers of “rape culture.”<sup>14</sup> At issue is not whether rape occurs on college campuses and elsewhere, because it clearly does,<sup>15</sup> or even how pervasive it is. At issue is whether our culture, either on campus or anywhere else, actually *fosters* rape as a social *norm* (as some societies do). At issue, in other words, is how to *interpret* sexual relations and even non-sexual relations between men and women. Do all lie on a continuum that “begins with a smile and ends with rape”? And if so, does this mean that “flirting” and “seduction” are polite words for rape? Is it worthwhile or even safe in such censorious and

punitive circumstances for male students to have any relations at all with female students? Is there something innately “wrong” with male sexuality? It would be very hard to imagine any healthy male student who does not resent these questions, whether he admits his resentment or not.

Given the current storm of outrage over the “rape culture” among male students, universities have found it necessary to revise policies that affect the relation between male and female students on campus or even off campus. Few universities, if any, have made these revisions known to outsiders. Because revelations of this kind might reveal the extent to which universities might go in order to punish and prevent “sexual assault” (which now has an elastic definition that can include anything from offensive words to rape). But we do know that some students and administrators are demanding revisions that would not only blur the line between campus security departments and municipal police departments but also diminish the prospect of due process for the accused—most or even all of whom, presumably, would be male.<sup>16</sup> The governor of California has already turned these demands into law (although it affects, so far, only university policies and not criminal proceedings).<sup>17</sup>

And Michael Kimmel believes that he knows why. He argues that young men are preoccupied with a sense of “aggrieved entitlement.”<sup>18</sup> They feel entitled, he claims, to privilege that society does not grant to women. When society fails to confer privilege on them, they react by turning against society. They turn against women, in particular, because society now seems to confer some forms of privilege on *them*. This explains the “boy code” and the rampant misogyny on college campuses—what others call their “rape culture.” In one way, Kimmel is correct. These “guys” do exist and now, perhaps, more of them do than ever. What *underlies* their verbal abuse or physical violence, however, is another matter. I would say that they are preoccupied not with illegitimate “aggrieved entitlement” but with *legitimate* “aggrieved entitlement. How can “entitlement” ever be legitimate? The answer should be (but is not yet) obvious: because *everyone* is surely entitled to some things. Not to privilege but to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” And “happiness” (no matter how you define that vague word) is *impossible* without a healthy collective identity. *That is why* many young men feel aggrieved. They know that they are entitled to a make at least one contribution to society, *as men*, that is distinctive, necessary and publicly valued. They know also that society has ignored their claim to a healthy collective identity, denying it to them but not to women. They resent that state of affairs. And, frankly, they have good reasons for doing so. It’s simple. If society has no respect for them, specifically *as men*, then they will have no respect for society. *Even an unhealthy identity*, they might well believe, is better than no identity at all. This does not *excuse* their anti-social behavior, but it does *explain* their anti-social behavior—and in a way that does not rely on ideological cynicism.

Now, consider the case of Elliot Rodger, who opened fire on a crowded street in Santa Barbara and then turned the gun on himself. His case is particularly interesting, because so many bloggers were dismayed by his murderous hostility toward *women* and thus framed their interpretation of the event in classic ideological framework of misogyny. Rodger, they argued, was not insane. Like all or most men, he simply hated women. The cause of his rampage was not abnormal psychology or even access to guns. It was “patriarchy.” How many of these bloggers even remembered his murderous hostility toward other *men*? After all, he mentioned his hatred toward other men in his long letter. And he actually killed *more* men than women. *Everyone* had rejected him, so *everyone* deserved his wrath. We had a similar case in Montreal almost thirty years ago. But Marc Lépine killed only women, fourteen of them, before killing himself as a victim of feminism. And some ideological

feminists did indeed exploit this case for political purposes—even at the public funerals. Lépine, they insisted, was *not* a rare psychopath. He was Everyman. He did what *all* men have *always* wanted to do more than anything else: kill or oppress women. Most men do not enact this fantasy, the ideologues admitted, but only because they are *afraid* to do so. Not all feminists, by any means, accepted this theory. But it remained at the heart of public discourse for a very long time. By now, the anniversary has become a solemn day of remembrance in Canada, especially in Quebec. It competes openly with Remembrance Day, moreover, which commemorates those who died while fighting for their country during the world wars—almost all of whom were young *men*. Public monuments to Lépine’s victims have become pilgrimage sites. The ceremonies that take place there closely resemble those that commemorate not only the military victims of Canadian wars but also, and more pointedly, the civilian victims of Nazi Germany. The implication is clear. Canada (or Quebec) is a “patriarchy” and thus not so very different from Nazi Germany. In that case, caring about men is tantamount to caring about Nazis. And that, from my perspective, is tantamount to misandry.

But misandry seldom finds outlets as dramatic as controversies over rape or mass murder. More often, it emerges in the underlying assumptions of laws and policies. Most people have been aware for a long time that some laws favor women despite gender-neutral language. No court in our time would allow any gender-specific law to stand—except, of course, for the one that still requires American young men but not young women to register for the draft—but those who *interpret* laws and those who *enforce* them do not always honor the spirit of gender-neutrality. Among the more notorious examples are those who run the family courts, which adjudicate matters such as child custody and child-support payments. A Canadian bill would have mandated the presumption of joint-custody, unless that arrangement would be likely to endanger children. But this bill was *defeated*. After years of supporting the presumption of joint-custody, the ruling party abandoned it. Was it truly convinced that fathers seek custody or joint custody only in order to reassert control over their wives? Was it truly convinced that fathers are more likely than mothers to abuse their children? Voters were left to speculate on parliamentary motives. No one had to speculate that the presumption of joint-custody is still *politically unacceptable*, however, even though that solution is *psychologically sound* from the perspective of children.<sup>19</sup>

Given this atmosphere, you hardly need a theory of illegitimate “aggrieved entitlement” to explain the growing evidence of an *identity* problem among men, especially young men. Ultimately, misandry is not about this or that law, this or that policy, but about society’s inability or unwillingness to *care* about men (as if doing that would somehow compromise caring about women). And caring about men in our time means helping them find a *healthy collective identity* specifically *as men*.

