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NEW MALE STUDIES – AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

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PREFACE

The first of our tenth-anniversary issues of *New Male Studies: An International Journal* examines practical and theoretical aspects of the male experience from boyhood through manhood. Jerome Teelucksingh's brief essay on "the boy wound" considers those "experiences of abuse, hurt, neglect and hate resulting in a painful stage of incompleteness" that complicate a boy's "transition into manhood." Teelucksingh advocates for healing this wound through "nurturing our boys," otherwise "the wrong persons will be their role models."

The two refereed articles in this issue treat the negotiation of commitment in male-female relationships. Steve Moxon's examination of "male heterogeneity and female choice in human mating" suggests that "pair bonding ensures successive highest-possible-quality offspring while offsetting age-related fertility decline, and dissuading low-mate-value social-sexual approach." Moxon argues a "failure properly to incorporate male heterogeneity and female discernment explains a longstanding theoretical impasse, with infanticide prevention a default mistaken hypothesis attempting to account for monogamy's chimerical opportunity costs."

Jane Ogden and Annie Patterson report the findings of their qualitative study in "It's just a girl thing, they're like that'. An Exploration into Men's Experience of Difficult Relationships with Women." Their male subjects "experienced controlling, shouting and blocking behaviours which had immediate and longer-term negative effects." These men "tended to normalise these experiences, reducing their victim status and making their partner's behaviour more acceptable." Ogden and Patterson conclude, "as the literature has been reluctant to accept men as victims, so are the men themselves."

The impact on males of theories explaining masculine expression is the subject of three of this issue's shorter articles. In an essay written before the 2020 U. S. Presidential Election, Gerard Nicol discusses "critical gender theory," his moniker for those Obama-era programs that justified the scapegoating of men. Nicol predicts "a Biden Administration will reimplement" those programs, and "American society will be cast back into the Obama-era world of critical gender theory and College Title IX kangaroo courts."

Tim Goldich investigates whether masculinity "needs 'redefining,'" and concludes that rather than "a redefinition of masculinity, we need an improved understanding of what masculinity truly is—an understanding divested of stereotypes and misandry." He argues that redefining masculinity denies its reality and renders it "a mere plaything for would-be sociologists, feminists, and special-interest groups to re-define at their whim."

Rick Bradford' review of Louise Liddon and John Barry's *Perspectives in Male Psychology: An Introduction* suggests this book offers the kind of "improved understanding" that Goldich seeks. Bradford observes, "the ethos the authors promote is that science, as an empirically grounded discipline, is not politics, and so male psychology, if it is to be a science, is not gender politics." The book, Bradford concludes, "provokes the reader into thinking more deeply about what lies behind the many phenomena involving male psychology whose treatment at present is either neglected or unconvincing."

Jan Andersen's photographs, titled "Forever Young," depict an aspect of the complicated transition to manhood described by Jerome Teelucksingh: the Keatsian melancholy, instead of the ecstasy, inherent in being young. Rather than joyful youth, these photos dramatize the troubled isolation boys experience once their embodied maleness codes their contingent value to society. The photographed subject is on the threshold of manhood. Becoming men usually means becoming physically useful. Boys' private contemplation of the male soma and the pressures, rather than just the pleasures it experiences often occurs within the bathroom sanctuary.

The opinions expressed by the authors in this issue do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Team. The papers published here are offered in a spirit of open, evidence-based dialogue regarding sex, gender, relationships, and issues related to male experience.

Thank you to the article reviewers for their contributions to this issue.



Dennis S. Gouws
Editor in Chief

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.

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THE BOY WOUND

Jerome Teelucksingh



ABSTRACT

The boy wound reflects experiences of abuse, hurt, neglect and hate resulting in a painful state of incompleteness. If a boy is neglected or abused, his crucial transition into manhood will be even more difficult. A boy who is physically abused might later see physical abuse as a medium to demand respect or as an acceptable form of punishment. A boy must be taught how to turn his anger, depression and pain into success. If we do not embrace and nurture our boys, then the wrong persons will be their role models. It might be then too late to heal the boy wound. And, if the boy wound is allowed to fester then the society will become very sick.

Keywords: boys, males, masculinity, men, World Day of the Boy Child

Some of us might be familiar with the terms *mother wound*, *father wound* and *narcissistic wound* (Gaba, Lavender). What about the *boy wound*? The boy wound is one of the most painful male experiences: the boy wound reflects conditions of abuse, hurt, neglect and hate resulting in a painful state of incompleteness. This incompleteness is the wound. There are many of us who have been wounded, and some refuse to be healed, whilst others are not aware of the wound. Some of us have small wounds; others display large wounds; a few carry multiple wounds.

Some have mocked the annual observances of World Day of the Boy Child on 16 May; they tend to be people who do not appreciate the significance of protecting and ensuring proper nurturing of the world's boys. Some in Kenya, Africa have acknowledged the fact that a focus on girls and women has contributed to a neglect of the boy child (Pike). Often, seminars and discussions have tended to focus on the adult male and inadvertently to overlook the boy. Some of the problems faced by men are due to earlier situations which were ignored. For instance, a boy who is constantly bullied has a higher chance of maturing into a man who might become introverted or suicidal. It is obvious we need to protect the boy child from the harmful influences of society or else we will reap the whirlwind. If a boy child is neglected or fed a diet of hate and violence, there is an increased possibility that he will develop into a teenager who is misguided and confused. And the next crucial transition into manhood will be even more difficult. A boy who is physically abused will later see physical abuse as a medium to demand respect or as an acceptable form of punishment.

During the past decade, there have been ugly revelations of boys being abused in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, Mexico, Australia and Europe (“Regensburg Domspatzen choir”; Kennedy; “Mexican Catholic group”). In 2020, another can of worms was opened as the world learnt of boys being abused in the Boy Scouts of America. These boys were robbed of their innocence and stripped of their dignity. The perpetrators of such depraved acts against innocent boys will never realize that they have created a generation of incomplete and unfinished men. No amounts of financial compensation to the victims can restore the damage done to these persons. These traumatized boys and humiliated men will face an uphill struggle: some will question organized religion; some will rebuild their broken spirituality; others will try to untangle their snarled sexuality. A scientific study in 2019 revealed that children who are abused will more likely commit suicide (Ioannis Angelakis, Emma Louise Gillespie, Maria

Panagioti). The scandals of the Roman Catholic Church and Boy Scouts are only the tip of the iceberg: what about the many stories of boys being wounded that are not been exposed by the media?

Even the traditional place of safety, the home, has been a breeding ground for abuse and violence. There is an urgent need to focus on the home and school as the public seek solutions to save the boy child. In the 21st century, the boy child lives in a turbulent social environment that makes him vulnerable to a multitude of negative forces.

Educational institutions have become venues for learning and abuse. It could be bullying, peer pressure and other forms of verbal, emotional or physical abuse. The minds of our boys are damaged as they are constantly embarrassed, humiliated and condemned. They graduate with certificates, diplomas and...damaged psyches.

Those boys and men who are victims of violence and abuse are emotionally challenged. Furthermore, boys who are abused will become depressed and attempt to forget the ugly memories by turning to medications and addictive drugs. Additionally, the abused are also psychologically challenged as they grapple with low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts. These are disabilities endured by boys that we have learnt to accept, but we are not dealing with their origins which are preventable. The boy or man who seeks to rectify his life will need a regimen of medication, therapy and counselling.

Many global and regional organizations that claim to be protectors of children cannot provide basic statistics that are needed in the battle to save our boys. Which institution can provide accurate statistics for the boys who are recruited into criminal gangs or unwilling participants of human trafficking? There are many boys who are forced to serve as soldiers in areas such as Afghanistan (Tallon). These innocent child soldiers are denied basic human rights and have lost their lives in senseless wars.

It seems as if our world is addicted to violence against boys. Creating wounds, inflicting pain and creating hurt among young males has become the new normal. This twisted way of life has become entrenched in our societies. We have become desensitized, and we have grown accustomed to wounded boys. Some of us tolerate abuse, tolerate these wounds; this is a frightening situation that reflects the dysfunctional level of society. However, violence is no

longer restricted to the battlefield; it has become a common-and-everyday scenario.

Some boys appear fortunate as they are surrounded by wealth and security but lack caring and considerate parents, friends, or both. Some boys might have attained a sound education and desirable occupation but display personality disorders or lack morals and ethics. This defect in character is another boy wound that is often untreated. We know of ungrateful boys who do not appreciate the work and sacrifices of their parents, guardians and teachers. These are the boys who are also wounded. We need to create an environment of trust to nurture this respect and understanding. In our society many of our boys are goaded to be winners. There is nothing wrong to excel academically, break records and win awards but they become *wounded winners*. However, we have to remind our boys that not everyone can be a winner. Somebody will be second, third...and last. If we keep on pressuring our boys, they will be more susceptible to nervous breakdowns and feelings of insecurity and inferiority. Of course, we cannot encourage a culture of mediocrity or let boys believe that becoming the best is not important.

For too long the world has avoided or moved very slowly in dealing with the trauma, neglect and abuse endured by our boys. Of course, the media would not want to highlight these issues because they seem bland and boring. The reality is that a sensational story would obviously capture more attention and sell more copies of newspapers and magazines. Observers of the World Day of the Boy Child salute those boys who are struggling to survive and those who are helping the healing of the wounds. Too often those teenagers and young men who have beaten the odds and become role models and successful men are not appreciated. We must never be ashamed of our wounded boys and have them hiding in the shadows of life. They must be given proper spiritual, physical and psychological care and be aware of their diversity and different talents.

In 2017, a mother from the United States contended, “While girls are encouraged to be not just ballerinas, but astronauts and coders, boys—who already know they can walk on the moon and dominate Silicon Valley—don’t receive explicit encouragement to fully access their emotions” (Salie). Furthermore, she became aware of the specific colours, messages and images on the clothes in the boys’ department in a baby store and realized, “The boy taught to be tough is emotionally doomed.” Such assessments of the wounded boyhood are needed in understanding the challenges of the young male. We need to identify the wounded boys and

rescue them from the waves of hopelessness and pessimism that continue to knock them down. Boys born to parents who are drug addicts and alcoholics will not fully develop their potential and talents in such a negative environment. Boys reared by parents bearing either a father wound, a mother wound, or both will most likely mature into a wounded adult. Thus, a wounded cycle continues into the next generation. A wounded teacher or wounded role model will often unknowingly inflict wounds on other innocent souls.

These questions arise: should the government or agencies immediately intervene and separate children from their biological parents who are wounded? Or should the government seek help for the parents and later reunite the child or children with the parents? Society should not judge these wounded boys as failures. These wounded children might have a slow or rough start in life, but they do not have to develop into failures or a burden to society. These children must be motivated and taught how to turn their anger, depression and pain into success.

The recipe to create mature, diligent, trustworthy boys in our world is a difficult one. There is considerable inequality; our boys are not all on the same playing field. We need to ensure that our boys can envision a society where they are treated equally. Differences in culture, literacy, religion and geographical location have all posed problems for moving boys to a higher level in society. However, there are similar ingredients in that elusive recipe which will help boys. These include ensuring our boys live peaceful and stable surroundings, promotion of a safe environment to encourage creativity and developing channels of communication to share problems and discuss ideas. Additionally, boys need to be guided on future careers, choices of companions and friends; governments need to create programs to rescue boys who are incarcerated.

It is difficult to disagree that many of our boys are misunderstood, and the adolescent journey is a nightmare. We need to work with our boys to let them fulfill their dreams and goals. We cannot believe that hugging and displaying affection will make our boys soft or effeminate. If we do not embrace and nurture our boys, then the wrong persons will be their role models. It might be too late to heal the boy wounds. If the boy wound is allowed to fester, then the society will become very sick.

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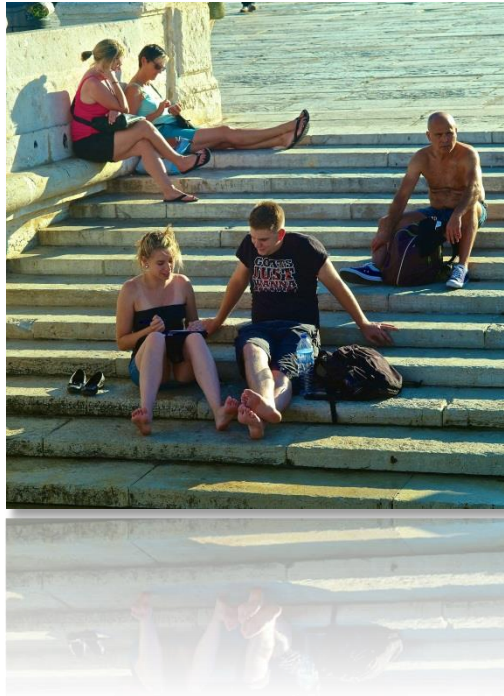
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MALE HETEROGENEITY AND FEMALE CHOICE IN HUMAN MATING: MAXIMISING WOMEN'S FERTILITY IN OFFSETTING STRESS, AGE, AND UNWANTED ATTENTION, WHILE FACILITATING EXTRA-PAIR CONCEPTION. (PART ONE)

Steve Moxon



ABSTRACT

Women's mate choice, given profoundly differential male genetic quality (specifically genomic integrity), is heavily skewed towards topmost-ranked males, producing polygyny with residual monogamy and bachelordom. Polygyny is ancestral, as in gorilla harems (apparently homologous with human female cliques): originally predation-avoidance grouping, male-interposed to obviate female-female stress depressing fertility to sub-replacement (Dunbar). Pair-bonding ensures successive highest-possible-quality offspring while offsetting age-related fertility decline, and dissuading low-mate-value social-sexual approach, thereby actually facilitating access by (or to) high-mate-value males for extra-pair conception. It's a female fertility platform and springboard for its enhancement. Failure properly to incorporate male heterogeneity and female discernment explains a longstanding theoretical impasse, with infanticide prevention a default mistaken hypothesis attempting to account for monogamy's chimerical opportunity costs.

