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NEW MALE STUDIES – AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

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Dennis Gouws



The contributions to our second, tenth-anniversary issue of *New Male Studies: An International Journal* show how vital our field of study has become: not only is valuable male-oriented research being conducted, but thoughtful male-affirmative critiques of current gender issues impacting boys and men are being written.

The two refereed articles in this issue respectively examine men’s social negotiation of reproduction and self-image. Steve Moxon’s studies “male heterogeneity and female choice in human mating,” arguing that “objectively, the human mating system is just that; a system, in which all individuals are engaged to play a part in what is a group-level phenomenon, with the goal of maximising overall reproductive output/efficiency.” Moxon suggests, “this is rather too obvious understanding to have been lacking—though still there are those hidebound by the outdated *group selection* debate, unaware of the now multiple complementary theoretical perspectives on how/why mutualism works.”

Katherine M. Pagano, Ryan D. Burns, and Nick A. Galli methodically examine men’s perceptions of their body image in “The influence of social comparisons on body image in men: A scoping review.” The authors investigate the efficacy of using Social Comparison Theory to “explain male body image outcomes.” Despite it being “clear that men experience body image and conduct social comparisons differently than women,” the authors “support the continued application of theoretical frameworks in body image inquiry as they enhance the rigor of research findings.”

Tim Goldich’s brief essay, “Equalism in gender politics: Liberals vs. conservatives,” argues that “feminism’s Male Power / Female Victimization paradigm is the problem, and It All Balances Out is a solution.” Goldich reasons, “Both sexes suffer injustice. These injustices may

come out even (balanced), but they're injustices all the same. So, *It All Balances Out* is not a proclamation intended to promote complacency."

This issue's three analysis-and-opinion articles critique gendered assumptions about men and suggest male-appropriate ways of remedying them.

In "Is there anything good in the men's movement? A masculinity expert maligns the manosphere," Janice Fiamengo argues that "British writer James Innes-Smith's recent article in *The Spectator* provides a case study" in the tactics used by "feminist-compliant" authors "when discussing men's issues." Fiamengo observes, "the most typical response involves acts of concealment, misdirection, cherry-picking, and outright misrepresentation, all to avoid admitting there is anything good in the men's movement." She concludes, "Innes-Smith leaves no doubt that the *last place* any troubled young man should turn is to any branch of men's advocacy or self-help. His essay is thus a good illustration of the dead end mainstream pundits often create for men in crisis: acknowledging their problems, but warning against avenues by which they might name and overcome them." Fiamengo rightly observes that, "the men's movement at its best [...] is about focusing justified anger on men's problems in order to find creative ways to oppose, solve, lighten, or live with them."

Miles Groth proposes a new interpretation of contemporary sexual politics in "Tonic Masculinity in the Post-gender Era." Groth observes, "Following a period of much-needed interest in the lives of women, there is a resurgence of interest in male experience and masculinity." This is his argument: "tonic masculinity is an emerging new honesty about male experience at this time. The word tonic has two senses that I want to apply to masculinity. One, found in music, refers to the home key of a composition. The other denotes an invigorating substance or influence. I believe that masculinity is re-emerging of necessity to provide both a sense of harmony as well as much needed positive energy to help heal an ailing social body." In addition, Groth offers this keen observation: "Masculinity in males (essential masculinity) is qualitatively different [...]; since its principal features derive from anatomy and physiognomy [...] male masculinity is genderless." This insight succinctly exemplifies a key difference in what male studies and what gender studies assume about men. For male-studies scholars, essential masculinity expresses embodied maleness.

Peter Wright’s “Unintended effects of transgender activism on men’s issues” observes “over the last century our framing of gendered customs has become increasingly captured by a gynocentric turf war between traditional women, and progressive feminist forces, with trans activism being one of the few novel forces that are actively working to disrupt it.” This turf war is important because “men’s advocates may find some value in instances of trans women breaking down gynocentric barriers that they have proven impotent to breach during the last 200 years of men’s advocacy,” including “exclusive female privileges” such as “domestic violence services, emergency accommodation, elite female-only gym and exercise clubs, legal services.” Wright notes males have also benefitted from “some legal actions” that have caused “women’s groups being ordered to open their services to not only trans women, but also to men and boys – with the threat of de-funding or further lawsuits for failure to comply with the spirit of anti-discrimination.” This thoughtful essay suggests opportunities for male-appropriate remedies to the disadvantages boys and men currently experience when encountering gynocentric institutions.

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

We appreciate the article reviewers’ thoughtful contributions to this issue.



Dennis Gouws
Editor in Chief

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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 TWO)

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

PREAMBLE

Part one of this paper (published in [New Male Studies: An International Journal, Issue 10.1](#)) demonstrates the centrality of male heterogeneity and female choice to the human mating system. Part two 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.

OUR MATING SYSTEM'S GORILLA-LIKE ANCESTRY

Polygyny is known to have been central to human mating ancestrally. DNA analysis reveals only 40% of men were ever fathers (Wilder, Mobasher & Hammer, 2004), fitting with data of worldwide Y-chromosome diversity indicating only a few men may have contributed a large fraction of the Y-chromosome pool at every generation until only recently (Dupanloup et al., 2003). Some evidence points to this change being in the era of early modern humans, circa 150,000 years ago (Walker, Flinn & Ellsworth, 2011). Note this would occur simply from a large increase in local populations, given no reason to suppose the sharp reproductive skew towards an apex of only a very few males would change. The tendency to *winner takes all* suggests that the residue of monogamy and bachelordom has grown without a commensurate proliferation of polygyny.