## Identity

Everyone has an identity, usually more than one. But precisely what is a “healthy” identity? Young and I propose the following hypothesis: that a *healthy* identity, whether personal or collective, requires *the ability to make at least one contribution to society that is distinctive, necessary, and therefore publicly valued*. Think about this hypothesis, now, in relation to both (a) feminine identities and (b) masculine identities.<sup>20</sup>



**Feminine identities:** Whether women like it or not, they can make at least one contribution to society that meets all three requirements.<sup>21</sup> By definition, after all, only they can become mothers; men, by definition, cannot. And even women who do not become mothers can still rely on the deep symbolic links between motherhood with womanhood—links that have been celebrated by ideological feminists in their quest for ways to demonstrate that women are innately superior to men. This or that woman might be either unwilling or even unable to have children, for instance, but she might nonetheless have some allegedly innate tendency to be “nurturing.” The point here is not that women are *only* mothers—women, like men, are many things—but that women *can*, at least collectively, be mothers in addition to whatever else informs their identity as women. So far, no one—not even the most egalitarian feminist—has succeeded in deconstructing motherhood and leaving women without any possible source of identity *as women*.

This has led some women to believe that women can be and should be *completely autonomous*—that is, completely *independent of men*, not merely less dependent on men than they used to be. For egalitarian feminists, this means primarily financial independence: providing equal opportunities for women and men to have exciting careers and to earn equal pay for equal work *but also* ensuring that single, widowed and divorced or abandoned women can support themselves and their families without having to depend on unreliable men. For ideological feminists, however, independence goes much further than that. Autonomy is about *identity*, for them, not merely about equality or practicality. They demand “reproductive autonomy,” which means taking unilateral control of family life (and implicitly of society’s future). With that in mind, they have lobbied for legislation and high-court rulings that promote their own assumptions: the right to have abortions without consulting the fathers, the right to full custody of children after divorce and so on.<sup>22</sup> So far, men have not demanded complete sexual autonomy.

But our research is not about the collective identity of women. It is about that of men, more and more of whom are demanding not merely equality but an acceptable collective *identity* of their own.

**Masculine identities:** Just as women found it necessary to reject the identities that men, such as Freud and Jung, had foisted on them, men must reject the identities that women, such as ideological feminists, are now foisting on them. This is something that every group must do for itself.

It should be self-evident (but obviously is not yet self-evident) that the mobilization of resentment makes collective identity very problematic for the resented.<sup>23</sup> For several decades, egalitarian men have believed that they lack any legitimate reason for complaining about the mobilization of resentment against them—that is, about pervasive (but seldom acknowledged) misandry. They have accepted the implicit attacks of egalitarian feminism<sup>24</sup> and the explicit ones of ideological feminism—few have been able to distinguish clearly between these two forms<sup>25</sup> of feminism—uncritically. Some have hoped to avoid personal attacks by embracing at least the most obviously egalitarian feminist goals as “male feminists.” But this state of affairs is changing quickly, and ideological feminists have tacitly acknowledged reality just as quickly by warning against a “backlash” and marshalling their heavy artillery against anyone who argues for “men’s rights” (on the dubious assumption that men’s rights are inherently incompatible with women’s rights). But it will take more time for men to figure it all out collectively, let alone to come up with a worldview that respects not one sex but both

sexes.

More than a few men react with surprising hostility even toward the idea that they, like women, have distinctive needs and problems at all. And I am not referring to alpha males, who can *afford to ignore* those of most other men. Alpha males are not hostile to ordinary men, merely *indifferent* to them. No, I am referring instead to those who actually *care* about social justice. They believe that only some form of feminism can attain social justice, can “level the playing field” by favoring women and therefore that their own needs and problems are trivial in relation to those of women. But this, too, presents a specifically *moral* problem. It relies on the closely related notions of *collective* guilt and *vicarious* punishment. All men today, and not only the alpha males among them, are allegedly guilty for continuing to benefit from the sins of their ancestors. Ergo, all men today, and not only the alpha males among them, allegedly deserve to bear the burden of paying for the sins of their ancestors.

Why would any men accept these notions, which have by now become conventional wisdom in academic and political circles? It would be cynical to assume that *self-interest*, whether personal or collective, is the only motivating factor. These men might well believe in altruism, after all, which even today sometimes takes the outmoded form of “chivalry.” And yet these men often reveal themselves *not* as altruists at all but as ideologues, explaining their point of view by referring to notions that prevail in ideological forms of feminism. But precisely *how* can men adopt an ideology that requires them to deny their own needs and problems and even to accept a very *negative identity*? They can do so in at least two ways.

Some men try to sever the link between themselves and other men. *We* are enlightened, they might think, it is only those *other* bastards who need to see the light of feminism. Charles Blow, for example, routinely says precisely that in his blog for the *New York Times*. A few ideological feminists define men as innately evil (which is a contradiction in terms because evil refers to morality, and no one can act either morally or immorally without the free choice to do so). Most of them—along with egalitarian feminists—do grant men the possibility of redemption through conversion to some form of feminism. Blow is a convert, saying so explicitly on his blog,<sup>26</sup> and therefore what Young and I would classify as an “honorary woman.” As such, he might expect praise from women. If so, he should expect also enmity from other men—that is, men who are either unable or unwilling ignore their own depressing experience of daily life. And for that very reason, his own goal of fostering reconciliation between the sexes, or at least sexual equality, remains a fantasy.