Keywords: male heterogeneity, female choice, monogamy, polygyny, pair-bond, genomic integrity

THE CENTRALITY OF DIFFERENTIAL MALE MATE VALUE

That the human mating system cannot be understood without making central male heterogeneity and female choice was the conclusion in a key review (*Human Origins and the Transition from Promiscuity to Pair-Bonding*) by Gavrilets (2012), as reiterated by Rooker & Gavrilets (2016). This should have come as no surprise, and was no new insight. It's a commonplace if not universal perception that men (as for males generally across species) are seen to vary considerably, indeed enormously as mate prospects. Complementing this, women (as for females generally across species) are seen to be very particular in their choosing. With variation, if more limited, also among women, then males and females pair up according to their equivalent albeit very differently based mate values—the perception by those of the opposite sex of an individual's overall worth as a sexual partner (the sum of traits likely to confer fitness in terms of reproductive output). Men and women mate *assortatively*, that is, according to their similar level of attractiveness. Profound differential male mate value, keen female discernment and consequent assortative mating would be expected to be at the core of any and every hypothesis of the basis and evolution of the human mating system (and of pair-bonding—evolved neuro-hormonally cemented enduring attachment—or simply pair-living, across primates, mammals, and species in general). Yet this has not been considered properly, if at all. One if not the only exception is the 2013 paper by the present author, which here receives major update, development and different presentation.

With Gavrilets' corrective unheeded, there is an absence of competing cogent hypotheses to test, and trying to decide between existing ones unsurprisingly has not been fruitful. There continues to be a widely acknowledged impasse in understanding of pair-living/-bonded (monogamous) species generically, not just regarding humans specifically. Reviewers agree on the current impossibility of coming to robust conclusions, though often cite low data quality and inappropriate comparisons (perhaps scapegoating methodological for unrecognised root conceptual problems). Most recently, Fernandez-Duque, Huck, Van Belle & Di Fiore (2020) in examining comparison studies of the evolution of monogamy have “serious doubts” about all of them, given data so poor as to be “distressing”. Lambert, Sabol & Solomon (2018) conclude there is no best model, and Kvarnemo (2018) finds overall monogamy is “still surprisingly poorly understood”, with no single overriding explanation, instead being more taxon-specific (pertaining to a particular group of individuals; for example, populations of the same species in

different ecological niches, sub-species, a genus or family of species, etc). Klug (2018) sees no way forward but pluralism plus different explanations of origin as distinct from maintenance (an impasse familiar from the study of the origin of sex and the sexes, indicating a likely similar failure to see the wood for the trees).

Without considering male heterogeneity, female choice and the resulting assortative mating, paired-off men and women may be seen and studied simply as interchangeable binary units entirely independent of each other and of others within the local population not paired up, despite all individuals being part-and-parcel of what is a mating *system*: a whole-group phenomenon. The resulting misconstrued hypotheses generate equivocal data, prompting their over-complex elaboration, and the risk that what seemingly key factors emerge may be artefactual. However, the failure here is likely not merely an unfortunate constraint of scientific inquiry through a need for parsimony and circumspection. A driver, at least in part, appears to be the denial of the reality of hierarchy in a fundamental misrepresentation of the nature of male heterogeneity. Instead of comprehending hierarchy as the foundational facet of human male sociality it is—as it is for animal species generically—there is the notion that hierarchy is an historical, social construct. Inasmuch as this isn't simply inappropriate ideological intrusion into science, it both stems from and creates the false notion that forager / hunter-gatherer societies are egalitarian, in that males do not display markedly differential possession of or access to resources. But this is because there is little or no facility to do so in such societies, so rank hardly could be distinguished on that basis (and hierarchy usually would not be expected to be overt if it is settled and thereby much less salient). Resource-holding is merely indicative of rank in male hierarchy, which functions not to allocate resources but sexual access (Moxon, 2009). Accordingly, trying to use resource-competition scenarios to assess the ranking of individuals fails: the rank order appears resource- and situation-specific (Lanctot & Best, 2000). Resource-holding cannot *constitute* rank, otherwise males in species where there is no resource-holding to indicate rank could not display the clear and stable ranking they do. For ranking to be meaningful—stable and transitive (such that alpha being dominant to beta, and beta dominant to gamma, then gamma is sub-dominant to alpha)—it has to be resource-neutral, as it were. Either the summation of a male's intrinsic qualities or some major aspect of them (which would be embodied and revealed in ramification across the whole genome through *genic capture*, the mutual influence of most if not all genes, such that each and every one has huge ramification in

expression across the whole genome). Belief in an ancestral non-hierarchical sociality precludes accepting that any sort of inherent distinctions in quality have profound social salience; not least that anything concerning hierarchy could be invoked in mating system aetiology.

Gavrilets' 2012 paper remains the key recent one in the field in that not only is it a rare actual test of several rival models of the evolution of the human mating system, but there is the addition, across all of them, of the parameters of male heterogeneity and female choice. His results lead Gavrilets to conclude that no hypothesis is feasible without them, as they “point to the crucial importance of female choice and emphasize the need for incorporating between-individual variation”. Whether this means existing hypotheses nevertheless identify factors that are necessary but not sufficient, or that male heterogeneity plus female choice *in themselves*, in their ramification, may be the only main factors required, Gavrilets does not venture. The task herein is to develop this as an hypothesis, along with any necessary qualifications.

The problem with the whole body of research, reiterated in 2016 (Rooker & Gavrilets), is echoed (looking across primates generally) by Huck, Di Fiore & Fernandez-Duque (2020), who urge incorporating into models “competition and variance in reproductive success across a population”—that is, taking into consideration all individuals in the reproductive group, including non-reproducers. Kvarnemo (2018), in discovering, contrary to what is commonly expected, substantial sexual selection under long-term mutual monogamy, stresses that “mate quality is obviously more important than mate numbers, which in turn affects the need for pre-mating mate choice”. Unfortunately, rather than by modelling, hypotheses continue to be examined usually only by phylogenetic analysis, an examination of the evolutionary history of the diversification of species. Though usefully delineating the change in possibly relevant factors, often this does not allow either their separation or to establish causal direction. It tends to miss discovering the need for missing parameters, and hence why theorising has managed to continue without being obliged to incorporate male heterogeneity and female choice.

Surprisingly, having outlined what at the very least is a necessary major corrective, Gavrilets himself fails to apply it properly to his own comparative modelling, restricting interpretation of male heterogeneity to fighting ability (determining the minority of males who could, supposedly, *monopolise* multiple females) and of female choice to only the services males may provide, and not in terms of intrinsic quality of males. Without such self-hobbling,

Gavrilets' conclusions likely would be doubly underscored. Albeit along the right lines, the outline of a cogent aetiology is obstructed by largely ignoring foundational biological principle.

MATING DEALS WITH THE CORE PROBLEM OF MAINTAINING *GENOMIC INTEGRITY*

The foundational biological principle that is the missing underpinning of hypothesis is this: the core problem faced by all biological entities of the relentless accumulation of gene replication error, necessitating repeated *purging*, the elimination of defective genes by natural and/or sexual selection, either through reducing the reproductive output of individual carriers, or consigning them to reproductive or actual oblivion. Given that the female as the gestating sex is always the *limiting factor* of reproduction, in effect purging has to be quarantined on the male half of the lineage, leaving the female to reproduce unhindered. Hence the male functions as the *genetic filter*, to use Atmar's (1991) label for the process, or *mutational cleanser*, to use West-Eberhard's (2005). As Martinossi-Alibert, Rueffler, Arnqvist & Berger (2019) put it: "sexual selection in males has the potential to purge deleterious alleles from the population while leaving females, who experience weaker selection, spared of the demographic cost of adaptation". Consequently, selection acts far more on the male than on the female, as is now extremely well evidenced and modelled (for citations and a mini review see Moxon, 2019, pp. 42-43).

Several mechanisms have evolved to express pointedly the male genome and to expose it to natural and especially sexual selection, resulting in males to some degree failing to reproduce if to reproduce at all, in proportion to the extent to which they carry deleterious genetic material (for an outline, see Moxon, 2012; 2016, pp. 16-25). It is not just that the male is obliged to take on this function, but that this functional distinction between the sexes appears to be their origin (Moxon, 2019), with sex itself having evolved to deal with mutational load (not to produce variation, as has long been mistakenly thought), as also concluded most recently by MacPherson, Scot & Gras (2021) and Zadorin & Rivoire (2021).

Male heterogeneity here is genetic quality in the special sense of *genomic integrity*, the maintenance of good inter-functionality of the whole of an individual's complement of genetic material (both coding and non-coding, regulatory genes), rather than the default notion in biology of the quality distinguishing males being *good genes*, the possession of the genes or

genetic variants most obviously conferring incremental competitive advantage; for example, height. A *good genes* understanding is notwithstanding equivocal meta-analytic findings (Prokopet al., 2012) suggesting males instead may be attractive to females in ways unrelated to fitness (the *sexy sons* notion of benefit to females in greater reproductive output of their own in turn attractive male offspring), plus methodological issues and questions about interpretation (Achorn & Rosenthal, 2020). The evidence and modelling fall short in looking for fitness *gains* when instead it's an *absence of fitness decline* that should be sought, in keeping with simply managing to *stand still* in what is a *red queen* scenario—thus dubbed from the Alice in Wonderland character obliged to keep moving simply to stand still. Rather than *good genes* per se, “female mating biases align with *the avoidance of bad genes*” (Dugand, Kennington & Tomkins, 2018). See also Velando, Torres & Alonso-Alvarez (2008).

The principal mechanism here is the assortment of males to rank according to their relative lack of deleterious genetic material. The resulting dominance (and/or prestige) hierarchy, as already pointed out, is shown to function to allocate sexual access (not resources per se) (Moxon, 2009). The principal mode of allocation is the intrinsic part females play in correspondingly keying into the male hierarchy as the mate-choosers. Given how crucial a function is purging deleterious genetic material, together with the low overall reproductive output of the female making it important that each conception counts, then it would be expected that all females vie for the male with the very topmost *genomic integrity*—that is, the most-highly-purged male genome. Thus, male heterogeneity, given the imperative of purging, is greatly amplified in being very heavily skewed in its translation into male mate value.

Note that if it were quality per se, then it would be additive, and all that would be needed of a male would be for him to be *good enough*. All individuals above a certain threshold thereby might be considered interchangeable. But distinctions between purged male genomes are not in absolute but relative terms. It's because constantly emerging genetic defects are potentially lethal, even as a single mutation, and likely to be synergistic across the whole genome, leading to depressed performance across-the-board, that the fight against them is a *red queen* phenomenon. Having to run just to avoid slipping backwards, as it were: chasing and closing, though never quite catching. Winning an endless series of battles in a war that never can be won requires constant greatest effort, utilising whichever is the currently top performing individual

as the template for all. The chosen male *can never be too good*. He needs to be *as good as it's possible to be*, with no female settling for less than the highest-possible genetic quality (*genomic integrity*) male obtainable in the circumstances. Hence an evolved enormous skew in the perception of male mate value towards the apex of an ordinal series. Male hierarchy potentially is a *winner takes all* scenario in terms of reproduction, assuming it were practically possible for the *alpha* to sire all offspring in the local group. This reproductive skew would be reinforced by the differential reproductive suppression of males that appears to be inextricable with ranking (Moxon, 2009), increasing in degree with descent down the male hierarchy, compounding falling male mate value in terms of *genomic integrity*. The impact of lower status on male stress physiology, in turn depressing male reproductive physiology and motivation (and the converse re higher status), has been well studied, and can be either direct behavioural reproductive suppression by high-rankers or its anticipation by low-rankers in order that it's obviated in evolved self-suppression mechanism.

With the female functioning as the *conduit* to the next generation of the *filtered / mutationally cleansed* male genome, then males as well as females have a basis of mate choice through opposite-sex heterogeneity. Female differential ability to act as the *conduit* is summed up in *fertility*. However, this is a quite particular and at the same time common quality, unlike the general but pre-eminent one looked for in the male, and concerns a narrow set of restricted parameters manifest in correspondingly narrow and restricted indicators, so here quality is according to a threshold model. There is no imperative to be *as good as it's possible to be*; just *good enough*. There is, then, far less scope for variation in mate value among females than among males. In any case, the great bulk of the variation among human females is simply age (see below): females not very long after their fertility-peak more or less cease to be under consideration as part of the mating pool. Most tellingly, females are subject to far less stringent mate-choosing than are males, given the minimal cost and great reproductive benefit to males of mating (compared to the huge costs to females): males, given the opportunity, focus on gaining sexual partners in number more than—or at the same time as—just one of notable high fertility. It is easy to see, then, why the female is considered the *choosing* sex.