Also indicating that polygyny is human-ancestral are the oft-cited long-known results from standard comparison of sex dimorphism in body size and other parameters across the family tree of hominid species. From these it has been proposed that the human mating system was never chimpanzee- but gorilla-like: long-term pair-bonds of one male with multiple females (Nakahashi & Horiuchi, 2012; Geary & Bailey, 2011). An evolutionary transition from this to the human mating system is discounted by Chapais (2008) in his assertion that separate *harems* would be unlikely to fuse to form the human sociality of multiple males and multiple females all together, and that instead this is more directly our ancestral state—like the hamadryas baboon

today. But this is to ignore a lot of research, notably in the 1990s, reporting large gorilla groupings of multiple one-male-+-multi-female sub-groups (see the book covering three decades of this research, by Robbins, Sicotte & Stewart, 2001). Gorillas evidently exhibit group fission-fusion of modules of a single male and his *harem*. This is analogous, likely homologous with human family grouping, and confirmed in gorilla-human comparative work (Morrison, 2019) demonstrating “common underlying multi-level social structure and the considerable similarities in inter-group territorial dynamics”; findings that “strongly emphasise the importance of gorillas as a model system for human social evolution”. Chapais therefore seems right that a multi-male-+-multi-female sociality is ancestral: it’s simply that he didn’t realise that this is what we have in the gorilla.

Reinforcing this is another window on the extinct ape common ancestor provided by the orangutan, in that this species is now shown to be gorilla-like *and* more human-like than is the chimpanzee. The orangutan in comparison to all other apes has evolved only very slowly (Locke et al., 2011), whereas human evolution comparatively in major respects has been effectively reversed by neoteny (Franchini & Pollard, 2017). Thus is explained the uncanny morphological and other human-orangutan similarity, whereas there is notable human-chimpanzee *dissimilarity* (Grehan & Schwartz, 2009). The molecular evidence has been held not to support this, but is not relevant in being in respect only of coding genes, when “most genomic changes that distinguish humans from their primate relatives are in non-coding sequences with regulatory functions” (Ligrone, 2019), especially in the so-called Human Accelerated Region (HAR), and not least those regulating neoteny. Tang et al. (2020) demonstrate that some human features indeed may be explained by neoteny, notably in the brain, with infant human brain growth being a mere third the rate of that of chimpanzees. It’s likely, then, that the orangutan’s mating system much more closely resembles those of species in the human phylogeny than does the chimpanzee’s, which appears to be a profound divergence. The upshot is that there is no utility and instead only hindrance and false trails in looking to the chimpanzee for our ancestral mating system. The orangutan, despite its semi-solitary living, is, like the gorilla, polygynous. It’s dubbed *short-term* polygynous, though this is rather inaccurate given that the sexually exclusive consortships of up to seven months reported by Utami et al. (2002) are a continuation of long-term affiliations formed in adolescence, which also revive between child-rearing (Grehan, 2006). Apparently, there *is* long-term pair-living/bonding in the orangutan, or there would be but for

periodic separation owing to necessary dispersal to ensure sufficient food resources. Any dissimilarity to the gorilla pattern is through the orangutan's relatively recent evolution to largely solitary living; the result of a major environmental change producing food scarcity, according to Harrison & Chivers (2007): "the orang-utan's present-day mating system most likely evolved from a gorilla-like base, with one dominant male guarding a harem of females".

THE HOMOLOGOUS HUMAN FEMALE CLIQUE

A gorilla-human seeming homology pertaining to mating system is the gorilla *harem* and the human female *clique*. The latter typically numbers four to six, or an average size of 5.11 members (Kwon & Lease, 2007); the former, a maximum of five individuals—the limit, across primate species, of the number of females per polygynous male (Pawłowski, Lowen & Dunbar, 1998). The workings and nature of the *clique* as the key form of girl, adolescent, and indeed adult human female sociality has been entirely neglected in the scientific literature in favour of consideration only of supposed unisexual sociality, despite it being abundantly clear that male sociality is entirely different, with male (but not female) sociality essentially group-based as opposed to dyadic (David-Barrett et al., 2015), and the female (but not the male) social dynamic being exclusion (Benenson et al., 2013). Presumably, this neglect is through fear of usual censure and career derailment of being considered in some way to negatively portray women. Insights instead come from parenting literature—most notably by Wiseman (2016), but also several other authors—finding its way into scholarship as teacher resources (Harley & MacNeil, 2017) and via *Psychology Today* (Powell-Lunder, 2013).