Other men have a very different way of ignoring their own needs and problems. They *repress* their sense of vulnerability. Discussing these things can feel very threatening, because no one actually *wants* to feel vulnerable.<sup>27</sup> To be vulnerable, after all, means to *have* unfulfilled needs and insoluble problems. And let us not forget that among the central features of American masculinity has been the sense of being in control—*not* necessarily in control over other people but always in control of *themselves*. To be *out of control*, or vulnerable, is thus to be something *other than masculine*. Because the current American version of masculinity is a very demanding one—apart from anything else, it demands stoic disregard for physical or even emotional pain—and because the price for abandoning it is intense ridicule or hostility, most American men have grown up with very heavy *emotional investments* in it. So, these men try to hide from their own vulnerability as long as possible and despite

the high cost of doing so. Vulnerability is for men an equivalent of the “fate worse than death” for women, in short, although both amount to the same thing: shame.

A few men, so far, have tried one very different approach. Like so many women, they *acknowledge* their own vulnerability to forces beyond their control—social, psychological, historical, legal, military, political and even physiological forces—in order to become less vulnerable. Why say “less vulnerable” instead of *invulnerable*? I do so because of the fact that *no one can ever be completely immune to vulnerability*. Therefore, no one can ever be completely autonomous. As social animals, humans need each other. We depend on each other, both personally and collectively. This leads me, finally, to the heart of what I want to say about the possibility of a healthy collective identity for men in our time.

Misandry is *not the only* problem that men face in the search for identity. Another problem is inherent in the definition of “equality” that prevails in public discourse, including that of egalitarian feminism (even though equality, per se, is a very laudable goal). To the extent that equality connotes sameness,<sup>28</sup> it raises a question of profound importance. If men and women are basically the same and thus interchangeable, after all, then how can men form any healthy identity *as men*? What *distinctive* contribution can they make to society *as men*? Can women *need* men, in other words, just as men need women?

Throughout human history, everyone knew that men and women needed each other. No one ever questioned this fact of life until very recently, when women began to complain, with good reason, about some forms or results of sexual interdependence. By now, though, no one except the most anachronistic “conservatives” still assume that gender—a cultural system that classifies the world in ways that foster the interdependence of men and women and thus ensures collective survival—originated as anything other than a titanic conspiracy of men to oppress women and must therefore be destroyed, root and branch.

But if men and women are no longer interdependent, if they no longer need each other, then on what basis can they build distinctive identities *as men* or *women*? Why would they even want to have “relationships”? You could argue that neither women *nor men* need each other as they once did. Many men find that they no longer need wives or girlfriends, for instance, to contribute their traditionally feminine household tasks or social skills. These men can either hire people or do without those services. Unless they want children, therefore, many young men feel no interest at all in marriage or even long-term relationships with women. This became clear in Katherine Gilday’s documentary film for Canada’s National Film Board. In *Women and Men Unglued*,<sup>29</sup> she interviewed young men and women (mainly but not only of the white and urban middle-class). Discussing their transient and somewhat unsatisfying relationships, some of those interviewed admitted that they envied their parents or grandparents for the enduring relationships that had once been not merely normal but normative. And yet these young people expressed very little hope of ever attaining relationships of that kind.

On the other hand, suppose that we have we are *not* quite ready for sexual autonomy. Suppose that women *do* still need men. Suppose more specifically that men could still make at least one distinctive and necessary contribution to society *as men*. It is true that of the three distinctive and nec-

essary contributions that men have made in the past—as protectors, providers and progenitors—two are no longer distinctive and the third is heading in the same direction. Women can indeed protect themselves and provide for themselves, after all, if necessary with help from the state. But can women be progenitors—that is, *fathers*—too? On this question hangs a great deal. And, at first glance, the answer might seem to be that women can indeed be “fathers,” or at least “father-figures.” Many people, including many men, would agree without even thinking carefully about what they are saying. Otherwise, how could we explain the fact that single mothers are now widely admired in popular culture, not pitied? Or the fact that single-motherhood-by-choice has become a popular lifestyle among the rich? Or that sperm banks are lucrative businesses? Many academics argue that distinctions between fatherhood and motherhood (after gestation) are trivial, which is why we now have legal structures that are supposedly “gender neutral.” Otherwise, how could any jurisdiction replace the words “mother” and “father” on birth certificates with “parent A” and “parent B”? Or allow children to have either two mothers but no father or two fathers but no mother? Or allow family courts to give divorced mothers fully custody, routinely, instead of joint custody?<sup>30</sup>

*Even so*, we suggest that fatherhood *remains* the one and only remaining source of a healthy collective identity for men, which is to say, one that fosters not only the family but also society as a whole. Fathers probably do have both distinctive and necessary functions in family life. If so, then society must actively, publicly and *unambiguously* value those distinctive and necessary functions. In other words, we argue that mothers *cannot* be fathers and that children *need* fathers—not assistant mothers, not walking wallets, but fathers. Now, then, precisely *what is* the distinctive and necessary contribution that men can make as fathers?

Think about it. Do we actually know that children need only one parent or two parents of only one sex? What if every child really does need at least one mother *and* one father? I say “at least” one,” because isolated nuclear families probably do not represent the ideal family type; most societies have produced and supported *extended* families. Nonetheless, most have recognized nuclear families within that larger context. And whether society assigns fatherhood to the genetic father or to the mother’s brother, the “job description” always calls for a *male* candidate. At issue here are the specific functions of male parents.