The different basis of mate choice according to sex is illustrated by findings regarding MHC (the Major Histocompatibility Complex), the key factor in immune response. Hanne,

Simmons & Rhodes (2009) find that a woman seeks a man with a strong MHC indicating immuno-competence, whereas a man seeks a woman who possesses MHC that merely contrasts with his own. The genetic complement under selection here clearly is that of the male, with the female's mate choice being in terms of a particularly well-functioning important aspect of the male requiring, as far as is possible, a perfectly non-compromised genetic basis. By contrast, the male's mate choice is in terms just of adding some hybrid vigour to assist in transmitting his *filtered* genome through to the next generation.

THE NEED FOR PAIR-BONDING AND SAME-PARTNERED SUCCESSIVE CONCEPTION

With the prodigious sexual capacity of the male, promiscuity at first glance would seem potentially to suffice as a mating system. The most-highly-purged male could be selected by all the females in the local reproductive group or wider mating pool. However, this would entail low regularity of sex (if not also compatibility issues, both physical and/or physiological), on average substantially delaying time taken to conceive if to conceive at all, including even with the most fertile females. Output/efficiency presumably would be greatly improved by the most-highly-purged male focusing on a number of very-high-fertility females over time, as in pair-living/-bonding, thereby ensuring iterated sex on a regular basis, and, therefore, conception and in minimal time. This presumably is the *proximal* function of pair-bonding. The number of these females would need to be restricted—likewise the extent of sex outside pair-bonding—so as not to reintroduce the problem of the male's mating effort being spread too thinly.

The principal benefit of pair-bonding, however, would be if it is *long-term*. Conception then would be *repeated*, leading to another benefit stemming from male heterogeneity. Offspring not only would continue to be assuredly produced and at minimal intervals, but all would be the most highly purged possible, as all would be sired by the same, most-highly-purged male. The alternative of only short-term pair-bonding, merely sufficient to ensure conception (or, as has been suggested, long enough to support the female during lactation), would be no different to promiscuity. It would risk the quality of offspring progressively decreasing with iterated assortative mating.

The quality (*genomic integrity*) of males subsequently secured in serial short-term pair-bonding would correspond to the age-related declining fertility of the female herself. Not only is there deterioration of stored ova (leading to quickly rising rates of implantation failure), but also

progressive shortening of the potential reproductive lifespan (Conroy-Beam & Buss, 2019). A sharp early diminution in a female's sexual attractiveness occurs with a first pregnancy, and then the impact of childbirth, as indicated by low waist-to-hip ratio and BMI (Lassek & Gaulin, 2018), or, more accurately, shallow waist depth and small circumference (Rilling et al., 2009). It is not fertility that is indicated but being nulligravid (that is, not currently and never having been pregnant). The female signals not only her current immediate availability for reproduction, but that she has her full reproductive life ahead of her (that is, none of its being already in the past); assuredly starting at her fertile peak. This enables a female to secure for a pair-bond partner a male with the greatest *genomic integrity* consonant with her other fertility indicators. Pair-bonding in effect projects forward in time female peak fertility, if at or circa the female age of peak fertility (and, therefore, attractiveness to males) the female looks for the male with the greatest *genomic integrity* she can find who is willing to pair-bond with her. There will never be a more auspicious time to do this, and the pair-bond effectively time-capsules her mate choice, which she could not do in reproducing promiscuously, as the *genomic integrity* of each successive father for her children is likely progressively to diminish in line with her own rapidly declining mate value. In other words, with pair-bonding the female in effect can cheat time.

Pair-bonding in the human case does appear to be of sufficient duration to effect repeat conception, albeit its estimation is extremely difficult, as discussed in Moxon (2013), with extremely inconsistent and very poorly comparable measures. Not least, data on marriage and even cohabitation is missing any period of initial informal pair-bonding, including the portion of this within those pair-bonds that later become marriages or cohabitations. The human pair-bond typically is about five years, according to Sefcek, Brumbach, Vasquez & Miller (2006), which is greater than inter-birth intervals in hunter-gatherer societies (those presumed closest to ancestral populations) of three to four years (Kaplan, Lancaster & Hurtado, 2000) or 3.65 years (Robson, van Schaik & Hawkes, 2006). Note that pair-bond duration would not have to be decisively longer than the inter-birth interval but merely comparable for pair-bonding to be adaptive in respect of repeat conception, as generally in the evolutionary creation of an adaptation even merely statistical biasing of behaviour usually suffices. Furthermore, pair-bonding would fulfil the putative function by merely providing a platform for other, usual modes of affiliation and attachment to augment and perhaps then supersede it. Such affiliation and attachment could have served to reduce in the first place the requirement for a lengthy period of

pair-bonding per se.

Most often cited or used as a basis for estimation is Fisher's four years (Fisher, 1989, 1994), which by other measure is a substantial under-estimate, being the modal average of the time from marriage to divorce. First, it's only a subset of all marriages, and a severely systematically biased one at that, as all those that did not end in divorce are excluded. Second, ignored is all of the period of pair-bonding prior to its formalisation even as cohabitation. Third, all of the very high proportion of marriages that are very lengthy are missed out in not using the median or mean as the measure. Note, though, the inter-birth interval data is also lacking, as it does not include the period from the inception of pair-bonding to conception. Taking the median rather than the mode, even for divorcing couples the duration of the average marriage almost doubles to seven years, and far longer than that for the whole set. Fisher's rationale for taking the modal peak is that in being what is typical rather than merely average we may detect the underlying natural extent of pair-bonding. Yet divorce itself in not being typical of marriage may represent less an absence of other affiliative and attachment processes *piggy-backing* the pair-bond than extrinsic factors precipitating pair-bond termination. If the latter pertain only to a contemporary and not an ancestral context, they would not be part of the milieu in which pair-bonding became adaptive. Consequently, pair-bonding that was highly adaptive ancestrally may be weaker in contemporary scenarios, reducing average duration to below what it may have been when originally evolved, providing other than a full picture today, clouding its function.

A key aspect and revealing feature of pair-bond duration is that it's U-shaped: typically, either long (if not very long) or very short. Fisher's data misses both these poles, neither of which can be considered atypical. Of those pair-bonds that dissolve, there is a very heavy skew toward this being very early in the relationship, as routinely commented on in the relationships-advice literature and journalism. Data for both developed-world and hunter-gatherer societies bear this out. Furthermore, specifically marriage data greatly understates relationship breakdown overall. In the USA, of unmarried couples, 70% break up within their first year (Rosenfeld, Thomas & Falcon, 2018). In the case of marriages, given the hurdle of the formalisation of the relationship causing lead times for dissolution, it's necessary to measure failure within the first year other than just by the divorce rate. Then it is found that over a fifth—amounting to half or more of all those marriages that end in failure—if not already dissolved were well on the way to that

outcome (Leonard & Roberts, 1998): 1% to 2% of couples had already completed divorce, 5% had permanently separated, and a further 14% had separated for a period at some point (heralding their demise). Additionally, much of the divorce rate in the second year should be attributed to the first, given that's when proceedings began or when the instability in the relationship had already made one or both parties minded to initiate them. Regarding hunter-gatherers, Blurton-Jones, Marlowe, Hawkes & O'Connell (2000), in studying across four quite different populations, note the great number of marriages breaking up before children are born is owing to their failure in fecundability, the probability of a female conceiving in a given period of time. Partners wait only so long to test the concrete fertility of the pairing before baling out. Similar is found with pastoralists. Du & Mace (2019) conclude: "The production of offspring, *regardless of their survivorship*, also had a positive effect on marriage duration, as did trial marriage, a time period before formal marriage". So, it's not producing children per se but confirmation of the potential to do so that is at issue. Trial marriage is commonplace. Pair-bonding generally appears indeed to be *on trial* until reproductive output is assured by conception, so it may be that in an important sense this is when bonding properly begins or fully completes. So, Fisher could well be right to exclude both extremes of duration: *long* because it's not pair-bonding per se sustaining the relationship; *short* because in important senses it's *pre*-bonding. Matching or exceeding the inter-birth interval might, then, be a good measure of pair-bond duration to evidence the putative function of ensuring at least one successive conception. The data clearly supports this.

POLYGYNY-MONOGAMY-BACHERLORDOM

The logic of the most rudimentary polygamy—polygyny, that is (one male multiply paired with females)—with the male of the greatest *genomic integrity* being the only male females choose for pair-bonding, affords much less opportunity for most females to mate with him than would be the case promiscuously, driving fierce female competition. Females would do better to vie for a parallel pair-bond with not just one but a number (albeit a very limited number) of top-ranking males (the very topmost plus a tiny few of the next highest-ranking males). Hence a number of polygynous males. A trade-off of a degree of diminished (compared to the *alpha*) male *genomic integrity* against reliability of long-term regular sex in pair-bonding, then can lead to assortative mating to encompass a larger portion of the male hierarchy. Males ranking high-to-middling additionally could also pair off polygynously, though each may attract fewer females

with decreasing rank. Given the very strong skew in mate value, this would quickly fall from a multiple to just one. Polygyny becomes monogyny (just one female per male; in other words, monogamy), leaving a surfeit of mateless males—*zerogamy*, as now popularly labelled. However fine-scaled is this assortment, as it proceeds the relative *genomic integrity* of males would decrease at least roughly in step with the corresponding lesser ability of the female partner to transmit the male's genes into the next generation. In this way, whatever the degree of male *genomic integrity*, it is not compromised by any less inter-generational transmissibility than it warrants, and vice-versa, overall producing high (if not the highest possible) reproductive output (quantity x quality) and efficiency of the local reproductive group or mating pool.

Note that the females are never selecting some interchangeable *also-ran* male. Those females mating with males who don't have the mate value to warrant multiple pairings, and therefore mate monogamously, still will have chosen a male with a degree of *genomic integrity* greater than that possessed by still lower-ranked males (and certainly more than that of the lowest-rankers). The supply of females will have run out before not just many but (ancestrally, at least, as evidenced below) *most* males get any opportunity to assort with them, owing to so many females having paired off multiply with just the one male—or even eschewing monogamy with well-below-average-ranked males, preferring instead intermittent consortship or promiscuity with males of higher rank. This is why it is so mistaken to view a basis of assortment as merely varied, idiosyncratic or arbitrary, as is implied by and the hidden assumption of usual hypotheses. The real possibility of complete matelessness would drive males to settle for partnering merely monogamously. Indeed, partner scarcity is proposed as the basis of monogamy (Schacht & Bell, 2016).

It is held that monogamy is difficult to explain because the male sustains something of the order of a fivefold opportunity cost of not having multiple pair-bond partners as in polygyny (for example, Dunbar, 2018), but although this can be argued in the case of *obligate* monogamy, it is not applicable to monogamy as a residue of polygyny. Polygyny is not a potential alternative for males who struggle to gain even a single partner. Far from monogamy entailing opportunity cost, it is a clear benefit to non-polygynous males because otherwise not only will they be *zerogamous* but they won't be able to acquire a sexual partner outside of a pair-bond either. They will not be able to reproduce *at all*, because a male finding himself in the lower realms of assortative

mating—in monogamy *clearing*, as it were—will have even less (much less) chance of mating promiscuously. Unlike men, women require substantially more attractive partners for extra-pair (no-strings) sex than for pair-bonding (Szepeswol, Mikulincer & Birnbaum, 2013), just as do females in other species (eg, Cochaset al., 2006; Kempnaerset al., 1992). Again, male heterogeneity enters as crucial to reveal what is going on.

A very different picture emerges here to that envisaged in modelling by Gavrilets, who recognises only the very top-ranking males as pairing up through any intrinsic quality—and only their fighting ability, which may recruit only a subset of the full range of genetic quality demonstrating *genomic integrity*—and this by imposition, not female choice. All other males are considered to possess little if any, or effectively zero mate value, and therefore in effect are interchangeable. Not until some of them realise they can adopt an alternative mate acquisition mode of offering to provide services beyond mating itself, such as provisioning. Only then and not before, in Gavrilets' modelling, does female choice emerge as a factor in mating systems. Clearly, this is a highly restricted model not reflecting biological reality.

The polygyny-monogyny-zeroyny mix arising from the simple logic of male-female assortment according to differential intrinsic mate value is an accurate characterisation of the human mating system, which is not monogamy. Monogamous species are obligately so. Polygyny and monogamy (and bachelordom) are inextricably linked, with polygyny central and monogamy (and bachelordom) in its shadow, notwithstanding that not only is there monogamy in all societies, but polygyny never accounts for more than a minority of pair-bonds. The very severe skew in male mate value produced by the imperative of purging means it can only be a small minority of males who are polygynous. So it is that in half of the societies thus categorized, less than five percent of men take on more than one wife (Labuda, Lefebvre, Nadeau & Roy-Gagnon, 2010). A large preponderance of societies (85%) in the anthropological record allowed polygyny (White et al., 1988). As well as polygyny being formally sanctioned in most societies, it occurs overtly in all societies in the guise of serial monogamy (Schacht & Kramer, 2019), as well as covertly in the de facto polygyny of *mistress-keeping*. Suda (2007) in a paper on contemporary and traditional African practice, titled *Formal monogamy and informal polygyny in parallel*, outlines that “although much of the ethnographic literature indicates that heterosexual monogamy remains the statistical marriage norm, polygyny was nevertheless empirically

widespread in traditional Africa and is increasingly being reinvented, often clandestinely ...” (p. 56). That polygyny is the human norm is the conclusion, in a book-length review of the topic, by Baresh (2016), who sees “the underlying prevalence of polygamy as the default setting for human intimacy” (p. 2).

