



BEING MALE

Kyle C. Glover



ABSTRACT

The author describes his experience of male embodiment; the adverse impact of gynocentric, often misandric, education practices on his schooling; and his subsequent quest for personal and professional fulfilment. A college professor's male-affirmative mentoring enabled the author to develop a sense of himself not possible in typical feminist-theory informed college courses. This professor's psychology courses "opened up" the author's "thinking about the role of sex in human life." The College's men's group encouraged male camaraderie. The author is currently undertaking graduate studies in psychology; he sees misandry in the mental-health field and a need for a better understanding of males in the women-dominated helping professions.

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My education in male studies began from birth, where by fate or fortune I was born a male baby. Whatever the fashionable gender politics of our time may decree, my existence is ineluctably bound to this male body, or, in a word: it is *embodied*. I shall never know what it is to have bodied forth as a female, nor shall any female know my embodied experience. She may have her experience of me, experiencing her, experiencing him *ad infinitum*, but the body each of us is inseparable from the body each of us have. All else is game playing, both fun and serious.

What an introduction to life this body of mine had! Stuck in the birth canal for hours (sorry, Mom) until I was cut and medically plunger-ed out with my head resembling one of the Coneheads of *Saturday Night Live*. Upon seeing me for the first time my maternal grandfather exclaimed “What’s wrong with his head?” One theme of my life was already developing – being messed up in the head. I was then promptly circumcised on my parents’ orders. I’ve never gotten a good explanation for why that was the case, though their being in the medical field they were probably following the doctor’s orders.¹ My parents told me that during the procedure their colleague, a Jamaican nurse, cried out “Dat baby got the biggest penis [on a baby, I assume] I ever seen!” So, a second early theme – confusion about and fixation on my manhood.

My later education and reading about issues facing males today has informed how I see some of what happened to me during my childhood and adolescence. Most notably I look at how my grade school years in the 90s and the start of the new millennium were affected by school reforms meant to privilege girls. I am one of four siblings, two boys and two girls. My sisters, who are very intelligent and hardworking people, were typically at the top of their class and generally excelled in school. My brother and I, also intelligent though a bit undisciplined, were lucky to graduate. Surely, some of that can be attributed to the age-old differences between male and female school performance, but as I was to learn, there was more going on.

Christina Hoff Sommers in *The War Against Boys* (2000) has written critically of the social science that was used to inform changes to schools and society that looked to elevate girls

¹ For medical and ethical concerns about circumcision see Geisheker (2013) <http://www.newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/article/view/60> and for the psychological impact of circumcision see Watson and Golden (2017) <http://www.newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/article/view/261/317>.

above their male counterparts. It was in 1990 (when I was two years old) that Carol Gilligan declared America's girls were in crisis and that broad societal changes needed to be made to help them. Though her evidence was spotty at best, she attracted attention from the *New York Times* and other large publications. Based largely on the wave of woe-are-the-girls literature and research inaugurated by Gilligan, in 1994 the U.S. Congress passed the Gender Equity in Education Act in order to ameliorate the ostensible differences in performance between boys and girls in school.

However, like much feminist rhetoric, it sometimes appeared there was less concern with empowering girls and more with trashing boys. In fact it appeared that boys were a new enemy in the path to women's liberation. Whatever sins six-year-old me had committed to that point, I doubt one of them was oppressing girls. If I recall correctly, girls actually quite liked me at that age (I was pretty cute). As Sommers (2000) has shown using U.S. Department of Education data, there was already an achievement gap between boys and girls in the 1990s *favouring girls*. The changes made in schools to favour girls' learning and school engagement only deepened the divide. I know it is a small sample size, but as a case study my own siblings' performance in school during the '90s and early 2000s backs Sommers' findings over Gilligan and company. If you consider that we are all genetically related and probably have similar levels of intelligence, it would make sense that situational factors were contributing to the stark divergence in our performance. My sisters would say I was lazier than them (fair enough), but I'm nearing my doctorate in psychology now, so what do they know (sorry, Carly and Paige).