Mothers not only give birth to infants but also maintain very intimate relations with their infants and young children; although fathers *can* interact with their children emotionally—and often do so, especially in our own time—they do not *need* to do so specifically as fathers. In modern parlance, mothers generally provide their infants and young children with *unconditional love*. The importance of fathers increases gradually, though, as children begin to live not only within the security of the home but also within the riskier world beyond home. Fathers provide them with *earned respect*. Fathers do not need to tell their children, “I’ll love you no matter what you do” (although that might well be true for many fathers). Rather, they need to tell their children, “I’ll respect you for acting effectively and honorably in the larger world.” These vaguely conflicting messages could be confusing if they come from the same parent, of course, even though earned respect is really one form of love.

So, is love unconditional or conditional? In theory, anyone, male or female, could give one message or the other. In practice, though, it is probably much easier for mothers—or will be at least in the foreseeable—to give unconditional love to their children and for fathers to give earned respect

to their children. This difference is *not* necessarily due to instinct and therefore innate. It is probably due mainly to the extensive *cultural training* that still produces “gender,” no matter how attenuated that cultural system has become. (If gender were genetically transmitted, as sex is, then why would every culture find it necessary to reward those who conform to gender expectations and to punish those who do not?) Some women and some men probably could refrain from one scenario and enact the other one. But we are not there yet. And why take *my* word for it? *Feminists* still complain that women are shackled by their maternal urges. Some argue that those urges are innate (and therefore make women superior to men by nature). Others argue that these urges are imposed by “patriarchal” culture (and therefore have made women the victims of men). Still others point out, correctly, that all people are the products of both nature and culture. The point here is simply that mothers and fathers continue to have *distinctive and necessary* functions within family life. In that case, men can indeed still create a healthy collective identity specifically *as men*.

## Conclusions

I have tried to make two points. First, misandry is a major problem for men and must not be ignored for fear of rocking the political boat. Second, misandry is not the only major problem for men and must not allow us to ignore the deepest one of all: allowing men to make at least one contribution to society that is distinctive, necessary and publicly valued—in other words, allowing men to establish a healthy collective identity.

Katherine Young and I do not stop at analyzing the current predicament of men. We go further by proposing a solution. Well, not a solution *per se* but a new method of seeking one. And it is not even new. What we call “inter-sexual dialogue” originated in inter-religious dialogue. The basic premise is that participants must actually *want* healing and reconciliation, not merely to sound off and score points over adversaries. They must listen carefully to their dialogue partners, therefore, and not focus all attention on themselves. In short, they must actively cultivate *empathy*. Clearly, then, dialogue is *not debate*. In debate, as we say, the goal is for one side to win and the other to lose. And this method can be very useful in academic and some legal contexts. In dialogue, however, the goal is for *both* sides to win.<sup>31</sup> And this method is almost certainly the only one that can end the current polarization of men and women and take us in an entirely new direction.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>See *Spreading Misandry: The Teaching of Contempt for Men in Popular Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001); *Legalizing Misandry: From Public Shame to Systemic Discrimination against Men* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006); *Sanctifying Misandry: Goddess Ideology and the Fall of Man* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010); *Replacing Misandry: A History of Men* (in press) and *Transcending Misandry: From Feminist Ideology to Inter-Sexual Dialogue* (in press).

<sup>2</sup>Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).



<sup>3</sup>See Nathanson and Young, *Spreading Misandry*, 194-233. Here are the eight characteristic, and therefore diagnostic, features of what we call “ideology”: (1) dualism, according to which all of history is a titanic conspiracy of “them” against “us”; (2) essentialism, according to which “we” are inherently or even innately good; (3) hierarchy, which leads directly to the conclusion that “we” are inherently or innately superior to “them”; (4) collectivism, according to which “our” collective good takes precedence over the needs of society as a whole; (5) utopianism, which assumes the possibility of perfection and therefore on punishing those who stand in the way of attaining it; (6) revolutionism, because only eliminating the source of evil, root and branch, not mere reform, will do the trick; (7) consequentialism, in the sense that a good end can justify what would otherwise be seen as evil means; and (8) quasi-religiosity, which involves both the attribution by initiates of divine or quasi-divine authority to their cause and the focus on special texts, days, places and rituals. These characteristic features are very closely related to each other, sometimes overlapping. All or most of these features must of these be present for us to classify a worldview as an ideology.

<sup>4</sup>Paul Nathanson, interviewed by Sue Smith, on *Homerun*, Radio 1, Montreal, 19 November 2013.

<sup>5</sup>Every dictionary includes the word “misogyny,” but few include the word “misandry” (except as a philosophical construct). No computer dictionary at all, to my knowledge, includes it.

<sup>6</sup>Men have probably always resorted to suicide more often than women have, despite their vaunted power, prestige and privileges, but we now have statistics to keep track of the disparity. “From 1999 to 2010, the suicide rate among Americans age 35 to 64 rose by nearly 30 percent, to 17.6 per 100,000 people, up from 13.7. Although suicide rates are growing among both middle-aged men and women, far more men take their own lives. The suicide rate for middle-aged men was 27.3 deaths per 100,000, while for women it was 8.1 deaths per 100,000” (Tara Parker-Pope, “Suicide Rates Rise Sharply in U.S.,” *New York Times*, 2 May 2013. See also National Institute of Mental Health, “Suicide Rates 2007,” [dated 2007], National Institute of Mental Health, [visited] 12 August 2014, <nimh.nih.gov/statistics/4SR07.shtml > ).