A particular form of polygyny in the anthropological literature is concubinage (here with a more restrictive meaning than non-marital co-habitation), also known as polycoity, which might be considered a hybrid of monogamy and polygyny in that there is a primary pair-bond plus one or more secondary, substantially lesser ones. Actually, this is the usual nature of polygyny. Chika & Nneka (2014), for example, point out: “The husband in most cases showers much love on the most favoured wife” (p. 23). Almost always there is a preferred wife over all others, whether an always-favoured or the newest (youngest), with the latter case being usual (eg, Gwirayi, 2016), which in effect is serial monogamy. Essien puts it emphatically: “The hierarchy of wives is indisputable and the inferiority of the secondary wives is beyond any argument”. This distinction underlines that polygyny is not some collective bonding with one male but parallel monogamy. Distinguishing between polygyny and monogamy gets harder the more they are investigated.

THE FEMALE AS THE CHOOSER

The full extent of the heavy reproductive skew towards males with the most *genomic integrity* would be revealed by adding to the within-pair reproductive output of polygynous males that which is through *extra-pair* conception. This is the reproductive output from clandestine polygyny plus any sex outside of any pair-bonding (*casual* sex, as it were). The latter would be very largely if not exclusively with polygynous males, in that (as afore-mentioned) human females require partners of substantially higher mate value for extra-pair sex than for pair-bonding (Szepeswol, Mikulincer & Birnbaum, 2013).

Extra-pair paternity is now shown to be extraordinarily high in populations most closely resembling ancestral ones: foragers or pastoralists. Among African pastoralists, Scelza et al. (2020) find extra-pair paternity to be 48%. A natural base rate of extra-pair paternity (*non-paternity*) had thus far been hidden. Macintyre & Sooman (1991) discuss the impossibility of verifying the usually cited 10%—medical students are told it’s 10-15%, which is in line with the worldwide median of 10% arrived at by Baker & Bellis (1995)—because known or suspected cases would self-select out of sampling to avoid discovery by the presumed father, leaving all measures

inherently gross under-estimates. Nevertheless, a series of unpublished studies of English samples put the rate at 30% (20-30% according to a likewise unpublished Liverpool survey). Research hitherto anyway has been restricted to European or European-descent populations, and therefore to (long-)developed societies, that profoundly contrast with the traditional agrarian, let alone those that might more resemble ancestral populations. It might be expected that the former feature factors depressing *non-paternity* and/or its discovery that were not present until recently.

The new data from pastoralists on extra-pair paternity indicates monogamy may function in part or mainly as back-up to supply an already high level of male *genomic integrity*, for if there has not occurred extra-pair conception with a male of *genomic integrity* substantially greater still. The latter is not unlikely to occur given the heightened sexual motivation of females at ovulation, which, in temporarily reducing, relatively, the salience of anything but sex, reduces concern for pair-bond maintenance, allowing the risk-taking required in extra-pair sex. It has been thought that during their brief fertile phase around ovulation women switch from being attracted to their pair-bond partner to extra-pair males (for example, Larson, Pillsworth, & Haselton, 2012). However, regular failure to replicate has been reported, most recently by Thomas, Armstrong, Stewart-Williams & Jones (2021), Stern, Kordsmeyer & Penke (2021), and van Stein, Strauß & Brenk-Franz (2019)—who nevertheless confirm heightened sexual motivation—or that only a modest or slight effect is evident (Marcinkowska et al., 2020). A new review (Jones, Hahn & DeBruine, 2019) finds largely null results even in old studies. All indicate a faulty interpretation has been at play. Rather than a preference for extra-pair males over the pair-bond partner, it's surely conditional on differential mate value. In the absence of an extra-pair male of substantially greater *genomic integrity* than the pair-bond partner, the female simply will have heightened sexual interest in her pair-bond partner. A general attraction to potential extra-pair males would not make sense. What has been dubbed the *dual mating strategy* or (*good genes*) *ovulatory shift hypothesis* is an artefact again of failing to incorporate male heterogeneity, instead to assume that the female, rather than looking for genetic quality (*genomic integrity*) in any and every male sexual partner, seeks different or additional qualities in a long-term partner: investment of some kind, usually assumed to be provisioning of offspring. But this requires evidence, which is absent, indeed countered (see

below). Women instead seek *genomic integrity* in *all* male partners, but substantially more so in specifically extra-pair partners because of the risk of pair-bond dissolution, and thereby the loss of a genome with high *genomic integrity* by which to conceive a subsequent series of offspring—which she won't be able to replace with anything like an equivalent male given her own steeply falling mate value. The extra-pair partner is available only for one conception, unless he too becomes a pair-bond partner of the female.

Furthermore, women have an aversion to sex during the infertile (luteal) phase, presumably because sex poses a substantial risk of implantation failure should an ovum be fertilised (Steiner, Pritchard, Young & Herring, 2014). Hence, it would seem, an evolved implantation-failure avoidance mechanism in pre-menstrual syndrome (Moxon, 2020). Added together, these phenomena are likely severely to depress the frequency of sex, which is the age-old principal complaint men have about marriage. Albeit minimal sex usually suffices to maintain a pair-bond (given the very well-known phenomenon in psychology experiment of reinforcement regimes that although infrequent nonetheless are effective, especially if they are unpredictable), this female overall strategy risks partner defection. Should a woman detect lesser investment in the pair-bond by her partner than by herself—in other words, a strong possibility of her pair-bond male defecting—she increases the regularity of sex with him, though only in the luteal (non-fertile) phase of her cycle (Grebe, Gangestad, Garver-Apgar & Thornhill, 2013), thereby continuing to facilitate (albeit not to preference) extra-pair sex during the fertile phase. It's a measure of the imperative to further boost fertility overall that even when the pair-bond is under threat the heightened sexual motivation at ovulation is not directed specifically towards the pair-bond partner.

All entails a large degree of female partner-choice, whether proceptive (taking the sexual initiative) or through selective acquiescence. Given the various difficulties attending engaging in extra-pair sex and potential costly implications, it is inconceivable that it could occur on this scale without females being not only fully complicit but actively the choosing sex. With so much at stake in extra-pair sex, women surely are the arbiters, whether or not they are the main initiators.

The centrality of female choice to add to that of male heterogeneity is shown in polygyny not being some male imposition as often supposed: “Many women in Africa choose polygynous over monogamous marriages even in the absence of pressure from relatives” (Anderson, 2000). There are even benefits in terms of childcare. Anderson finds other adult females acting as alloparents, taking on parental duties despite not being parents of the offspring themselves. Female kin and co-wives provide the resources that contribute to the reproductive success of women married polygynously. There are benefits from polygyny not just for first but also for subsequent wives (Uggla, Gurmu & Gibson, 2018), contradicting assumptions that women in polygynous marriages are just *making the best of a bad job*. There is not only no evidence that polygynous marriage is a harmful cultural practice, claim Lawson et al. (2015), but any costs of sharing a husband are offset by greater wealth of polygynous households, consistent (the author himself notes) with models of polygyny based on female choice. So even on an inappropriate economic analysis ignoring the centrality of intrinsic male heterogeneity, polygyny is not disadvantageous but beneficial to women.

That women are the choosers, not men, is very clear whether in polygyny or monogamy. Corresponding to male advertisement of quality so as to prompt female choice, the female choosing the particular male is basic in evolutionary theory and long ago confirmed in the case of humans. Cross-cultural verbal interaction research by Stephens (1963) showed that notwithstanding men being the sexual initiators, women are the choosers; or, as Moore (1985) put it, the controllers of mate choice (including initiation). This extends to arranged marriage (the dominant form of match-making across Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and all but ubiquitous across the world prior to industrialisation), which was and is invariably orchestrated by women: either family members (aunt, elder sister, sister-in-law, or possibly an older matriarch) and/or an outsider female matchmaker. It’s the cross-cultural norm today and throughout history (for a brief review, see Moxon, 2017, p146).

[This concludes part one of this paper, which demonstrates the centrality of male heterogeneity and female choice to the human mating system. Part two (in the second issue of NMS 2021) examines its phylogeny: a gorilla-like ancestry, and the homology of gorilla female sub-groups with the human female clique; this from a pre-adaptation to polygyny of an interceding male to prevent female fertility collapse through the stress caused by fractious female sub-groups.

The male bodyguard function is outlined, and how this has been misconstrued as mate-guarding. Supposed infanticide prevention is revealed to be a red herring. Male service to the female is amply evidenced as an overall principle, congruent with the hypothesis of the human mating system as a ramification of male heterogeneity and female choice.]

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'IT'S JUST A GIRL THING, THEY'RE LIKE THAT'.

**AN EXPLORATION INTO MEN'S EXPERIENCES OF DIFFICULT
RELATIONSHIPS WITH WOMEN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

Jane Ogden, Annie Patterson



ABSTRACT

This qualitative study interviewed heterosexual men (n=12) who had experienced a difficult relationship with a woman, one defined as 'emotionally difficult, but without the presence of physical abuse'. The paper's thematic analysis describes three main themes (the meaning of difficult relationships; the immediate impact; the longer-term impact) and two higher order themes (gendered standards and power imbalance). The men experienced controlling, shouting and blocking behaviours which had immediate and longer-term negative effects. Their relationships were underpinned by double standards of behaviour and a power imbalance. They tended to normalise these experiences, reducing their victim status and making their partner's behaviour more acceptable. Accordingly, as the literature has been reluctant to accept men as victims, so are the men themselves.

Keywords: relationships, abuse, masculinity, shame, qualitative

INTRODUCTION

All romantic relationships can have their problems (McMillan, 2011), yet when a relationship impacts a person's life in a predominantly negative way it may be defined as difficult. Previous studies have used different terms to describe such relationships: 'abusive' (Lehmann et al 2012), 'difficult' (Lischick, 1999), 'unhealthy' (Mumford et al 2018) and 'toxic' (Motz, 2014). The current study uses the term *difficult* throughout this paper.

In the UK, abusive relationships are defined as involving physical, emotional or sexual abuse (NHS, 2019) and according to the 'ManKind Initiative', 2.8% of heterosexual men, and 5.6% of heterosexual women, were victims of partner abuse in 2018-2019 (Brooks, 2020). In line with this gender difference, most research has focused on men as the perpetrators, and women as the victims (Johnson, 2008). Over recent years, whilst the gender difference for partner abuse has been at its lowest (Brooks, 2020), there remains a gender bias within the literature, with less research into the experience of difficult relationships from the male perspective (Swan et al 2008). The focus of the present study is on men's experiences of being in a difficult heterosexual relationship. The relevant research will now be described, focusing on both women's and men's experiences of difficult relationships.

Much research has addressed women as the victim in difficult relationships, with an emphasis on the impact of physical abuse (Golding, 1999). For example, research indicates that women who have been physically abused by their male partner are more likely to experience mental health problems such as depression (Campbell, 2002), anxiety (Coker et al 2002), and posttraumatic stress disorder (Pico-Alfonso et al 2006). Likewise, research indicates that emotional abuse by men often results in self-blame for women (Ullman et al 2007), decreased self-esteem (Bowman, 1999) and increased feelings of loneliness and abandonment (Orzeck et al 2010). Further, evidence also indicates that women can self-isolate as a result of physical and emotional abuse in an attempt to cease violence (Flitcraft, 1995) or due to being coerced into restricting contact with family and friends (Goetting, 1991). Women also report problems with trusting new partners (Berger, 1998) and experience difficulties in being emotionally and physically intimate (Orzeck et al, 2009). Despite these negative impacts, however, women often stay with their abusive male partner for many reasons (Pugh et al, 2018), including economic

concerns (Anderson & Saunders, 2003), presence of children (Estrellado & Loh, 2013) or having no other place to go (Velonis et al, 2015). Research has therefore explored women's experiences of difficult relationships, with a focus on their first-hand accounts of being a victim, as well as reasons for remaining with their partner. In contrast, less research has explored the experiences of men.

The subject of men as victims in difficult relationships is controversial (Hines et al, 2007). Steinmetz (1977) was one of the first academics to highlight the existence of male victims and defined female abuse against men as 'battered husband syndrome'. Although this was found to be relatively common, it was often ignored, dismissed and deemed to be a myth (Steinmetz, 1977). Therefore, when incidents of male abuse are reported, research indicates that time is often dedicated to deciding whether men are 'legitimate victims', as opposed to deciding on the appropriate action for the female abuser (Robinson & Rowlands, 2009). Further, the construction of difficult and abusive relationships has often been stereotyped as involving physical attacks. This has resulted in the marginalisation of male victims (Donovan & Hester, 2010) as physical partner abuse is more often carried out by men against women (Devries et al 2013), and the literature characterises men as being more physically violent (Myhill, 2015). Therefore, as partner abuse is often presented as physical violence, male victims are disregarded as within this framework they are outnumbered by the female victims (George, 1994). Further, whilst there are support services for male victims, research indicates that these are rarely exclusively orientated towards the needs of men (Watson & Parsons, 2005).