As Powell-Lunder stresses, girls in general belong to a *queen bee*-led small coterie; that is, a *clique*. Not just those who are the most popular (who are merely the most conspicuous and suitable as protagonists in famous films such as *Mean Girls*). Furthermore, Powell-Lunder elaborates, the *cliques* to which most girls belong are still fiercer environments than those of the *populars*, because of the fear that exclusion from this less exclusive social milieu may leave nowhere else to go. *Clique* members adopt the various well-documented (Wiseman, 2016) unranked roles, in an ethos of fierce avoidance of one-upmanship, with just one of them at any one time a potential replacement in being the *deputy* of the *queen bee*, who appears, therefore, not an *alpha* at the apex of a hierarchy but *first among equals*. The hallmark of *clique* sociality is of course the extremely well-known intense *policing* of membership, under the fierce control of

the *queen bee* (unless and until she is deposed by her *deputy*). Also, the firm exclusion of all others, the difficulty in gaining membership, and the constant prospect of losing it. The imperative appears to be an all-encompassing desire to achieve and maintain *clique* membership by serving the *queen bee* and taking great care not to be seen to challenge her (on pain of expulsion), yet inhabiting or creating a springboard position from which to be the usurper should there be an opportunity (with sufficiently good prospects of success).

From a comparative, evolutionary perspective, the human female *clique* looks like a proto- (though possibly only facultative, or even vestigial) *co-operative breeding* unit, with a (potential) sole breeding female controlling a group of fellow females she reproductively suppresses so they can be utilised (through channelling their reproductive motivation) as alloparents. It may be that in the *deputy* there is a reserve breeding female or a subsidiary as a result of only partial reproductive suppression. Perhaps the rest of the females, though reproductively suppressed more than is the *deputy*, nevertheless are not fully so, and may then breed to a limited degree or in some circumstances. If not obligate, this could be facultative *co-operative breeding* triggered by local severe ecological stress, as an adaptation to head off the possibility of local extinction, by restricting reproduction, possibly to the extent of a 100% skew to the one most fertile female in the sub-group. In her being paired with one of the males with the least deleterious genetic complement, and the use of locally very limited resources (including the parenting efforts of other reproductive-age females) being reserved exclusively for their use, then there would be a good chance that the one most reproductively fit couple of each sub-group could manage to produce a next generation. Such a *best shot* likely would outdo the alternative of too many pairs attempting to breed, as this would place them in mutual competition over temporarily impossibly limited resources. It may be that in extremis only one pre-eminent sub-group—therefore, just one couple—gets to reproduce from out of the entire group (collection of sub-groups). This would account for the character of the one *popular* clique of the most highly fertile females.

The stresses attending human females together in a breeding unit are evident in the experiences of co-wives in polygyny. According to Essien (2018), “co-wife conflict especially in the early years of marriage is pervasive, and often marked by outbursts of verbal or physical violence”. “Ongoing and contentious rivalry” and “a recurrent motif of strident co-wife hostility”

is how Jankowiak, Sudakov & Wilreker (2005) put it: “... we found women's sexual desire and reproductive interests paramount factors in promoting co-wife conflict (that is a) deep-seated resentment”. Oppong, Monebenimp & Nzefa (2019) discuss the “emotional suppression” felt by co-wives. The chronic stress experienced by co-wives is so severe that a principal theme of the findings by Tabi, Doster & Cheney (2010) is infertility, with it prompting co-wives to welcome additional wives so as to avoid divorce. The co-wives' predicament in their contradictory social dynamic is neatly summed up in the title of Madhavan's (2002) paper, *Best of friends and worst of enemies: competition and collaboration in polygyny*. Female clique dynamics in a nutshell.

THE MALE BODYGUARD TO FEND OFF FEMALE AGGRESSION

The human-clique-homologous gorilla pattern of small female sub-groups interpolated by males is now understood (Dunbar, 2020) originally to be an adaptation to reduce stress on females from females in other sub-groups, which could not be addressed by group fission given that large overall grouping itself is an adaptation—to avoid predation. Failing to deal with female intra-sexual stress would directly reduce female fertility to sub-replacement, leading to local extinction. Dunbar writes:

“One possible mechanism would be the impact that social stress has on the mammalian female menstrual system (and hence fecundity), the endocrinology of which is now well understood (Abbott 1984; Abbott et al. 1984; Gordon et al. 1992; McNeilly et al. 1994; McNeilly 2001a,b; von Borrel et al. 2007; Chatterjee & Chatterjee 2009; Son et al. 2012; Iwasa et al. 2017; see also Wasser & Barash 1983; Huchard & Cowlshaw 2011)”.

Human females are no different in stress causing reproductive suppression (Wasser & Isenberg, 1986). Interpolating males to reduce female-female aggression would be a *pre-adaptation* to subsequent pair-bonding. Likewise appears to be *concealed ovulation*, which also functions to reduce female-female aggression, according to Krems et al. (2021), who, in testing a *male investment* model of concealed ovulation against one of *female rivalry*, find clear support for the latter and none for the former. The evidence here is that females evolved *concealed ovulation* because cues to ovulation trigger aggression from other females trying to boost their own mating opportunities by reducing those of others.