<sup>7</sup>This is not only a political problem or an academic one. It is ultimately a *moral* problem. Now some people are uncomfortable with the use of moral discourse in public debates. And yet the conflict that brought me here today, the conflict that has already led to death-threats against me and several other participants at this conference, is ultimately a moral conflict, and ignoring that fact will do nothing to resolve it. It is true, of course, that no one reacts in a helpful way when accused of being an immoral or evil *person*. But I would never accuse anyone of *being* immoral or evil. This is not an ontological problem but a moral one. Someone who indulges in comparative suffering or even the mobilization of resentment for political purposes, for instance, is not an immoral or evil person—that is, *inherently* immoral or evil—because there can be no such thing as an inherently immoral or evil person; that would apply only to a satanic and therefore supernatural being. We are all *ordinary* mortals. We make bad *choices* at some times and good ones at other times. We create or promote bad *ideas* at some times and good ones at other times. Morality relies on choices; choices rely on wisdom; and wisdom relies on information. Anyone who feels offended by this state of affairs might as well feel offended by the human condition.

<sup>8</sup>Nathanson and Young, *Legalizing Misandry*, 36-37; 297-299; 373-390.

<sup>9</sup>The word “holocaust” (or “Holocaust”) is misleading, because that was the ancient Greek word for “sacrifice.” But very few victims of Nazi persecution sacrificed themselves, which made them not victims at all but martyrs. And not one of their victimizers sacrificed anyone as perfect and valuable offering to God. Consequently, many Jews now use the Hebrew word *shoah*, which means “catastrophe.”

<sup>10</sup>Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966)

<sup>11</sup>Both biblical and rabbinic Judaism rely on two forms of theology. One of them fits the paradigm of “providence,” which assumes divine intervention to protect righteous Israelites or Jews and punish their unrighteous adversaries (including unrighteous Israelites or Jews). Providential theology has always been problematic, because no one can demonstrate its application to history without elaborate and sometimes offensive attempts to “interpret” history accordingly. The other form of theology fits a very different paradigm, that of “grace,” which assumes the spontaneous or ritualized accessibility of holiness in daily life no matter what the historical circumstances might be. The Book of Job, controversial but canonical, remains a classic challenge to providential theology. Job suffers despite his innocence and therefore demands an explanation from God. The answer is not that he must be guilty of something to have deserved punishment. The answer is not a cognitive one at all. It is a theophany, an ecstatic and overwhelming experience of God’s presence.

<sup>12</sup>See Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (New York: Verso Books, 2000). This book remains intensely controversial, which indicates that the author has hit a nerve.

<sup>13</sup>Emil Fackenheim, *God’s Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: New York University Press, 1970).

<sup>14</sup>Susan Brownmiller coined the expression “rape culture” in her landmark book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975). This expression fell into general disuse for a while, prompting some to believe that the polarization between men and women was subsiding, but it has recently regained currency. The underlying premise is still that our *entire culture* (like every other one throughout history), not only the “culture” of college campuses, relies on rape or the threat of rape. But now, at least some women have questioned this premise. See Barbara Kay, “‘Rape Culture’ Fanatics Don’t Know What a Culture Is,” *National Post*, 8 March 2014. See also Caroline Kitchens, “It’s Time to End ‘Rape Culture’ Hysteria,” *Time*, 20 March 2014.

<sup>15</sup>The prevalent assumptions are that only women can be raped and that only men can be rapists. According to one recent study, however, both assumptions are dubious. See Laura Stemple and Ilan Meyer, “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America: New Data Challenge Old Assumptions,” *American Journal Public Health*, 104:6 (June 2014): e19-e26.

<sup>16</sup>By August 2014, at least thirty American college men were fighting back, *in court*, after being accused of rape but being denied due process at their colleges. Under Title IX, accusers can claim that the accused have violated their civil rights. The standard of proof for violation of civil rights is much

lower than it is criminal cases, however, which means that many cases boil down to “she said” versus “he said.” In other words, accusers are much more likely to win than the accused. Why colleges are involved at all in rape cases, which are matters of criminal law, is another matter. They fear bad publicity, which might scare the parents of potential students, and therefore prefer to deal with these matters privately (and with no one around to ensure due process for the accused). In any case, male students and their lawyers have organized themselves for legal battles in court. More and more of them are suing their accusers, their former universities or even both for violations of civil rights. See, for instance, “New York Times Flops in Attempt to Rig the Sexual Assault Debate, [dated] 15 August 2014, *Stop Abusive and Violent Environments*, [visited] 15 August 2014, <[saveservices.org/2014/08/ny-times-flops-in-attempt-to-rig-the-campus-sexual-assault-debate/](http://saveservices.org/2014/08/ny-times-flops-in-attempt-to-rig-the-campus-sexual-assault-debate/)>. See Ashe Schow, “Backlash: College Men Challenge ‘Guilty until Proven Innocent’ Standard for Sex Assault Cases,” *Washington Examiner*, 11 August 2014; and Charlotte Hayes, “Affirmative Consent’ Laws Create More Confusion and Problems Than They Solve,” [dated] 15 August 2014, *Townhall Magazine*, [visited] 15 August 2014, <[townhall.com/columnists/charlottehays/2014/08/15/affirmative-consent-laws-create-more-confusion-and-problems-than-they-would-solve-m1879017/page/full](http://townhall.com/columnists/charlottehays/2014/08/15/affirmative-consent-laws-create-more-confusion-and-problems-than-they-would-solve-m1879017/page/full)>

<sup>17</sup>Melody Gutierrez, “‘Affirmed Consent’ Bill Signed by Brown,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 September 2014.”

<sup>18</sup>See Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York: Harper, 2008).