One study in 1998 did include male victims in their exploration of physical abuse with 100 heterosexual men completing a questionnaire either over the telephone or in person. (Dispatches Survey, 1998). The results showed a high prevalence of female physical aggression committed against men, with a large proportion reporting being kicked, punched or bitten. Of these, however, 49% never sought police help due to fear of being disbelieved, or feeling embarrassed that they had experienced abuse from a woman (Dispatches Survey, 1998). The study concluded that women can be equally as violent as men (George & Yarwood, 2004). Despite these findings, female physical violence in relationships is often portrayed as self-defence, or as retaliation for being hurt by their partner (Swan et al 2008; Straus et al, 1990) whereas as male physical relationship violence is often seen as an expression of patriarchal

oppression against women (Lammers et al, 2005).

More research has addressed emotional abuse by women in heterosexual relationships. For example, the prevalence of emotional abuse against males is high, with research suggesting comparable levels for both men and women (Straus et al, 1992). Further, one study reported that 90% of male participants had received verbal aggression or other emotional abuse from their female partner within the past year (Simonelli & Ingram, 1998) with this being particularly apparent when men are younger (Karakurt et al, 2013). Research has also addressed the consequences of emotional abuse and evidence suggests that men do not often discuss their experiences of emotional abuse (Karakurt & Silver, 2013) or view themselves as victims (Taylor et al, 1983). They do, however, show negative effects of this emotional abuse, including psychological distress and depression (Simonelli et al, 1998). To date, however, research into male victims of emotional abuse is limited (Heise et al, 2019), despite it being the most common form of abuse against men (ONS, 2019).

In summary, whilst it is now increasingly accepted that men can be victims, their experiences of difficult relationships with women remains neglected in the literature with a greater focus on physical violence, rather than emotional abuse (ONS, 2019). Further, a stereotype persists, in which men are not considered to be victims as freely as women (Karakurt et al, 2013) and men's accounts of such relationships have often been poorly recorded, with little detail on the duration, frequency or type of abuse experienced (Huntley et al, 2019). In order to expand and deepen our understanding of men's experiences of more subtle forms of abuse, the present qualitative study explores the accounts of men who had experienced a difficult heterosexual relationship. For this study *difficult* relationships are defined as 'emotionally difficult, but without the presence of physical abuse'.

METHODS

Design

A qualitative design was used to gain a rich understanding of men's experiences of difficult heterosexual relationships (Padgett, 2012). Data were collected using either face to face or telephone semi-structured interviews analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants

Participants were recruited using a snowballing sampling method (Coleman, 1958). Researchers used their own personal and professional networks to identify men who they thought would be suitable for the study and contacted them through email or telephone. The researchers' contacts also acted as gatekeepers and considered if they knew of men who had been in difficult heterosexual relationships. The gate keepers asked the men to email the researchers if they were interested in taking part. The final data set involved 12 white, heterosexual males, aged 20-30 years old, who perceived a previous relationship with a woman as difficult. Males were over 18 when the relationship began and had been out of the relationship for at least 6 months. Exclusion criteria meant that no male experienced physical abuse in the relationship or sought professional support during or after the experience. Participants were given pseudonyms (see Table 1 for participant demographics).

Participant Pseudonym	Participant current age	Participant Ethnicity	Length of difficult relationship	Relationship status at time of interview
Ryan	22	White	3 years	Single
Tim	25	White	2 years	Single
David	30	White	8 months	In a relationship
Joe	21	White	7 months	Single
Toby	22	White	8 months	Single
Will	22	White	3 years	Single
Liam	26	White	1 year	In a relationship
Alfie	22	White	9 months	Single
Cameron	22	White	6 months	In a relationship
Curtis	25	White	1 year	Single
Mike	21	White	3 years	Single
Samuel	22	White	2 years	Single

Table 1 - Participant demographics

Interview schedule

Semi-structured interviews were used. Questions began with an overview of the relationship, such as when and how they met, when it went wrong, how long it lasted and how it ended. Questions were then asked around the difficult aspects, including what men would describe as *difficult*, examples of difficult times, how their partner acted, how it made them feel, as well as their coping strategies. The final part of the interview asked about men's retrospective

thoughts on the relationship and their partner, as well as their views on women and future relationships. This structure ensured a chronological account, which helped the researchers to gain a clear insight into how, when and why the relationship became difficult. The interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes.

Procedure

After recruitment, a mutually convenient interview time was arranged with each participant. Prior to each interview, participants received an information sheet and consent form which was given either in person or via email. Interviews were completed by one of two researchers. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The University Research Integrity and Governance Office (RIGO) granted ethical approval for this project.

Data analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA; Braun et al, 2006) was used to analyse the data as it is suitable to analyse large qualitative data sets and encourages a structured approach to data handling (Nowell et al, 2017). TA is also better suited at identifying patterns within the data and for highlighting similarities and differences between participants (King, 2004) compared to other approaches (Smith et al, 2013). The epistemological perspective was a critical realist stance (Bhaskar, 1975). This allowed the analysis to accept the data for what it was and recognize that it represented reality for participants. This stance also acknowledged that people construct their understanding of the world through their own experiences, and that reality is shaped by social, contextual and historical factors. The advantage of this is that the analysis could include the relationship between people's lives and society (Sims-Schouten et al 2007).

To begin the inductive analytic procedure, transcripts were read multiple times to ensure familiarisation with the content. Sections were highlighted if relevant to the aim of understanding men's experiences of difficult relationships and given a 'code' to describe the content (Braun et al, 2006). Patterns were identified amongst the codes; those that were describing similar things were grouped together, and given a short self-explanatory sentence, to generate themes which were further grouped into sub-themes to create a thematic hierarchy. To ensure credibility, the codes and themes were discussed within the research team and refined to ensure that they were distinct, and had enough supporting evidence, in order to present a clear narrative. Themes and sub-themes were then illustrated with relevant extracts from the

transcripts to develop a thematic story.

RESULTS

Following analysis of the data set, themes and subthemes were described from the twelve transcripts. The themes were separated into different levels: three main themes with subthemes, two higher order themes, and a transcending theme. The thematic map is shown in Figure 1 and described below with exemplar quotes.

Main Theme 1: the meaning of a difficult relationship

This theme describes what men classify as difficult, and how women engaged in these behaviours which led men to realise, either during or afterwards, that they were in a difficult relationship. These behaviours are separated into the following three inter-related subthemes.

Controlling behaviour

This sub-theme reflects how females controlled their male partner, which was most commonly demonstrated in the control over men's friendships.

'she was very funny about me going out with my mates, even for a short time. She'd basically not allow me to hang out with them or chat to them when she was around' (Alfie)

The quotation illustrates how the woman would not allow her boyfriend to speak with his friends whilst she was present and expected him to pay all of his attention to his girlfriend. The phrase 'even for a short time' highlights the degree of control that this woman had over her boyfriend.

Control of friendships was also seen in Joe's and Cameron's interviews:

'She made that explicitly clear that I couldn't be friends with girls, so I kind of closed myself off to girls who could be friends' (Joe)

'told me who to talk to and said that I couldn't be mates with girls' (Cameron)

Therefore, whilst Alfie felt that his contact with his 'mates' was controlled, other men described control over potential friends, particularly with girls, even before these friendships had been formed. Further, by 'closing himself off' Joe's quote illustrates how attempts at control were successful.

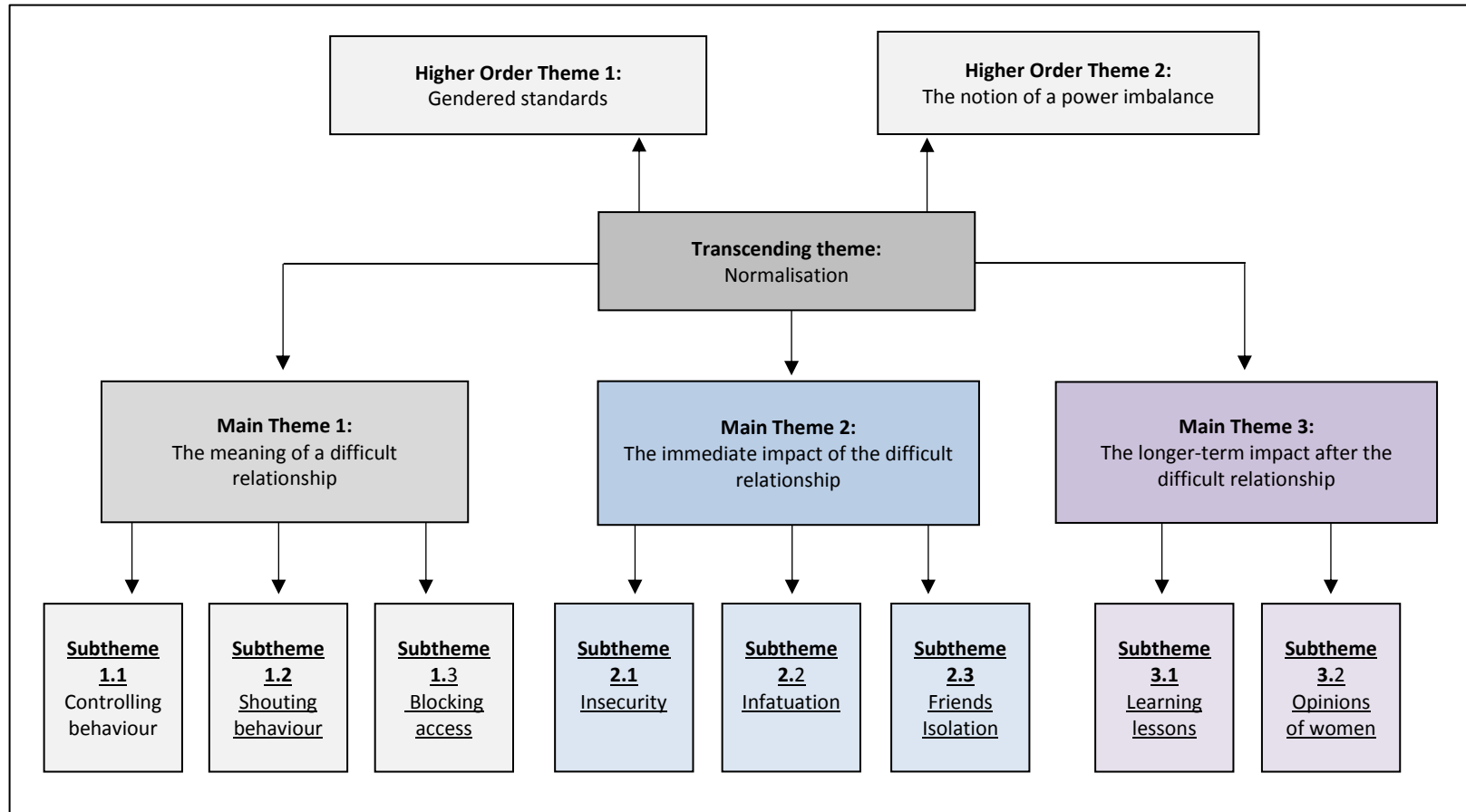


Figure 1 - Thematic map, with the three main themes and related sub-themes, and two higher order themes, centred around the transcending theme.

Shouting behaviour

The notion of *difficult* was also reflected in women's verbal attacks on men, which made the dynamic of the relationship difficult. Shouting behaviour is seen in Luke's interview:

'she went mental and psycho like so suddenly. Like she was screaming down the phone, shouting and swearing, calling me disgusting names which made me feel shit' (Luke)

This illustrates how the shouting was extreme, and beyond the extent of what Luke thought was 'normal', as seen by his choice of words: 'mental' and 'psycho'. The emotive language, such as, 'disgusting' and 'made me feel shit', also demonstrates how this shouting behaviour had a significantly negative impact on how Luke felt about himself.

Similarly, shouting behaviour is portrayed in Mike's interview:

'she'd just erupt out of nowhere and start screaming'. (Mike)

For both Luke and Mike, the shouting arose quickly, almost without any warning and 'out of nowhere'. Shouting behaviour may have had an impact on how men felt, because it was so unexpected. This is a common trend throughout the transcripts:

'She was a pocket rocket who'd go off at any moment so I'd tread carefully' (Luke)

The comparison to a 'rocket' suggests that when the girl did 'go off', it was explosive and loud. The fact that he had to 'tread carefully', suggests that the experience was unpleasant and unwanted, as he tried to prevent it. This subtheme is closely related to *Controlling behaviour* as the men's behaviour was dependent on the women's mood, and seemed to be controlled by the fear of the woman exploding into shouting behaviour.

Blocking access

The third component to the meaning of a difficult relationship focuses on women's tendency to block their partner's phone number or social media access, usually as a result of an argument.

'she often blocked and deleted me after arguments...so I couldn't message her to sort it out...it would make me panic so I would grovel regardless of who was wrong' (Tim)

Blocking clearly had a negative impact on Tim, as he would 'panic', perhaps about the thought of a 'break up', and the inability to communicate in order to resolve the conflict. This

sub-theme, again, links to *Controlling behaviour* as blocking seemed to be used as a form of control and emotional manipulation by the woman, to make the man feel anxious, in order to make him apologise and 'grovel'.