It has long been known that low level agonistic interactions between female gorillas increase dramatically in frequency with the number of females, and *not* with group size (males

and females both) per se (Watts, 1985). A strong parallel is evident in the closely-related primates, baboons. Within-group female coalitions attack and thereby reproductively suppress their female victims, who experience more cycles before conception and longer inter-birth intervals (Wasser & Starling, 1988), with female group size causing increased female-female competition that correspondingly elevates stress levels (Hill, Lycett & Dunbar, 2000). “Conflicts between neighbouring *harems* are usually initiated by one, occasionally two, females; if the conflict escalates, more females will become involved, until eventually the *harem* males are drawn into the dispute and force the separation of the two groups of females (Dunbar 1983b, 2018)” (Dunbar, 2020). The parallel appears to be very general indeed, and recognised some time ago by Gowaty (1996): “In fact, female-female aggression may be the most parsimonious explanation for socially monogamous males in many species” (p. 28).

Both sexes experience crowding stress from same-sex others, but whereas for male mammals this is from spatial proximity, for females it’s caused simply by their total number (Brown & Grunberg, 1995). It’s social dynamics per se. Splitting the group of course would merely reintroduce the very predation threat that increasing group size evolved to counter. A separation of females is required that is more complete than is the merely spatial. Interceding males, one per each female sub-group, would be an adaptive solution if this socially buffered the female sub-groups from each other, at the same time facilitating sufficient cohesion to create overall one coordinated large group to dissuade or deal with predators. As noted by Dunbar (2012): “It seems that in the large groups adult males act as bridges, or weak links, that help maintain the cohesion between clusters of females”. This is strongly echoed in the afore-mentioned new work (Morrison, 2019) showing unexpected ape contiguity with human multi-level social structure and inter-group dynamics.

This interceding male Dunbar dubs the *bodyguard*, which is to borrow a term coined by Mesnick (1997) but which was on the understanding that deterrence was of *male* aggression. Dunbar himself formerly had considered the *bodyguard* to dissuade unwanted social-sexual advances from males, which had been proposed by Lumkin (1983), and as a possible basis of primate pair-bonding by Norscia & Borgognini-Tarli (2008). It was also the view of the present author in Moxon (2013), but there qualified to be specifically in respect of social-sexual advances from *low-mate-value* males, thereby actually facilitating the female pair-bond partner’s

accessibility to and by males of high mate value—that is, of a mate value substantially higher than that of the female’s pair-bond partner. In other, colloquial words: clearing away the *riff-raff* leaves the deck clear for *hob-nobbing*. Indeed, this may be the principal benefit of *bodyguarding*, on top of and in the wake of the original function to reduce female-female stress. Low-mate-value males are unlikely anyway to present a threat to the female in terms of unwanted conception, given rank-appropriate behavioural self-inhibition by males, backed up by community sanction as well as that by the pair-bond male. Being of greater *genomic integrity* (in this scenario), the pair-bond male is likely to be physically and in other ways superior (more confident, belligerent, part of an effective coalition, etc), so would be anticipated to win any fight. In this way, *bodyguarding* appears to be routinely facultative.

Its workings in this respect are tapped into by Hoplock, Stinson & Joordens (2019) in finding that “highly-attractive men engage in mate-poaching behavior (proximity seeking) when a romantically-involved woman is accompanied by a less-attractive boyfriend, but not when she is alone or accompanied by a boyfriend who matches her attractiveness”. Here, the redundancy and abandonment of *bodyguarding* in the scenario where it is not required by the female appears as if formalised, with high-mate-value males actually preferring the presence of the erstwhile *bodyguard* during extra-pair courting of women. Indeed, the tactic appears to be itself the very mode of courtship in attempts to poach pair-bonded females. High-mate-value males overtly usurp low-mate-value males with women partners they perceive may be in the market for extra-pair sex owing to substantial mate-value disparities. This is plainly what Moran, Kuhle, Wade & Seid (2017) discovered. And in this scenario, Fugère, Cousins & MacLaren (2015) find there is reciprocal behaviour from the female: more flirting, feeling less committed to the pair-bond and unconstrained by (what the authors term) *mate-guarding*.

BODYGUARDING HAS BEEN MISCONSTRUED AS MATE-GUARDING

Fugère, Cousins & MacLaren appear to misconstrue *bodyguarding* as instead *mate-guarding*, which is understandable in its being a far more familiar conceptualisation. A supposed defence of the female *not in the female’s but the male guarder’s own interests*: and of the female from *all* social-sexual approach (supposedly from high-mate-value as well as from low-mate-value male potential mate-poachers). It is a thus conceptualised defence that the aforementioned Lumkin (1983) suggested was usurped in the guarded female’s interests to

become defence specifically against *unwanted* male approaches: what is herein termed *bodyguarding*. *Mate-guarding* is a notion based on a chain of assumptions. The assumed male need to be assured of paternity, as a consequence of assumed male investment in offspring. Underlying all is the default assumption of male proprietorial control of the female, which appears to be inappropriate incursion of contemporary ideology—that only male interests ever are served. This notion has no scientific basis and is flatly contradicted by a diametrically opposite insight from biology: the fact that the female is the *limiting factor* in reproduction dictates that the female interest must be preferenced, as indeed it is.