<sup>19</sup>Most social scientists now believe that some form of joint custody, or shared custody, is best for children to the extent that this arrangement gives children reliable and enduring access to both parents (unless the parents are unwilling to put their personal conflicts aside, of course, or unless one parent is likely to be violent). At the heart of this argument is the massive evidence that children with two parents at home do better than those with only one parent. But would any two parents—two mothers, say, or two fathers—be as effective as the two genetic parents? Opinion is divided on this matter. Some experts acknowledge that mothers and fathers function differently within family life, although even these experts do not always agree on how or why they differ (let alone on how or why they *should* differ). Other experts promote single parents and same-sex parents by arguing that mothers and fathers are interchangeable apart from gestation and lactation—and even those exceptions are of no importance in view of some new reproductive technologies. Anyone, they say, can function as a “father-figure,” a “mother-figure” or both. So far, no conclusive evidence supports either side of this debate, because we are still waiting for the results of well-planned longitudinal studies—that is, large and randomly selected studies of children over the several decades from birth to the beginning of a new reproductive cycle.

<sup>20</sup>The words “masculine” and “feminine” refer to *gender* and thus to culturally assigned characteristics. The words “male” and “female,” by contrast, refer to *sex* and thus to innate characteristics. The words “men” and “women” refer to the various combinations of gender and sex that make us human.

<sup>21</sup>Many women argue that our society could make it much easier than it does now for women to have children and work outside the home. But the only people who have ever argued seriously that motherhood is “boring” have been some early feminists. They were following Betty Friedan, who believed

that women could find personal fulfillment only by building careers outside the home. Very few feminists would make that argument today, when even lesbian couples demand both the right to marry and the right to have children of their own, although most feminists would insist that society make it practical for women to do both.

<sup>22</sup>In addition, ideological feminists have lobbied, successfully in many countries, to promote reproductive technologies that women want (such as abortion) but to ban reproductive technologies (such as surrogacy) that might harm women physically, emotionally or symbolically. Spearheading this movement in the 1980s and 1990s was the Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering. Ironically, many of the same ideological feminists have now turned around and advocated the use of most reproductive technologies in order to accommodate lesbian couples.

<sup>23</sup>This should be self-evident because of the abundant and longstanding evidence from other targets of resentment. At the top of that list would be women themselves, who have complained for decades about the ways that misogyny— notions of the ideal mother, the ideal woman, the ideal female body—have harmed their personal and collective identities. Both black Americans and Jews, moreover, have long complained about the “self-hatred” that results from prejudice against them.

<sup>24</sup>Egalitarian feminists do not attack the men of today, generally speaking, but some of them do blame residual sexual inequality on the men of yesterday by unwittingly accepting the conspiracy theory of history—which is to say, the theory that primeval men, for whatever reason, created societies that gave power and prestige to themselves but denied both to women (a theory that we examine in all of our books but most thoroughly in *Sanctifying Misandry*). Otherwise, feminists could not insist on moral grounds, let alone legal grounds, that the men of today pay for residual sexual equality by submitting to affirmative action, for instance, if it favors women. Women often call this “leveling the playing field,” but men—ordinary men—often experience it as not only a denial of equality but also as a collective punishment for the sins of their remote male ancestors.

<sup>25</sup>There are many forms of feminism (liberal, socialist, religious, womanist and so on), especially if you consider forms that have arisen in non-Western societies. From the specific perspective of *men*, however, there are only two: egalitarian feminism (which affirms men who join women in promoting sexual equality) and ideological feminism (which denounces early men as the founders of patriarchy and contemporary men as the inheritors of patriarchy). Men have trouble making even this distinction, because not all feminists (or people of any kind) are consistent; double messages and double standards are everywhere, as Young and I explain in all of our books.

<sup>26</sup>See Charles Blow, “Yes, All Men,” *New York Times*, 1 June 2014.

<sup>27</sup>Women should not encourage men to feel vulnerable, because vulnerability has no more appeal to women than it does to men. Cultivating it on psychological grounds, therefore, makes no sense. Rather, women should encourage men merely to *accept the fact* that vulnerability of one kind or another is an inescapable fact of the human condition.

<sup>28</sup>Sexual equality need not imply sameness. European feminists, for instance, have not drawn that

conclusion. They have long insisted on state support for mothers (and long ignored state laws that require young men, not women, to serve in armies).

<sup>29</sup>*Women and Men Unglued* (Katherine Gilday, 2004).

<sup>30</sup>Joint custody is becoming more common, but ideological feminists still argue—often successfully, as they did in Canada—that fathers who demand joint custody are really trying to reassert control over their wives, not to care for their children, and are likely to be violent.

<sup>31</sup>We will explore this topic very fully in *Transcending Misandry*, which is still in press. The word “dialogue” refers in this context to one point on a continuum of communication. At one end of the continuum is hostility, at the other harmony. Debate is near the former, dialogue near the latter. But no one needs to be a philosopher or even a moral philosopher to participate in dialogue. The goal is “concrete” in the sense of social transformation. And the method practical for any groups that want to move away from enduring conflict and toward reconciliation: acceptance of ten principles that guarantee fairness and justice for both sides. These principles, collectively, amount to what we call the “decatalogue of dialogue.”



Paul Nathanson, PhD, is researcher at the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.