Blocking was not, however, always seen as negative. As Will described:

'I'd loved if she'd block in fights instead of threats...remove the hassle' (Will)

Blocking therefore seemed to occur quite frequently but was seen differently amongst the men. For some, like Tim, it was seen as negative and concerning, whereas those like Will believed that it helped to escape confrontation. This is linked further to the sub-theme of *Shouting behaviour*, as it suggests that arguments and consequent shouting, were seen as 'hassle', and situations that men wanted to avoid.

Accordingly, men described difficult relationships as controlling behaviour, shouting and blocking which reflect inter-connected ways that women behaved within these relationships.

Main Theme 2: the immediate impact of the difficult relationship

This main theme focuses on the way in which men were affected by women's behaviours, whilst in the relationship, which has been separated into three subthemes.

Insecurity

This sub-theme demonstrates how difficult relationships can change the way men feel about themselves.

'in the relationship, I felt insecure. It hit my self-esteem, lost my confidence – I was confident before her, outgoing, extrovert – wow, thinking about it, it was pretty bad' (Tim)

The women's behaviour was therefore seen as damaging to men's confidence and could alter men's personality; Tim changed from 'confident' and an 'extrovert', to 'insecure'. The closing remark, 'thinking about it, it was pretty bad', suggests that he had this realisation during the interview, and only just recognized how insecure he felt whilst with his girlfriend. There is a cycle in these relationships: they cause men to feel insecure and lower their confidence which stops them from recognizing the harmful issues. This is also seen by Samuel:

'honestly questioned what I'd done to fucking deserve it to be honest and it took me ages to get my head around that it wasn't me who was a shit person --- it was her' (Samuel)

This quotation further illustrates how these relationships can cause insecurity, as for a while, Samuel believed that he was a ‘shit’ person. The swear words suggest a level of anger, which may be directed at himself for not realising, to his ex-girlfriend for making him feel this way, or both. The phrase, ‘took me ages’, also shows that the woman is not immediately viewed as a ‘shit person’ which again, suggests that his lack of self-confidence blinded him to the problem, and prolonged the process of recognising that the issues were not his fault.

This subtheme is also linked to *Shouting behaviour* as shouting often caused feelings of insecurity as seen in Toby’s interview:

‘she’d just start shouting and swearing at me.... make me feel shit about myself’

The power of verbal abuse is demonstrated by the remark, ‘feel shit about myself’ and reveals the immediate negative effect that it may have on men’s confidence.

Infatuation with girlfriend

The immediate impact of the difficult relationship was also described with a focus on men’s intense passion and infatuation with their girlfriend. This is clearly portrayed in Tim’s interview:

‘I would do anything for the girl. I would literally pine for her.... the more fucked up things she did, the more I would pine...I was pretty much blinded by my love for her’. (Tim)

The word ‘pine’ shows how he placed the girl on a pedestal, despite the ‘fucked up things she did’, possibly due to a loss of self-identity or self-respect. As a result of their infatuation several men seemed to view themselves as a boyfriend, and not as their own person, and with the same low level of respect with which they were treated. This notion of infatuation is linked to *Controlling behaviour* and *Insecurity*; being infatuated may have made men more susceptible to being controlled and to losing confidence, as their focus was wholly on their girlfriend, and seeing her in an overly positive light, whilst viewing themselves negatively.

Infatuation was not, however, shown to the same intensity in all participants:

‘the way she manipulated situations did blind me because I loved her, but sometimes I’d have to tell myself that just because I love her, this isn’t ok...’ (Ryan)

This shows a less powerful version of infatuation, as he recognized that ‘love’ did not

justify wrong actions. However, the phrase, 'have to tell myself', suggests that infatuation was hard to resist, and may require self-talk, in order to avoid being 'blinded' by love.

Isolation from friends

The third immediate impact of these difficult relationships was the tendency for men to withdraw from their friends and become isolated. At times this was an indirect result of being in a difficult relationship.

'I kinda closed myself off from my friends...I was like pushing them away because I was so engrossed in this relationship with this girl that was so toxic' (Joe)

This shows how the relationship made Joe focus more attention on his girlfriend, whilst ignoring his friends. It suggests that the isolation from friends was through Joe's own behaviour, as opposed to his girlfriend's request. This relates to the subtheme of *Infatuation*, as it illustrates how being 'engrossed' with his girlfriend resulted in him neglecting the other relationships in his life.

In contrast, this isolation was sometimes due to a direct request from their girlfriend as seen in Tim's interview:

'I wasn't seeing my friends as much...if I wasn't with her I would get into trouble.'

Tim was therefore isolated from friends due to his girlfriend, as he could not socialise without her criticising him, suggesting a conflict between seeing friends or his girlfriend. His statement that he admits to 'not seeing my friends', shows that he accepted his girlfriend's wishes, over his desire to see friends, which may have been due to *Infatuation*. This is linked to *Controlling behaviour* and *Shouting behaviour*; the girl dictated how often Tim saw his friends, by threatening consequences ('get into trouble') if he spent time with them, instead of with her.

Participants therefore described several immediate negative consequences of being in a difficult relationship with a focus on the inter-related issues of insecurity, infatuation and isolation. Further, these consequences in turn can be seen as related to the very core of a difficult relationship reflecting aspects of controlling and shouting behaviour.

Main Theme 3: The longer-term impact after the difficult relationship

This third main theme explores how men felt about the relationship, and their ex-girlfriend, in retrospect, which can be categorised into two subthemes.

Learning lessons

With retrospect, participants described how these difficult relationships could be considered opportunities to learn, especially when choosing future partners. This is seen in Curtis' interview:

'I cut this new girl off...seeing the same signs, like jealousy and controlling ... gosh, if I hadn't had this previous learning experience, I wouldn't have cut this one out' (Curtis)

Therefore, the primary difficult relationship enabled him to gain awareness and insight to recognize similar patterns of warning behaviour in other women, such as jealousy and control. On reflection Curtis can draw benefit from his past experience: by remarking 'if I hadn't had this', he suggests that the experience has its benefits due to the lessons that have been learned.

This is also demonstrated in Liam's interview:

'It's a learning curve. I learnt I'm resilient enough to handle these situations' (Liam)

He demonstrates a positive portrayal of these experiences, in terms of character building, and learning about personal qualities, despite experiencing difficulties. Further, this short sentence also suggests that men may not want to see themselves as victims, but as 'resilient' men, who can overcome these experiences.

Opinions of women

The longer-term impact of these relationships was also described in terms of changes in men's views on women in general and in particular highlights the language used to describe their thoughts. Some men were keen to express that their past difficult relationships hadn't coloured their views of all women. As Toby said:

'I don't think all girls are psycho or bad, I think that's generalising it too much...just because you have one or two bad experiences, doesn't mean every bird is like that' (Toby)

Toby seems to have healed from the relationship in a healthy way, as he does not seem to have a deep-rooted dislike for all women or view them all as 'psycho'. The colloquial tone, of 'bird', in place of 'woman', however, could be interpreted as chauvinistic, suggesting that he is not as positive about women as he wants us to believe and now views women in a more negative way. Some men, however, were clear that their views had been changed for the worse by their past relationships. For example, Tim said:

'all women are psycho, and are controlling...that's what you have to deal with' (Tim)

This highlights how the experience had tainted his view of girls, as he now sees them all as 'psycho'. The remark, 'that's what you have to deal with', is matter-of-fact, and suggests that such behaviour is intrinsic within women, which men have to accept. The effect of this approach is to downplay the negative impact of women's behaviour, suggest that it is not to be taken too seriously and to normalise it as part of heterosexual life.

Therefore, the longer-term impact of difficult relationships was described in terms of a learning lessons and subsequent changes in their views about women.

Main themes: Overall summary

The men in this study, therefore, described their experiences of such difficult relationships in terms of experiencing controlling, shouting and blocking behaviour, which resulted in immediate feelings of insecurity, infatuation and isolation. These men also described the longer-term impact of their experiences in terms of the lessons learned and how their views of women had changed. Two higher order themes are apparent across these three main themes: gendered standards and the notion of a power imbalance.

Higher order theme 1: Gendered standards

The first higher order theme that was apparent across the main themes was gendered standards and the implicit difference in what was considered acceptable for men and women. For example, Joe describes gendered standards as follows:

'when I went out, she'd be like, 'oh why did you go out', and make me feel guilty...if it worked the other way round, she'd be like, 'why you intruding on my life'. (Joe)

Accordingly, participant's accounts suggest differences in what women consider acceptable for themselves compared to their boyfriend. This reflects aspects of the main themes such as *Controlling* and *Shouting behaviour* and *Isolation* and how what is acceptable differs between men and women. This level of double standards may be particularly damaging as, when still in the relationship, men seem to believe that women's behaviour is acceptable which could explain why they do not leave the relationship straight away.

The idea of 'double standards' is also illustrated in Will's interview in the context of social media:

'she made a fucking massive deal about me liking girl's Insta photos--- if she did it to boys, suddenly it's fine. Ridiculous LOL, just gotta get on with it haven't you' (Will)

The use of swear words ('fucking massive deal'), as well as the sarcastic tone ('suddenly it's fine'), suggests that this 'double standard' upset Will. The closing remark, 'just gotta get on with it', however, suggests a level of acceptance and endurance either to avoid conflict or because this gendered standard was becoming normalised.

Higher order theme 2: The notion of a power imbalance

The second higher order theme to cut across the main themes was the notion of a power imbalance illustrating how the men interviewed felt that women held more of the power in these relationships. An example of this is given by David:

'the dynamic of the relationship was defo in her power...I'd be treading carefully until I figured out the mood she was in...then I'd know the day I was in for' (David).

From David's perspective, his girlfriend was perceived as dominating the relationship as she had the power to alter how he behaved, until he was certain of her mood. This power imbalance relates to aspects of the main themes such as *Shouting behaviour* and *Insecurity*. This dynamic may also have been exacerbated by *Infatuation* resulting in men allowing the woman to have more of the power. A different view, however, was proposed by Will:

'she'd try to take the power. I'd really try to not listen to what she told me to do' (Will)

The words 'she'd try' and 'I'd really try' clearly illustrate the ongoing struggle for power occurring in the relationship. Further, whilst some men may be more accepting of this power imbalance, others such as Will find ways to try to regain control.

Transcending theme: Normalisation

Experience of difficult relationships, therefore, highlighted higher order themes of gendered standards and an imbalance of power which in turn encapsulate many of the main themes and subthemes such as *Shouting* and *Controlling Behaviour*, *Insecurity* and *Infatuation*. Permeating all themes and cutting across the transcripts was the concept of normalisation reflecting how the women's behaviour seems to be sanctioned, accepted and normalised. For some, this process of normalisation happened at an individual level with men describing how they were happy to give their girlfriend the benefit of the doubt and convince themselves that

they had good intentions. As Toby said:

'I thought it was normal that she didn't let me see my friends...I just thought it was her wanting to spend time with me, which at the time, I thought was understandable' (Toby)

In this quote, Toby makes an excuse for her controlling behaviour and describes it as 'understandable'. This shows how he rationalised her unreasonable behaviour, perhaps as a result of feeling flattered that she 'wanted' him which may have been driven by a desire to feel attractive and preserve his sense of masculinity.

For others, this process of normalisation seemed to occur at a more group level and drew upon generalisations of gender either due to biology or the way we have all been socialised to behave. For example, David said:

'girls naturally just wanna control your life...they're a lot more creative in their mind games with guys...I think it's just a girl thing, they're just like that' (David)

From this quote it can be seen that David accepts 'control' and 'mind games' by arguing that it is inevitable ('They're just like that'; 'it's just a girl thing'). Further, by drawing upon both biological and socialisation narratives using the phrases '*naturally*' and '*they're just like that*', these behaviours become normal. Therefore, whilst acknowledging gendered standards and power imbalances in these difficult relationships, and describing controlling behaviours and shouting and blocking, which have both immediate and longer terms impacts upon how the men feel about themselves, these behaviours are normalised at both the individual and group level to justify how women behave and to make it easier for them to be tolerated and accepted.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored men's experiences of difficult relationships with women. Previous research has suggested that difficult and abusive relationships are mainly characterized by physical attacks (Donovan et al, 2010). The findings from this study illustrate that heterosexual relationships do not require a physical component to be considered difficult for men and can involve other forms of attack such as control, shouting and blocking access. These findings reflect the work of Simonelli and Ingram (1998) who identified verbal aggression and emotional abuse as characterising the ways in which women can abuse men. The present study suggests, however, that there are also other more subtle forms of attack often involving control

which may be particularly apparent in contemporary times of phone technology and social media. The findings from the current study also show that these relationships have immediate negative impacts on men, and can cause insecurity, feelings of infatuation and isolation. These findings reflect previous literature for both women (Goetting, 1991; Bowman, 1999; Orzeck et al, 2009) and men (Simonelli et al, 1998) indicating that emotional abuse in difficult relationships negatively effects psychological well-being, regardless of gender. The men in the present study also described consequences into the longer term. For some, this involved having more negative opinions of women, which reflects the ways women who have been abused describe their feelings about future partners, and a lack of trust (eg. Berger, 1998; Orzeck et al, 2009). Some men, however, described lessons learned and how their experiences had made them more resilient. This process of benefit finding may reflect an ability to reframe their experiences in a positive way. It may also reflect a reluctance to be framed as a victim and a need to minimise the severity of their experiences (Karakurt & Silver, 2013; Taylor et al, 1983).