Despite my disadvantage (or laziness) I did make it into college due to getting my act together in the last year and a half of high school. I would attend Wagner College on Staten Island, New York, where unbeknownst to me there was a college men's group forming under the guidance of Dr. Miles Groth. I wouldn't meet Miles until my sophomore year. Starting off at college I had a few ideas of my own about the world but was open to exploring all the liberal arts had to offer me. Mostly I was interested in studying the world's religions, but they didn't have a major in that at Wagner. I was politically liberal and was caught up in most of the things associated with campus leftism. All things considered, it was nowhere near as virulent and demonstrative as it is now. Mostly it involved smoking cigarettes and talking about the plight of the proletariat.

I also had a dalliance with feminism, as I took my female classmates' statements about the plight of women seriously. I really was a sophomore both in year and knowledge of the world. I took a course on feminist philosophy which was intriguing at times though class did devolve into male-bashing occasionally, intellectualized male-bashing, but bashing all the same. I recall that after sitting through a few classes, I said to myself "Why is everyone so mad at men?" It was towards the end of that semester that in another philosophy course a rather physically imposing classmate named Andy would ask if I'd join the college men's group. I agreed to give it a try, and he told me to reach out to Miles Groth.

My relationship with Miles, which has taken many forms throughout the years, began in the basement classroom of Parker Hall with a brief conversation about joining the men's group. I agreed and this began a fruitful collaboration between us that has lasted over a decade. Though the course of our thought has led us more towards concerns about psychotherapy, his courses in gender studies at Wagner were, I think, the birth of male studies as a curriculum and opened up my thinking about the role of sex in human life.

My experience in the men's group was one of camaraderie. Three of my best friends to this day were in that group and we spent much of it in discussion about the world. We didn't even necessarily talk about men's issues and unlike most people thought it wasn't a place to bash women either. We didn't even talk about women unless someone was having romantic troubles. We'd go on retreats in Upstate New York due to the generous grant we were given and there we'd talk about what it meant to us to be men, what our relationships were like with our fathers, how we saw the world. For the most part we enjoyed one another's company and ate good food.

Outside perception of the group was a bit different. On a campus that was mainly comprised of women (about 70%) there was some distrust but mainly just lack of understanding. Occasionally, you had those who believed it was a conspiracy to oppress women on campus, but they were few and far between back then. Mainly the lack of understanding could be summarized by a question asked by my friend Katie at the time: "What is it, some kind of gay thing?" It wasn't though gay guys were certainly welcome to join. One guy who did join tried to use the group as a dating service, but he didn't last too long. These two attitudes about males coming together to meet, that it is either (1) conspiratorial or (2) homosexual in nature is, I think, a fairly neat summation of attitudes towards men in the U.S. Much of this I think is

attributable to the particular feature of the narcissism of women who think that men must always be thinking about them.

I attended Wagner from 2007-2011, and the sort of campus activism that is now commonplace was not happening yet. Looking back, I can see that it was simmering under the surface but it was still held in check by the general collegiality of the campus atmosphere. However, upon returning a year later to see the campus there was a new feeling in the air. The young guy who was running the campus men's group told me that during the club fair at the start of the semester young women had come up to him and called him a "fucking pig" and spit at his table. People had been suspicious of our men's group before, but they'd rarely been hostile. I heard stories of rape accusations that sounded an awful lot like the awkward sexual encounters we had as young people discovering our sexuality. This was no doubt a product of the "Dear Colleague" letter which the Obama administration used to weaponize Title IX to form the campus kangaroo courts which mainly put young men's sexuality on trial.² I was a first-hand observer of the formation of many of the disturbing trends on campuses that took place during the 2010s. My position from within the Wagner College men's group gave me a unique perspective to see the resentment forming in young people towards (mainly white) males.

After college I would obtain a research position in South Australia due to the generosity of Miles, and Drs. Gary Misan and John Ashfield. There I would do research on men's sheds, which is a kind of male space outside of the home where men can tinker around and work on things. There was and is movement in Australia where these sheds have been expanded into mainly male-only spaces where men young and old can enjoy one another's company and learn from one another. I also assisted on some research on men's mental health and suicide as part of a team that primarily did research on issues facing rural populations. My work on sheds was published in *New Male Studies* in one of its first issues.

² For insight into sexual politics on the college campus (as well as a prescient warning about "fake news") see Glover (2015) <http://www.newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/article/view/185/216>. Joe Biden has occupied a central place in promoting radical feminist ideas into respectability meaning we are poised for another round of their ideological influence.