Katherine K. Young, PhD, is Professor Emerita at the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

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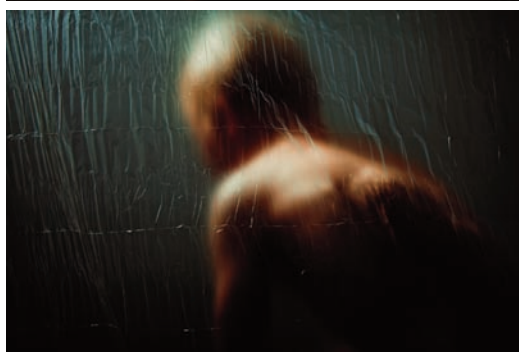
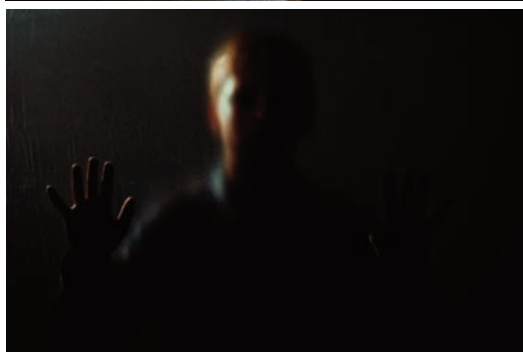
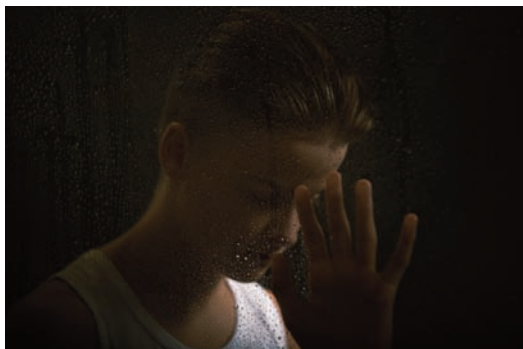
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## Transfigurines

An exploration of young minds holding on to the secure foundations of the comprehensible world, now and then daring to take a peek through the thin curtain protecting the innocence, unreachable and easily misjudged by the obscured vision of adulthood.







**JAN H. ANDERSEN** is a Danish photographer, software developer, and author specializing in topics surrounding children and teenagers. With a degree in child care and with many years of experience working with troubled kids and families, he writes with passion about child psychology, boy issues and parenting. You can read more at his website [www.jhandersen.com](http://www.jhandersen.com) and reach him at [jha@jhandersen.com](mailto:jha@jhandersen.com).

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# Book Reviews



**Tammi Vacha-Haase, Stephen R. Wester and Heidi Fowell (eds.), *Psychotherapy with Older Men*, New York: Routledge, 2011.**

In his Foreword of the book: *Psychotherapy with Older Men*, Kiselica the series editor, proudly announces the arrival of this volume as one that is 'sensitively written', 'scholarly' and exhibiting a blend of clinical experience, and 'sophisticated research expertise on the psychology of men and masculinity'. The rationale for the book is certainly laudable, as it quite rightly identifies that mental health professionals may 'lack knowledge about the lives of older men and how to help them'. The book's intended use is for 'the experienced therapist' and it presumes a degree of competence in the practice of professional psychology.<sup>1</sup>

The key undertaking of the book is provision of information that is clear, accessible and instructive, for professionals to engage older men in psychotherapy, '...earn their trust, and join them on their journey during their twilight years'.<sup>2</sup> In the Preface, the contributing authors immediately erect a thematic mainstay of the book - their view and understanding of masculinity, which is consistently invoked interpretively in relation to men's experience and men's issues, and appears to be foundational to their *psychology* of men and masculinity. They mention their reliance on 'extant literature' that has identified 'concepts of traditional masculine traits'<sup>3</sup>, and to 'empirical work on the socialised male gender role'. They say of the book that it is a '...conceptualisation of older men's experience...through a lens identifying a lifetime of socialised situations'.<sup>4</sup>

The first two chapters of the book: *Life as an Older Man*, and, *Gender and Aging*, assume the same stance in relation to masculinity, variously characterising it as: 'hegemonic', dysfunctional (with few exceptions), maladaptive, associated with 'social privilege', 'homophobic', and 'aggrieved'. The authors claim not to pathologize men, nor to 'overtly blame them for their problems'<sup>5</sup> and yet much of the content of these and other chapters reinforce the popular stereotypes of male deficit, and indulge a subtle degradation of the male gender under the guise of caring and concerned therapy.

Whilst this pervasively undermines the value of the book, rendering much of its content at best unhelpful, at worst potentially clinically iatrogenic, and subverts its stated intention and purpose, there is some reason here to come to the authors' defence, albeit in a particular sense. They are merely following an ingrained and widely accepted practice common in the voluminous divinatory genre of literature masquerading as authoritative, dealing with the male gender.

A propensity sadly evident and endemic in academe, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, is a lazy deference to the ideological influence and literature of gender feminist social constructionism. Although now thoroughly discredited by evidence-based scholarship – particularly that of the empirical science disciplines, as largely speculative and theoretically untenable, it doggedly persists as the dominant gender paradigm, in spite of its dilapidation, a bit like the Black Knight in the Monty Python film, *The Holy Grail*.

The most conspicuous characteristics of this paradigm include: its denial of and disconnection from physiological reality, its myopic cultural essentialism, its selective use of statistical data, its assertion of male culpability, and male social and emotional deficiency, and its radical devaluation of thought and thoughtful enquiry, by making the appearance of appealing to intelligence and reason, whilst actually seeking merely to induce moral indignation, and unquestioning adherence and acceptance (a classic strategy of propagandist fundamentalism).

This pseudo-intellectual and unfortunately facile take on gender and psycho-social reality, is within such easy reach of academic authors, and has been so often asserted as the only authoritative and *acceptable* view by popular media and vocal ideologues, that it continues to be the preferred 'off the shelf' 'plugin' product of gender theory. Perhaps more disturbing, is when it is used despite some awareness of its defectiveness, simply because it is safer to do so than to run a line of argument contrary to political correctness; an action admittedly that has proven to be to the detriment of many promising academic careers.