The human mating system did not evolve from a need for male investment in offspring. Not only is evidence for paternal investment equivocal (for a very brief review, see Moxon, 2013, p27), but as is now well evidenced, modelled and very widely agreed, any paternal investment that may have evolved did so *in the wake of* the evolution of the human mating system, so cannot be the basis of it. This was the conclusion of an across-species (including human) key investigation by Brotherton & Komers (2003), and specifically regarding humans by Chapais (2008). Chapais (2011) concludes that human pair-bonding originated as “a pre-adaptation for the evolution of parental cooperation in the provisioning of progressively altricial (helpless) children”. Similarly outlining a primate phylogeny of pair-bonding, Geary & Bailey (2011) conclude that the emergence of a specifically human mating pattern merely coincided with increasing male provisioning. Opie et al. (2013) applied phylogenetic comparative methods widely to 230 different species, confirming an antecedent evolutionary pathway. Lukas & Clutton-Block (2013) also confirm this.

With the evidence overwhelming that male provisioning was not the basis of the human mating system, then the notion that its foundation is the need for the male to be assured of his paternity (in order to protect his investment) evaporates. There is no investment to protect. As it is the male’s investment that is taken to be the reason why males supposedly persist in trying to prevent the female partner from mating with other males, then such attempts would be pointless. The evidence indeed is that mate-guarding does not work—that is, what is presumed to be mate-guarding actually does not thus function. It fails so badly that by some measures extra-pair paternity is actually greater with mate-guarding, according to Kempnaers, Verheyen & Dhondt (1995), who conclude: “despite mate guarding, paternity seems to be largely under

female control and unattractive males guarding their mate are making the best of a bad situation”. Little if any relationship exists between the strength of mate-guarding and paternity in avian species (Johnson & Burley, 1998), despite their seeming strict monogamy. Kokko & Morrell (2005) ask “if females regularly escape mate-guarding attempts, we face an enigma: why does mate-guarding evolve if it is so inefficient?” The answer is because the male is not guarding his own interests but the female’s, as in bodyguarding. What has been taken to be mate-guarding of the male’s interests would appear in fact—as outlined above—to deter social-sexual advance only by males of lower mate-value (lesser genomic integrity)—that is, lower than that of her pair-bonded partner—who would not serve the female’s interests to accept, and surely she would not want. In marked contrast, higher mate-value (greater genomic integrity) suitors—that is, higher than that of her pair-bonded partner—would be in the female’s interests to accept, if the mate-value difference were significant enough to outweigh the risk to the endurance of the pair-bond. Again to reiterate: even if the male wished to try to prevent such mating, ultimately he would not be able to do so, as the adverse difference in ranking would be reflected in the suitor’s greater fighting ability or coalitional strength. Not that an agonistic encounter likely would occur: it would be obviated by the psychological and physiological mechanisms that have evolved in the service of hierarchy.

INFANTICIDE PREVENTION IS A *RED HERRING*

Not considered *bodyguarding*, though which might be thought a putative special form of it, is infanticide prevention: supposed male defence of a female to keep at bay other males who might kill unweaned offspring so as to prompt the female to end lactation and thereby resume cycling and fecundability. As a possible basis of the evolution of pair-living / -bonding it’s in major doubt even in principle. Supposedly to cut her losses in anticipation of infanticide in a *male takeover* scenario, a female may spontaneously abort a foetus (what is dubbed the *Bruce effect*), but again there is here a failure to take account of male heterogeneity. With the new male necessarily of a higher *genomic integrity* sufficient to have been able to effect takeover, the female gains in fertility, which quickly manifests in improved reproductive output in quality-x-quantity terms, given an immediate return to cycling, and then not just a replacement offspring in short order, but subsequent offspring of the same high *genomic integrity*. The imperative to maximise purging manifests again. Not only has the female not sustained any net cost, but has

benefited. It is anyway frequently acknowledged how extraordinarily difficult it is to find evidence of the occurrence of infanticide, let alone of its prevention, in any species.

Infanticide prevention as the foundation of monogamy in humans and primates generally is championed most recently by Opie et al. (2019), but their phylogenetic analysis considers only a highly restricted set of other alternative key factors as hypotheses (just parental care and a distribution of females too thin for males practically to have harems, with neither of these incorporating male heterogeneity & female choice), so the analysis is set up as a forced choice where only infanticide prevention is likely to be supported. Fernandez-Duque, Huck, Van Belle & Di Fiore (2020) in reviewing competing hypotheses take particular issue with the infanticide prevention hypothesis, citing a phylogenetic analysis (Lukas & Clutton-Brock, 2013) completely at odds with Opie's earlier outline (Opie, Atkinson, Dunbar & Shultz, 2013)—which last has been the subject of rebuttals and counters to counter-rebuttals—going into considerable detail about poor methodology. Fernandez-Duque et al. explain that support for the infanticide prevention hypothesis (though here not alone among evolutionary explanations in sharing the same fault) is a case of the fallacy known as *affirming the consequent*. Making a poor case for its significance are unsatisfactory proxies of infanticide risk, that supposedly is addressable by the adaptation of pair-living/ -bonding. But the existence of the adaptation is itself the basis of inferring infanticide prevention is the problem the adaptation evolved to solve.