The results from the present study also illustrated gendered standards with men reporting that women accepted certain behaviours for themselves but not for their male partners. This is a novel research finding but does find reflection in gender differences in general concerning all aspects of behaviour together with the ongoing stereotypes of men as more physically violent and less emotionally expressive (Myhill, 2015). Accordingly, the gender differences reported in the literature are paralleled in the gendered standards as to what is deemed acceptable practice within a relationship. These differences were further illustrated by a notion of power imbalance with the relationships often compounded by behaviours such as shouting, controlling or blocking. For some, this resulted in negative emotions such as insecurity often fuelled by infatuation. For others it resulted in a battle for power and a determination not to give in.

The results therefore show that men experienced difficult relationships as involving behaviours which had both immediate and longer-term consequences. Further these relationships were characterised by gendered standards and an imbalance of power. Transcending these findings was the process of normalisation. In particular, the results indicate that through justification at both the individual and group level, women's difficult behaviour was accepted by considering it *understandable* due to either the attractiveness of the man himself or the inevitability of being a woman due to her biology or socialisation. Existing literature

indicates that abuse by females, against males, is often overlooked (Steinmetz, 1977). Further, the gendered debates surrounding men as victims of abuse illustrate a tendency to ignore or dismiss accounts of abuse by women (eg. Steinmetz, 1977; Robinson & Rowlands, 2009). The results from the present study suggest, however, that such difficult behaviour is also overlooked, ignored or dismissed by the male victims themselves as they strive to normalise their experiences and downplay what they are going through. Accordingly, as the literature has been reluctant to accept men as victims, so are the men themselves.

The results from the present study therefore provide insights into the experiences of men in difficult relationships and highlight the process of normalisation which reduces their status as a victim and makes their partner's behaviour more acceptable. There are, however, some problems with this study which need to be considered. Primarily, those men agreeing to be interviewed may not reflect the experiences of those not captured by this study. The recruitment process involved identifying men, who were thought by the research team and their contacts to have been in a difficult relationship. This requires a man to have reflected on their relationship, identify what they have gone through as difficult in some way and share this with someone in contact with the research team. This clearly excludes those who are still in denial; those who haven't processed their experiences yet; those who haven't labelled their experiences as difficult; and those who haven't shared their experiences. It also excludes those who may have accepted their experiences but don't want to talk about them in an interview. The recruited men, and the obtained data, therefore, only represents a specific sample of participants. Future research could try to expand upon this sampling procedure perhaps by using alternative words such as 'survivor' and by recruiting from a larger pool of people. Second, both interviewers were women which may have changed the dynamic of the interviews. Whilst reflective and mindful of their impact on the openness of the interviewees, future research could include both male and female interviewers to create a more balanced approach. Finally, the qualitative approach requires a degree of insight, reflexivity and emotional expression for the generation of in-depth data. The participants, the topic matter and the expectations of masculinity together with the presence of a female interviewers may each have limited the openness of the interviewee's accounts.

To conclude, whilst previous literature has tended to neglect the experiences of men due to assumptions about the notion of abuse and a reluctance to see men as victims, the present study focused on the experiences of men in difficult relationships with women. The results showed that difficult relationships are characterised by controlling, shouting and blocking behaviours which have both immediate and longer-term consequences and that these relationships are underpinned by gendered standards and a power imbalance. Furthermore, the results indicate a tendency for men to normalise women's difficult behaviour through a sense of acceptance and inevitability. Accordingly, it may not only be the literature which neglects the experiences of the male victim or is biased against men as victims of abuse. It may also be the men themselves as they downplay their experiences in order to protect their sense of self. Both the literature and society need to become more accepting of men as victims in heterosexual relationships to prevent the normalisation of women's difficult behaviour.

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CRITICAL GENDER THEORY AND THE U. S. ELECTION

Gerard Nicol



ABSTRACT

Written before the election results were official, this article examines Former-President Trump's corrective response to his predecessor's critical-gender-theory-informed policies and speculates what a Biden Administration might do to undermine it. Until recently, U. S.-Government employees were forced to sit through training programs that scapegoated half of the participants based upon the perverse concept of gender-based ancestry, where men are held responsible for the actions of every man who came before them. The author suggests a Biden Administration will reimplement these programs, and American society will be cast back into the Obama-era world of critical gender theory and College Title-IX kangaroo courts.

Keywords: Title ix, critical gender theory, gender, feminism, misandry

While the world waits to see if President Trump can successfully argue in the courts that he did win the 2020 election, there is a small group of people who mourn the potential of losing a strong advocate for gender equality. It is undeniable that most people see President Trump through the lens of secretly recorded personal comments on kissing women without consent, and his perception that women allow wealthy men to take liberties that they would deny lesser men, but a minority perspective is that President Trump has brought a voice of reason to the discussion of gender. The media in Australia mainly ignored President Trump's efforts, with the notable exception being the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which occasionally report the stories from a narrow left-wing ideological perspective.

On September 22nd, 2020, President Trump issued Executive Order 13950 to combat race and sex stereotyping and scapegoating within the United States Government. What could possibly be wrong with that? Isn't stereotyping or scapegoating someone based upon his or her gender fundamentally incompatible with the basic principles of gender equality? The President's executive order defunded programs that framed one gender as inherently superior to another, that framed any gender as inherently sexist and oppressive, or that encouraged people to treat a person differently based upon his or her gender. Had President Obama issued the same executive order, wouldn't it have been hailed as one of his greatest achievements? In fact, why didn't President Obama issue that executive order in the first term of his presidency?

Before his election, President Trump ran afoul of political correctness when he claimed some Mexican men entering the United States illegally were rapists. His comments were interpreted by some on the left to be a political dog whistle, encouraging a rush-to-judgment against illegal-migrant men, but it has been President Trump's Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, who has fought extensively to return Due Process to U. S. College-Campus Title-IX sexual-assault proceedings, proceedings that are disproportionately brought against men who come from a non-English speaking background.

If the Democrats win the Presidency, among President Biden's first acts will be the reversal of President Trump's executive order on gender scapegoating and his Title IX reforms. American society will be cast back into the President Obama-era world of critical gender theory and College Title IX kangaroo courts, and this return will be framed by the media as a great step towards gender equality. In effect, the entire official narrative on gender will revert to the

intersectional-feminist perspective that categorizes each individual by race, gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, fertility, disabilities and religion. While few pay any direct attention to these ideas, the fact remains that under President Obama these ideas started to flow into government agencies; President Trump turned off the tap, and President Biden will turn that tap back on.

It isn't 2008 anymore; the world has changed. Intersectional feminism has shown men that no matter what they say or do, they will still be categorized as oppressors for as long as they remain CIS gendered and heterosexual. Men have seen that being a feminist ally is no protection from the feminist mob, and they have seen that the ever-growing conservative mob automatically label woke men as opportunistic sexual predators.

For all his faults, President Trump has called into question the wisdom of perspectives, agendas and programs that create a gender *apartheid*. He has supported Betsy Devos as she required that both men and women accused of sexual assault receive the basic right of being told the allegations against them, before they are expelled without even the basics of due process. Only a few months ago government employees were forced to sit through training programs that scapegoated half of the participants based upon the perverse concept of gender-based ancestry, where men are held responsible for the actions of every man who came before them. That recently stopped, and there is a good chance it will start again as a matter of priority.

But will men and women accept this reimposition?

What happens when a woman walks out of the training because President Trump has empowered her to say that she will not scapegoat men? These things were starting to happen already during the end of the Obama presidency, well before the weight of Trump's presidency labelled them as inconsistent not only with American values, but with the basic principles of gender equality. What happens when colleges revert to Obama era Title IX kangaroo courts that were already flooding the civil courts with lawsuits where sometimes even the victim wasn't even accusing the perpetrator of any wrongdoing?

Under President Obama, gender conflict was racing towards a brick wall at 60 miles per hour, President Trump tapped the brakes and the car slowed down, but if Joe Biden becomes President, the radical left of his own party is going to insist that he push the pedal to the floor.

While we might have hit the wall a few years later than we would have if President Trump had not won in 2016, we are going to hit it way harder than we ever would have under President Obama's momentum. It is questionable whether most men and women have ever been exposed to critical gender theory, but where they were forced to endure it, they sat through it in the hope that their tolerance would placate the angry. Now they know that the indoctrination is just the beginning and not the end, it remains to be seen how they will respond.

Strap yourselves in: it will be a ride that isn't uniquely American.

AUTHOR PROFILE



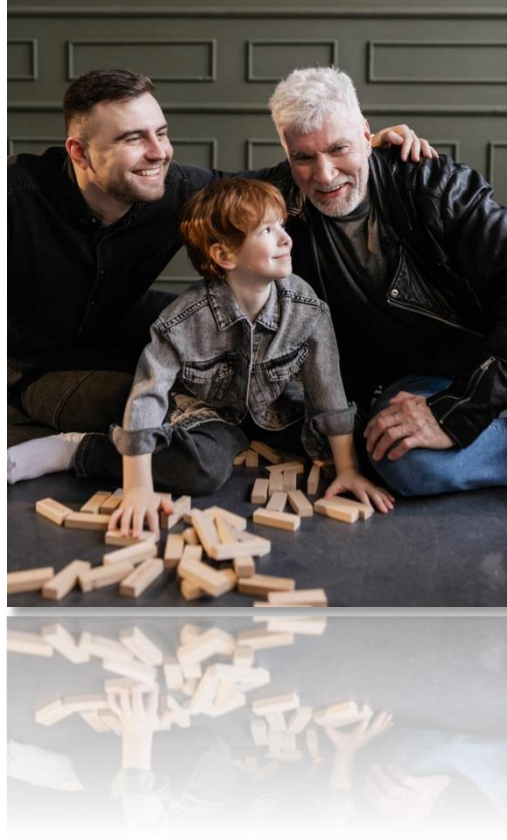
Gerard Nicol has 27 years of experience in enterprise storage management and data security. He welcomes any comments in relation to this article and is happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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DOES MASCULINITY NEED “REDEFINING”?

Tim Goldich



ABSTRACT

We don't need a redefinition of masculinity; we need an improved understanding of what masculinity truly is—an understanding divested of stereotypes and misandry. The distinction between defining and redefining masculinity is crucial. To define masculinity is to respect masculinity as something real, something that we are endeavoring to understand more deeply. To redefine masculinity is to assume that masculinity is purely a social construct with no reality and no meaning beyond what we arbitrarily assign to it. And therefore, masculinity becomes a mere plaything for would-be sociologists, feminists, and special interest groups to re-define at their whim. Efforts to improve our imperfect definition of masculinity are valid, but efforts to redefine masculinity are not to be trusted.

Keywords: maleness, masculinity, misandry, stereotypes

Is masculinity all washed up? Compared with femininity, in order to remain viable, is masculinity (so-called, “toxic masculinity”) in need of *redefining* for the new millennium? In the opening chapter of *Plato’s Republic*, three philosophers of the day rise to Socrates’ challenge to define *justice*. Each definition improves upon the last, yet each is revealed as woefully inadequate. It is difficult indeed to trap so high and elusive a concept as justice within an airtight verbal box. But this failure to define justice, does not erode Plato’s faith that justice is *real*. Would we not be suspicious of any governmental committee whose stated goal was to *re-define* justice? Redefine it how . . . to serve whose purposes? Here’s the distinction: Plato was attempting to *define* justice, not *redefine* justice. Humans can ponder the meaning of justice, and attempt to understand and capture that meaning in words, but according to Plato, the word *justice* refers to something real and eternal, and humans haven’t the authority to *redefine* it.

So . . . is masculinity also something real? Does this concept also have some sort of independent meaning that lies outside the reach of human interference? I believe that two million years of human evolution did indeed create something real, something that we label “feminine” and “masculine.” As is true of justice, we struggle and largely fail to contain these concepts within tight verbal boxes called definitions, but that, in itself, should not erode our confidence in their reality. The question is, are our definitions of feminine and masculine accurate? It seems to me that where gender is concerned, powerful psychic forces (including instinct, chivalry, Eros, sentiment, myths and mythos) tend to bias our perceptions and overpower reason. Masculine and feminine are real I think, but, at present, only imperfectly understood.

So, I’m all in with efforts to improve our imperfect *definitions* of masculine and feminine, but I regard current efforts to *redefine* them (or deny their existence) with suspicion.

Masculinity in particular is judged in the worst way. In some circles, masculine is synonymous with *macho* and widely regarded as the source of all evil: destructive, violent, false, immature, inferior, unnecessary, redundant, even obsolete. The prestigious American Psychological Association has officially declared “traditional masculinity” as “harmful” and advocates “Redefining Masculinity.” “We need a new definition of masculinity” intones the Daily Beacon. The International Boys’ Schools Coalition is all for “Redefining Masculinity: Helping Boys to be Better Men.” Even the ManKind Project (an organization that I’ve been part of since

2000) is on about “Redefining Masculinity for the 21st Century.” With women supposedly rising and men supposedly in decline, the temptation to *redefine* and fix masculinity that it might better fit in with modern realities, is a temptation that runs deep. But I resist that temptation for a number of reasons.

