



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.

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.¹ 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,² 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.*³ 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.⁴ 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”).⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸ 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”⁹ 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*,¹⁰ 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),¹¹ 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.”¹² 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.¹³ 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.”¹⁴ At issue is not whether rape occurs on college campuses and elsewhere, because it clearly does,¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ The governor of California has already turned these demands into law (although it affects, so far, only university policies and not criminal proceedings).¹⁷

And Michael Kimmel believes that he knows why. He argues that young men are preoccupied with a sense of “aggrieved entitlement.”¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰

Feminine identities: Whether women like it or not, they can make at least one contribution to society that meets all three requirements.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³ 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 feminism²⁴ and the explicit ones of ideological feminism—few have been able to distinguish clearly between these two forms²⁵ 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,²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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,²⁸ 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*,²⁹ 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?³⁰

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.³¹ 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

¹See *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).

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

³See 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.

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

⁵Every 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.

⁶Men 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 >).

⁷This 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.

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

⁹The 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.”

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

¹¹Both 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.

¹²See 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.

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

¹⁴Susan 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.

¹⁵The 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.

¹⁶By 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/>. 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>

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

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

¹⁹Most 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.

²⁰The 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.

²¹Many 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.

²²In 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.

²³This 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.

²⁴Egalitarian 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.

²⁵There 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.

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

²⁷Women 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.

²⁸Sexual 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).

²⁹*Women and Men Unglued* (Katherine Gilday, 2004).

³⁰Joint 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.

³¹We 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.

NEW MALE STUDIES: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL (NMS) IS AN OPEN ACCESS ONLINE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES FACING BOYS AND MEN WORLDWIDE. THIS JOURNAL USES OPEN JOURNAL SYSTEMS 2.3.4.0, WHICH IS OPEN SOURCE JOURNAL MANAGEMENT AND PUBLISHING SOFTWARE DEVELOPED, SUPPORTED, AND FREELY DISTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT UNDER THE GNU GENERAL PUBLIC LICENSE.

THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN DOWNLOADED FROM [HTTP://NEWMALESTUDIES.COM](http://newmalestudies.com).