If infanticide were a significant problem for such as the gorilla, Dunbar (2020) points out, then fertility decline of females would be in line with increasing numbers of males, not exclusively through the increase in the number of females (as is found). Instead, infanticide in the wake of takeovers always remains a risk. If a *harem's* male is deposed, there is no other male to defend against the usurping male if he chooses to be infanticidal. In the case of the *harem* male still being in place, there is no logical rationale for infanticide in the first place. There would be no benefit for another male to attempt to bring back into cycling a lactating *harem* female belonging to a *harem* still with its male, because the long delay between ending lactation and resuming cycling means the opportunity to capitalise on the initiative would be in the future, when the *harem* male would have to be challenged anew for the sexual access. Unless the male challenger has the wherewithal to take over the *harem*, then he's unlikely to achieve sexual access, and the female won't be co-operative in any case. This is to return to the situation in

bodyguarding, where males of lower mate value than the pair-bonded (or *harem*) male are easily dissuaded from making socio-sexual advances, and indeed, would internalise this as self-inhibition. A male of substantially higher mate value than the pair-bond (or *harem*) male is a different proposition. His takeover would be part-and-parcel of the species' reproductive system, serving to increase reproductive output and efficiency, and the only individual who loses out is the deposed lower-mate-value male. A female *harem* member may suffer the immediate loss of a new-born through infanticide, but this is not a loss in even slightly wider perspective—just as in the spontaneous abortion scenario (above)—as it's a clear gain in the greater *genomic integrity* provided by the new *harem* male, which will be embodied in an immediate replacement offspring if one were to be lost to infanticide, and, more importantly, several subsequent offspring. Even if the harem male is replaced simply through his aging, this too is of significant benefit to the *harem* females in that the likelihood of gene replication error in the male's gametes will have increased dramatically. It's hard to see how the female would benefit in being protected from the threat of infanticide even if it were real.

Whether as social-sexual advance or attempting infanticide, the concern that lower-mate-value males may *gain the system*, as it were, is misplaced, as these are the very males not in a position to do so. By contrast, higher-mate-value males, who are of actual benefit to females, are not *gaining the system*, being very much a part of how the mating system works, which is to the benefit of females generally and only for a minority of males. The issue of infanticide-prevention and the scope for a male service to the female in this regard is a theoretical problem only—if that, in that the theory appears awry.

Another apparent misconception regarding infanticide prevention is that *concealed ovulation* serves this function. As already outlined, modelling now shows instead that it reduces female-female aggression (Krems et al., 2021). It has long been claimed that the most parsimonious conclusion about *concealed ovulation* is that it is not an adaptation at all: simply loss of function through the absence of selection pressure (Burt, 1992; Pawlowski, 1999). It is an untested presumption that *concealed ovulation* causes paternity uncertainty, sufficient that as a consequence a potentially infanticidal male sees a significant risk of unintentionally killing his own offspring.

Furthermore, strangely there has not been considered that *concealed ovulation* is of most utility to females in reducing the benefits and increasing the costs to lower-mate-value males in their social-sexual approaches in attempt to usurp pair-bonding. Together with what anyway are the difficulties for low-mate-value males in approaching a *bodyguarded* non-receptive female, the strategy of sneak mating attempts would not be worth the risks if it were made impossible to time them to when the female is fertile. In thus augmenting *bodyguarding* in keeping lower-mate-value males at bay, then again, as with the *bodyguard*, thereby is allowed mutual social-sexual approach of *higher*-mate-value males and pair-bond females. For a higher-mate-value extra-pair male, concealment of ovulation is not an issue. On the contrary, ovulation prompts female proceptive and receptive behaviour towards him, notwithstanding its not being *specifically* so: nevertheless it would be in this context—of extra-pair sex with a substantially higher-mate-value male being in the offing. There's another advantage. With the female allowing, indeed encouraging him to be close, he is in a position to detect subtle indications of impending ovulation (eg, Lobmaier et al., 2018) and sexual arousal (Wiseman & Shriram, 2020), that a *lower*-mate-value male, who, in not being allowed close and instead positively distanced, could not. He will never be in a position to increase the probability of conception to sufficiently offset the likely costs, to render a bid for a sneak mating worth the risk. Further disadvantaging lower-mate-value suitors may explain why human coitus itself is concealed. With the timing of sex a good indicator of likely heightened female sexual receptivity prompted by ovulation, its discovery by a lower-mate-value male would encourage his social-sexual approach in the immediate future so as still to be within the female's fertile window. *Not* concealing coitus would be provocative and potentially very destabilising, in line with the interpretation of new data by Yitzchak (2020) that hidden coitus serves to maintain cooperation with those within the group who are prevented from mating.

Placing infanticide prevention at the heart of the aetiology of the human mating system appears to be unwarranted inference, evoked as a default hypothesis through a false understanding that essentially humans are monogamous and that (as aforesaid) this has a seeming fivefold opportunity cost compared to polygyny, as might thus be considered *obligate* monogamy. In the human case, at least, with monogamy not being obligate, and simply a reduced form of polygyny for those males not able to secure multiple females, there is no opportunity cost to sustain. The misconception at root is through the failure to appreciate the

centrality of male heterogeneity and female choice. Infanticide prevention is proffered for want of an alternative in the paucity of hypothesis generation that stems from mis-framing what is here at issue.