First off, it would seem that every *redefinition* of masculinity heads in the same direction—less masculine, more feminine. But then, how could it be otherwise? There is only yin and yang, anima and animus, male and female; there is no third direction. If masculinity will undergo a shift, then where will it go; will men become more dolphin-like? One reason I’m suspicious of *redefining* masculinity is that I see nowhere else for the masculine to go but toward the feminine. I have no problem with men and women choosing to be balanced, but that has nothing to do with how we define *masculine*. Is shifting our definition of masculine toward the feminine a step toward *redefining* masculinity or a step toward *negating* masculinity? Does feminizing masculinity create a sustainable model of masculinity for the future or does it only take us a further step down the road toward male redundancy and obsolescence? I find these questions troubling.

Another reason I’m suspicious of *redefining* masculinity is that it seems all too closely aligned with feminist agendas. I think if feminists had their way, they would *redefine* *masculine* as safe, compliant, selfless, obsequious, sexless, and obeisant to every female complaint. As always, men would remain responsible for policing and succumbing to the dark side of the world and human nature. Men will perform those tasks most harsh and hazardous (battlefields, mining, sewers, firefighting, construction . . .). Males will be ten times more likely to die on the job (according to DeVore), but men will ask for nothing. Men will have no perspectives of their own, claiming only feminist (i.e., “female-ist”) perspectives for themselves. Well, I happen to think that men have gone too far down *that* road already! Maleness *redefined* in a manner that best serves feminist purposes, that’s what I’d regard as the worst-case outcome here. You know, women everywhere look around them and insist, “There are no men!” How feminized are men supposed to be?

A third reason to distrust *redefining* masculinity is that I don’t trust that humans are wise enough to take control of such a thing. *Redefining* is *not* defining; it is social engineering. And who do I trust to take charge of this social engineering? —*nobody!* No human entity can be

trusted to redefine masculinity. Lao Tzu, Jesus, Leonardo, Shakespeare, Bach, Einstein . . . how did we ever allow ourselves to be brainwashed into believing that the masculine has no redeeming virtue?

A fourth reason to distrust redefining masculinity is that it is born of misandry. It is born of seeing the masculine shadow, but not the masculine gold; and seeing the feminine gold, but not the feminine shadow. It is gender bias and bigotry. It is sexism. It is an outgrowth of the escalating notion that masculinity is a defective anachronism that is at fault and to blame for all things bad, but cannot be credited for anything good. The urge to redefine masculinity is an urge to *purge* men of their masculinity, a so-called toxic masculinity that has *already been* redefined in the worst way.

The fifth and final reason to distrust redefining takes us back to where we started. I believe that, like the concept of *justice*, the concept of the *masculine* has an independent reality. Unless or until we are prepared to alter human DNA, we can *redefine* the *word* masculinity as we please, but the truth of masculinity will not be altered. We can defame and malign the masculine into ever greater levels of dysfunctional shame. We can undervalue the masculine contribution in parenting to the point that fatherless sons become the norm. Oh yes, we can certainly undermine masculinity, but we cannot change what masculinity is.

Authentic masculinity's not the problem. But how will fatherless boys learn authentic masculinity? The true problem with current masculinity is that it has been—and continues to be—undermined by powerful cultural forces, forces that result in male academic and economic decline plus a generalized contempt of the masculine. Yes, we are told that women are rising and men are in decline, but those in the know, know that females are so advantaged and males so disadvantaged that it could not be otherwise. Sadly, however, it feels simpler and a whole lot safer to lay all the blame on male defects than to respect womankind enough to hold her accountable as equal partner in the human system.

We don't need a *redefinition* of masculinity; we need an improved understanding of what masculinity truly is: an understanding truer perhaps than any prior understanding of masculinity, an understanding divested of stereotypes and misandry. What is *authentic* masculinity? I would struggle to define it. But I believe that qualities such as drive, honor,

obsession, fairness, wisdom, integrity and accountability live at its core. These qualities are timeless. They add up to a definition of masculinity that is sustainable into any future—a masculinity that can *never* be rendered obsolete.

This is not the masculine *redefined* as feminist doormat; this is a strong masculinity—a masculinity that demands . . . wait for it . . . *justice!*

I believe that the distinction between defining and *redefining* masculinity is crucial. To define masculinity is to *respect* masculinity as something *real*, something that we are endeavoring more deeply to understand. To *redefine* masculinity is to assume that masculinity is purely a social construct with no reality and no meaning beyond what we arbitrarily assign to it. And therefore, *masculinity* becomes a mere plaything for would-be sociologists, feminists, and special interest groups to *re-define* at their whim.

So, I'm all in with efforts to improve our imperfect *definition* of masculinity, but efforts to *redefine* masculinity are not to be trusted.

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Title photograph by [Alena Darmel](#) from [Pexels](#).

AUTHOR PROFILE



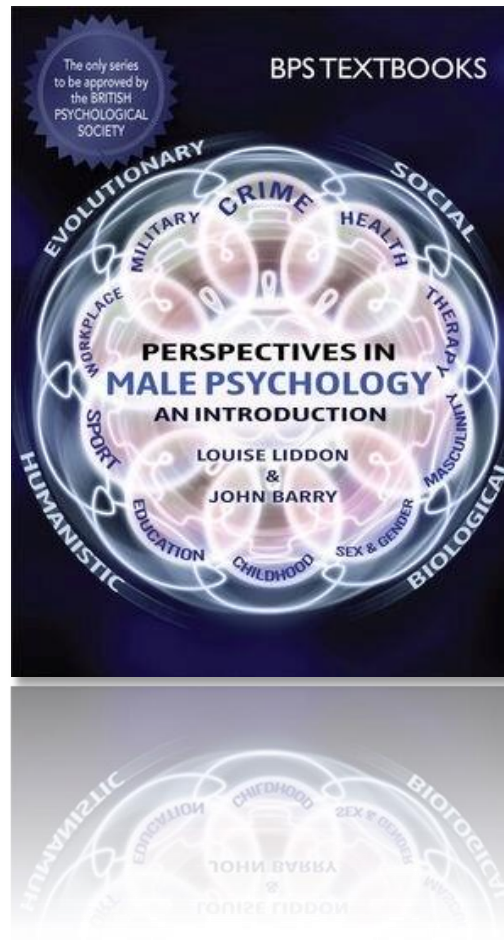
Tim Goldich is the president of the Chicago chapter of the National Coalition for Men and an avid member of the ManKind Project, two organizations that variously support men politically and emotionally. He is also an educator and mentor to boys on their way to becoming men. Goldich facilitates the personal growth work of men on New Warrior Training Adventure weekends and of men and women on personal growth weekends called Path to Spirit. He is the author of four books, including [Loving Men, Respecting Women: The Future of Gender Politics](#).

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BOOK REVIEW

PERSPECTIVES IN MALE PSYCHOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

LOUISE LIDDON AND JOHN BARRY

Rick Bradford



Keywords: male psychology, book review

This is an important book.

It is important, not only because it provides a much-needed primer on male psychology, but because it presents an opportunity to begin a new era in psychology. There is no point in dissembling, and the book itself does not do so. Psychology is intrinsically personal, so when the personal was made political, so was psychology. The ethos the authors promote is that science, as an empirically grounded discipline, is not politics, and so male psychology, if it is to be a science, is not gender politics. That the book will be controversial is inevitable, but the reason does not lie in the book itself but in the prevailing academic environment. The authors are to be congratulated on facing this prospect bravely.

The book is male psychology 101 – or it would be if undergraduate courses on male psychology were the norm. They are not. In the UK there is currently only one such course, at Sunderland under Dr Rebecca Owens. But *Perspectives* provides ideal material for similar introductory courses to be included within psychology degrees.

The book is intended to be the first in a series, the remainder concentrating on more specialist areas. *Perspectives*, however, is extremely broad in scope. After an elucidation of the aims and orientation of male psychology, the scene is set with a brief discussion on the hazards of researching sex differences. The bulk of the book systematically addresses a wide range of issues in terms of their impact on male psychology – or the impact of male psychology on them – including child development, education, sport, work, criminality, the armed forces, and physical and mental health. These are followed by a chapter on masculinity (thankfully expressed in the singular not the plural).

The book is well structured, being divided into relatively short sections and so is easy to assimilate rapidly. The use of text boxes to highlight certain issues is also an aid to accessibility. Similarly, technical terms are generally defined where they arise. Throughout, at key points, the authors refer forwards to the final chapter which draws out some good advice and common themes distilled from the topics overall. In short, the book is ideal as an introduction; undergraduates and the general public will find it easy to read.

I was particularly pleased to see a discussion of the impact on boys of growing up in a culture of pervasive negative portrayal of masculinity. That the same sources of opinion who are

so sensitive to the harms of gender stereotyping in one context have themselves created and promoted negative stereotyping in another context is one of the reasons why this book is so badly needed.

Perhaps as a hallmark of a successful book, one is stimulated to think of additional topics which might have been included. However, virtually every sub-section could be expanded to the length of a major academic publication, with the addition of fifty references where just one or two are used. But to burden individual topics with too much detail would defeat the purpose of the book which, in the approach actually taken, it successfully achieves. Hence, I struggle to have grounds for criticism, which is an uncomfortable position for a reviewer. In that spirit I offer a few observations, none of which greatly detract from the book.

In the context of education, the book mentions assessment bias against boys, citing evidence from Israel and France. Actually, there is similar evidence in the UK, though I doubt it has been published in the academic journals. That fact is, in itself, a concern. The UK data showing teachers' assessment bias at Key Stage 2 SATS (age 10/11) can be found in [The Empathy Gap, Male Disadvantages and the Mechanisms of Their Neglect](#), Section 2.1, which also discusses similar data from the USA based on [Cornwell et al \(2013\)](#). More recently in the UK, the debacle of the examless A Level awards during the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 has provided definitive evidence of teachers' assessment bias (see The Illustrated Empathy Gap's article [State Education, Dying, Dying...Dead?](#)).

In the chapter on criminality, one causal factor which is not discussed is IQ. Our prisons are not packed with people of high intelligence. In an increasingly technology-driven world, gainful employment has become increasingly difficult for the less intellectually gifted. And men have a larger IQ variance than women, so there are more men with especially low IQ. The preponderance in prisons of men with a history of exclusion from school is undoubtedly related. Add to this the importance to men of being providers, and the frustration of being unable to do so by the legal means of gaining employment is likely (one surmises) to encourage criminality.

It was good to see veterans discussed. But I would point out that is not only mental ill-health issues from which they commonly suffer. Important though PTSD is, it can be addressed if the man seeks help. What proves more intractable in practice is veterans' contact with their

children, because partner separation is disproportionately common amongst veterans – perhaps as a result of their mental state. So, one problem creates another even more virulent.

Perhaps the most important issue that the book mentions is that, in the context of gender, women tend to have in-group preference whereas men have stronger out-group than in-group preference, here the authors quote [Rudman and Goodwin \(2004\)](#). Liddon and Barry conclude that, “*This means that men favour women relatively more than they favour other men, which undermines the idea that misogyny is a core part of masculinity*”. Arguably this absence of in-group preference amongst men is a cause of much misunderstanding (such as the idea that men’s dominance in politics means that political policy favours men).

The implications for our changing society of women’s stronger in-group preference, and men’s relative out-group preference, have not yet been grasped. Women dominate as students and lecturers in tertiary education as regards all people-oriented subjects. Consequently, women dominate as professionals in areas such as teaching, mental and physical health, social work and domestic abuse services, the latter two being of central importance after parental separation and hence impacting fathers as much as mothers. The implications of skewed gender-group preference should be of concern, but currently fail to be so precisely because this skew is perceived as right and proper. This is exactly where academic psychology has a crucial role in exposing the true basis of our perspectives, behaviours and ultimately political policy.

That the book encourages thoughts like those above is a measure of its success, for surely that is one of its key aims. The book is an excellent entry point to the literature across a very broad range of issues. But more importantly it provokes the reader into thinking more deeply about what lies behind the many phenomena involving male psychology whose treatment at present is either neglected or unconvincing. As such it will make an ideal undergraduate text in psychology as well as being suitable for a general audience.

You can buy *Perspectives in Male Psychology: An Introduction* [here](#) or other usual suppliers.

An earlier version of this review appeared on the www.psychreg.org website.

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Back in the mists of time **Rick Bradford** obtained his degree in theoretical physics from Cambridge University and a PhD from University College London. He worked as a professional mechanical engineer in the power generation industry for nearly 40 years and is now semi-retired. Since retiring he has been a Visiting Professor and an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, Engineering Department, teaching at MSc level and supervising PhD students. He has been married since the world was a very different place and has two sons in their mid-30s. To convince himself he is still a physicist he published a book on quantum mechanics in 2020 (*The Unweirding*). In 2019 he published a book on male disadvantages, *The Empathy Gap: Male Disadvantages and the Mechanisms of Their Neglect*, under the pen name William Collins. He blogs under that name on men's issues on *The Illustrated Empathy Gap*.

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FOREVER YOUNG

A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

Jan H. Andersen















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