I was stationed in Whyalla, a little town close to the Outback in South Australia. It was a pretty lonesome life there, which was what I needed at the time though it was difficult to accept. There I really started to build my life, first by taking up cooking my own meals. The men in my family have been the cooks, especially on my father's side. My grandfather was a chicken farmer from Texas, and he would cook up fried chicken throughout my dad's childhood, and my father combined that love of all things fried with my grandmother's French cooking (lots of butter). If I die from a heart attack do not be surprised. But by 24 years old I could barely cook an egg and so my own passage to manhood started in the kitchen of all places. Also, during this time, I shed much of my youthful narcissism and folly as I became more resolute to face the world on my own.

Time spent in Australia was time searching for the Father such as has been written about eloquently by Luigi Zoja in *The Father* (2001). As the place of the father within society has declined in Western civilization, perhaps unsurprisingly it has given way to greater chaos that has reached a fever pitch in recent years. The hatred expressed towards males, especially by women, and the wayward place of boys in society is a direct result of the disappearance of the father. Only his malevolent side is acknowledged as was seen in the daily media spectacle of bashing outgoing president Donald Trump. But it was the decision long ago of human males to become fathers that led to the formation of civilization as we know it and as they go so will we. This search within myself continues to today and is a daily struggle in determining what kind of man I will be.

After Australia I served for a time as assistant editor on this journal as it got its start. During that time, I had also returned to New York to live in Brooklyn and took my chances in the city. After a few years of working bad jobs and having generally troubled relationships I began to lose interest in male studies as I realized I needed to turn attention towards my own struggles. In rather petulant and unceremonious fashion I left as assistant editor (sorry, Dr. Ashfield) and turned towards other interests. It was during this time that I learned of what the well-educated and creative class of people in chic Brooklyn thought of males. The men would denounce their privilege and speak about their need to be allies to women. The women were mostly uninteresting apart from their fashion choices. The men were self-effacing in the hopes of courting one of these women and the women took sadistic glee in talking trash about men. In

the bizarre romantic world of Brooklyn our twisted sexual politics have turned into a sadomasochistic game.

Luckily for me I spent a lot of that time in a training analysis for therapy. I also met my future wife and returned to school for psychology. After getting married we moved to San Diego where I have been getting my doctorate in clinical psychology and exploring my interest in existential therapy. My work published in this journal on school shooters was one of my first forays in years back into the psychology of men.³ Though my focus is mainly in therapy, my work in therapy is deeply informed by my experiences throughout my twenties while involved with male studies. Most of my patients now are young men, mainly alcoholics and opiate addicts, who along with their struggles with drugs are struggling with manhood in our chaotic era. The misandry that Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young⁴ have written about for years is present within the mental health field and is expressed as a harsher attitude toward male patients.

Perhaps nowhere is it more apparent that the picture of the all-powerful male is a lie than in the therapist's office. Here you will hear stories of men beaten by wives, abused by neighbours, unloved, uncared for, fundamentally and deeply lonely behind the smile they wear most days. The majority of people in the helping professions are female. Some are adequate to the task of caring for males, many are not. *New Male Studies* stands poised to provide a resource for those looking to provide more adequate care for males. I first sat down to write this on International Men's Day which was receiving its annual derision from the Twitterati and the elite media class. The familiar refrain "Every day is men's day!" Tell that to those who are suffering, tell that to those whose crime is being male.

³ See Glover (2019) <http://www.newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/article/view/301/362>. This piece attempts to deconstruct the notion of toxic masculinity as well as the typical psychiatric account of school shooters.

⁴ [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 Revolutionary History of Men](#) (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), and [Transcending Misandry: From Feminist Ideology to Inter-Sexual Dialogue](#) (in press).

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Author profile



K. C. Glover is obtaining his PsyD. in Applied Clinical Psychology at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology at San Diego. He received his BA in interdisciplinary studies at Wagner College and MA in Child Psychology from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. For a number of years, he worked as a mental health service provider for underprivileged populations in New York City. He was also the assistant editor of NMS during its early years.

Contact details: kglover@ego.thechicagoschool.edu

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