CONCLUSION

With pair-bonding to ensure repeat offspring of the greatest-possible *genomic integrity* (least mutationally compromised), featuring *bodyguarding* to dissuade low-mate-value male social-sexual approach, thereby actually facilitating approach by/to high-mate-value males for extra-pair sex; all while buffering against female age-related fertility decline, and built on a pre-adaptation of interposed males to reduce female-female stress ... the overall picture of the basis of the human mating system is one of *service by the male to the female*. Yet neither provisioning (the erstwhile assumed mode of such service) nor infanticide-prevention (the still current oft-assumed mode) is its basis. Instead, it's the set of ramifications from keen female choice and profound heterogeneity of males, in turn from the imperative to purge relentlessly accumulating gene replication error.

Service by the male is investigated in a new review of the evolution of monogamy in a primate model by Dolotovskaya, Walker & Heymann (2020) by pitching against each other three categories of hypotheses: *male-services*, *resource-defence* and *mate-defence*—this last being *mate-guarding*. The authors conclude that “Our data is most consistent with the ‘male-services’ hypothesis for pair-bond maintenance, where a female contributes more to the proximity and affiliation maintenance while a male provides beneficial services”. Note the authors are cautious in making their claims in respect of maintenance rather than origin per se, because they include care of infants, which they concede evolved *in the wake* of the evolution of pair-bonding. The principal *male services* they ascribe to protection from predation and territorial defence, though these are not from pair-bonding but are the platform on which it was possible. What remains may be simply the way male heterogeneity and female choice play out.

Male services, with the female the party keeping the pair together, chimes with the data on mate-retention tactics showing that most are women's or mostly used by women (for a brief outline and citations, see Moxon 2020, p10), and the research concerning the various other ways women in comparison to men reveal a far greater concern for and interest in their pair-bond (for an account, see Moxon 2016, pp.73-75). Of romantic attachment itself, males but not females are

dismissive—in a near universal sex difference (Schmitt, 2003). All lines of evidence converge on a conclusion that human pair-living/-bonding is not at all the presumed proprietorial control by men of women. Indeed, it appears more the converse. Objectively, the human mating system is just that; a system, in which all individuals are engaged to play a part in what is a group-level phenomenon, with the goal of maximising overall reproductive output/efficiency. This is rather too obvious understanding to have been lacking—though still there are those hidebound by the outdated *group selection* debate, unaware of the now multiple complementary theoretical perspectives on how/why mutualism works. Appreciating the purging imperative driving the profound skew amplifying male heterogeneity, and even accepting that profound male heterogeneity exists, may be a different matter. Yet (the pre-adaptation of reducing female-female stress aside) a highly parsimonious hypothesis unfolds from the one premise of purging.

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AUTHOR PROFILE



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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL COMPARISONS ON BODY IMAGE IN MEN: A SCOPING REVIEW

Katherine M. Pagano, Ryan D. Burns, Nick A. Galli



ABSTRACT

Research indicates that men use social comparisons as a mechanism to evaluate their body image (e.g., Schaefer, 2018). The present study investigated literature utilizing Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) as a framework for explaining male body image outcomes. To achieve the study's purpose, the authors conducted a scoping systematic review of peer-reviewed literature on body image in men, yielding 27 relevant articles. Tabular analysis and line coding of each article uncovered four emergent themes: 1) sociocultural ideals of body image set by peers, friends, and media initiated social comparisons; 2) social comparisons led to men's internalization of body ideals, resulting in both positive and negative physical and psychological outcomes; 3) comparison implications depended on target (e.g., friend, peer), and direction of comparison (e.g., upward or downward); and 4) comparison activity was influenced by protective and contributing factors which included age, ethnicity, race, and social involvement. Although it is clear that men experience body image and conduct social comparisons differently than women, sources of body-related influence remain consistent across genders. Findings from this review support the continued application of theoretical frameworks in body image inquiry as they enhance the rigor of research findings.

Keywords: appearance comparisons, male body image dissatisfaction, scoping review

28 INTRODUCTION

29 Researchers and clinicians have recently given more attention to body image as it relates to
30 the health and well-being of men (e.g. Gorman, Sheffield, Clark & Griffiths, 2019; McNeill &
31 Firman, 2019). At one time, body image was only thought to be a female concern associated with
32 clinical pathologies such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa; however, studies show that men
33 experience body concerns differently than women, making research more challenging with men
34 (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2002). For example, women tend to be preoccupied with thinness as it
35 correlates to body weight, with less body weight indicating higher levels of body satisfaction
36 (Muren & Karazsia, 2017). Men, on the other hand, seesaw between having too much body
37 weight in the form of body fat, or too little body weight in the form of muscularity (Griffiths,
38 Mond, Murray, & Touyz, 2015; Smolak & Murnen, 2008). Negative attitudes, perceptions, and
39 thoughts associated with body fat and muscularity (i.e. body dissatisfaction) are correlated with
40 harmful physical and psychological outcomes such as depression, performance-enhancing drug
41 use, compulsive exercise, and eating disorders (Blashill & Wilhelm, 2014; Darcy et al., 2005; De
42 Jesus et al., 2015; Grogan, 2016; Eisenberg, Wall & Neumark-Sztainer, 2012; Mellor et al., 2014;
43 Payton, 2014). Research suggests that behaviors directed at modifying the body signify the
44 importance men place on appearance, specifically in accordance to Western norms for
45 masculinity (Gattario, Frisén, Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, Ricciardelli, Diedrichs, Yager, & Smolak, 2015;
46 Murray & Lewis, 2012).