Certainly we should not be surprised that academics can succumb to ideology of this kind; as Jacques Ellul observed: "They absorb the largest amount of unverifiable secondhand, information; they feel the compelling need to have an opinion...and thus easily succumb to opinions offered to them by propaganda on all such indigestible pieces of information; they consider themselves as capable of "judging for themselves". They literally need propaganda."<sup>6</sup>

In treating issues of male emotion and coping, the authors exhibit small knowledge – and appear unaware of the psychology of males and masculinity easily accessible in extant scholarly literature.

In chapter 2, which reflects on a range of mostly rather wilted theoretical material, little of any value emerges to guide and inform psychotherapy. Here again an opportunity to provide relevant evidence-based perspectives is sadly wasted. The incessant and glib reference to 'male socialisation' as a substitute for evidence based analysis and data, or a conceptual and theoretical basis for a psy-



chology of males or masculinity, I found surprising and disappointing. Unfortunately, this was to be the case throughout nearly the entire book.

Chapter 3, takes up the issue of male help-seeking. No surprises here, quite predictably the stance the authors take is that men are reluctant to seek psychotherapy, yes, you guessed it because of the 'socialised male gender'. Would it be so unreasonable to consider for a moment at least that such reluctance, assuming it is true, might have something to do with the reputation mental health, counselling, and psychology professions have for a belittling attitude towards men? Could it be that men are more discerning and self-respecting than people imagine? Why would men want to avail themselves of services that deem them a psychosocially deficient and culpable gender aggregate?

In fact in Australia, there have been some notable experiments in revised service provision, that clearly suggest that men are in fact more than willing to utilise both health and mental health services that are 'male friendly', respectful, and appropriate. It is also interesting to note that Divisions of General Practice (medical) in Eastern Australia, conducted local research on barriers to male access to and utilisation of clinical services.<sup>7</sup> The findings of this research were consistent with the previously mentioned revised service delivery experiments. Blaming men for not turning up to therapy when they should, is an easy escapism for services and service providers that fail to engage men. An analogy might be helpful here. If you organised a party, invited lots of people to come and nobody turned up, and there you were with tables of food and beverages bound to go to waste, would you simply blame everyone for not caring to turn up, or would ask yourself some serious questions, about your approach, the quality or nature of the event, or even about your own reputation, presumed popularity or social approachability?

One further observation about chapter 3, (and my perception here may not necessarily be shared by other readers), is that if as the authors suggest, the book is for experienced therapists, it significantly misses the mark. I found some of the content patronising and condescending, and at times felt like I was being addressed as a first-year college student in need of a lesson in elementary self-awareness.

Chapters 4 & 5 have some data of value in relation to life transitions and adaptation, and depression in older men. Notwithstanding, here again the authors seek to bend and interpret data to fit with their thematic supposition of speculative social constructionism. A simplistic attribution to 'masculinities' and 'denial' is made instead of an understanding of physiology based differences between male and female depression presentations. Again, the opportunity is missed to offer an evidence based analysis of on-average sex-specific coping styles, the coping assets of males, and their particular symptomatology of experienced powerless giving rise to transient pseudo-depressive symptoms. Common data indicating the particular problems for men with alcohol and abdominal obesity induced serotonergic dysfunction are also absent. There was also opportunity here for the authors to offer a basic critique of the inadequacies of the DSMIV in providing diagnostic depression criteria suited to male clients, and a critique of some anti-depressant prescribing practises of General Medical Practitioners and Physicians that can impact on males quite negatively.

Chapter 6, dedicated to an analysis of anxiety in older men, offers some useful information, but fails to examine vitally important data of physiology as it relates to differential profiles of anxiety of men compared with women, and the connection between these differences and other mental and physical health outcomes. It is interesting that this chapter reflects strongly a medical rather than psychotherapeutic perspective, and yet ignores much robust and readily available data illuminative for interventions of psychotherapy.

The remaining chapters contain some useful data and discussion on chronic health conditions, substance misuse and cognitive conditions of some older males. However, there is still a disappointingly naïve dependence on *explain-all* 'male socialisation' as a substitute for a sound evidence based theory of gender and male psychology.

Sadly the real value of this book is not in what it offers psychotherapists for working more effectively and respectfully with older men, but as an example (at least in part) of a genre of current literature mistakenly reliant on a-priori assertions of popular but largely specious and speculative gender ideology. This represents the antithesis of scholarship. Not only so, but given that psychotherapists can profoundly influence psycho-social and mental health outcomes for patients and clients, to guide clinicians in approaches that may be in the service of ideology rather than evidence based practice, has not only ethical but potentially clinical iatrogenic implications.

A common and unacceptable naivety is that somehow good intentions or the humanism of our craft as psychotherapists is a sufficient regulatory guarantee against doing harm. It is not. The best of therapeutic intentions, if poorly informed, may not only be ineffectual, but also significantly harmful.

I had hoped to find this book informative and scholarly; it proved to be neither, due to its departures throughout from standards of basic academic composition: its uncritical dependence on ideological suppositions of male gender and psychology, the omission of references to important extant sources of data and literature on the subject, and its reinforcement (albeit perhaps unwitting) of an unjust and demeaning deficit image of males.

John Ashfield

## Notes

1. *Foreword*, xii – xiv.
2. *Ibid.*, xiv
3. *Preface*, xviii
4. *Ibid.*, xx
5. *Preface*, xx
6. Ellul, J (1974) *Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes*, New York: Vintage Books, pp. 180-181.
7. Woods, M (2001) *Men's use of GP services*. *New South Wales Public health Bulletin*, Vol. 12, No. 12.

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