47 Traditional masculine norms are exhibited through courage, confidence, and assertiveness,
48 which quantify what it means to be a "man" (Darcy et al., 2012; Muren & Don, 2012). A man's
49 aptitude in demonstrating masculinity also means displaying certain physical characteristics,
50 including a tall stature, low body fat, and lean muscularity (McCreary, 2002; Olivardia, Pope,
51 Borowiecki & Cohane, 2004). According to McCabe & McGreevy (2010), men historically equated
52 good body image with physical functionality and utility (e.g. displaying strength and endurance
53 in physical tasks); however, norms for body image among heterosexual men have shifted in the
54 last three decades (Law & Labre, 2002). For example, a preoccupation with physical appearance
55 has superseded body utility and functionality, shifting body modification habits towards a focus
56 on muscle-building activities and the use of supplementation to build muscle (Leit, Pope, &
57 Gray, 2001; McCreary & Sasse, 2000). Morrison and colleagues (2004) report the amount and
58 definition of muscularity as the primary concern men have with body image.

59 The Masculinity Hypothesis (Blishill, 2011) purports that a muscular body is important for
60 showing others that a man has attained norms associated with masculinity (Christensen &
61 Jensen, 2007; Lefkowich, Oliffe, Hurd Clarke, & Hannan-Leith, 2017). For example, actors such as
62 Hugh Jackman in *Wolverine*, and Brad Pitt in *Fight Club* epitomize the physical characteristics
63 associated with normative masculine values such as muscularity that accompanies hyper-
64 leanness, which is imperative for showing muscle definition (Tylka, 2011).

65 Some scholars have argued otherwise, suggesting that a plurality exists in acceptable body
66 types for men (e.g., Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). With a sense of evolving masculinity,
67 models, and professional athletes are both considered to have ideal physiques, yet each differ in
68 muscularity, height, and body fat proportion (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Leit, Gray & Pope,
69 2002; Parent & Bradstreet, 2017). Despite the plurality of body types portrayed by sociocultural
70 influences such as the media, most men are not able to obtain ideals for body image without the
71 use of performance-enhancing drugs, or extreme dieting (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009; Kouri,
72 Pope, Katz & Olivardia, 1995; Matthews, Lynch & Martins, 2016; Mulgrew & Cragg, 2016).

73 Scholars in psychology (e.g. Tylka 2011), sociology (e.g. Gough, 2007), and gender studies
74 (e.g. Drummond, 2011; Frederick, Shapiro, Williams, Seoane, McIntosh, & Fischer, 2017) have
75 expressed interest in body image pathologies as they relate to sociocultural influences.
76 Sociocultural Theory suggests that external influences from the media, peers, family, friends, and
77 partners play an impactful role in setting body standards for men (Thompson et al., 1999).
78 Hyper-masculine representations of the male body are prevalent in popular media such as
79 television, pornography, and video games (Strubel & Petrie, 2017; Schwartz & Grimm,
80 2016; Mulgrew & Cragg, 2017). Robl & Mulgrew (2016) illustrated the impact of idealized media
81 exposure when they reported that men expressed significantly poorer body, fitness and
82 muscularity satisfaction after viewing hyper-masculine video images verses men that only viewed
83 average looking bodies. Morrison and colleagues (2004) discussed the psychological implications
84 of exposure to hyper-masculine bodies, including how men perceive that they should be actively
85 pursuing bodies portrayed by the media. Sociocultural influences have thus received increasing
86 attention from scholars investigating causation of body image pathologies (e.g., Karaszia &
87 Crowther, 2009; Levine & Muren, 2009; Tylka, 2011)

88 Sociocultural and psychosocial processes that influence men's body attitudes and
89 behaviors are central to Tylka's (2011) modified Tripartite Influence Model. Tylka (2011)
90 illustrates that sociocultural influences push men to reconsider norms for body image, creating
91 pressure to adopt socially constructed body ideals. External pressures further exacerbate
92 psychosocial processes, such as body comparisons and internalization of body ideals, which play
93 a key role in the development of attitudes and beliefs about body image (Franzoi & Klaiber, 2007;
94 McNeill & Firman, 2013). Currently, a large body of literature supports psychosocial processes as
95 a mechanism through which men create attitudes and beliefs about their body (Franzoi,
96 Vasquez, Sparapani, Frost, Martin & Aebly, 2012; Girard, Chabrol & Rodgers (2017). For example,
97 Martin & Govender (2015) discussed the importance of investigating how men integrate
98 perceptions of others' bodies and behaviors when assigning meaning to their own appearance.
99 Scholars have supported this call by applying Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory. Many
100 scholars have shown Social Comparison Theory to be a fruitful theoretical framework for
101 explaining attitudes and behaviors relating to male body perceptions, evaluations, and
102 experiences (e.g., Fox & Vendemia, 2016; Keum, 2016; Lamarche, Gammage, & Ozimok 2018;
103 Schaefer, 2018; Schwartz & Grimm, 2016; Strubel & Petrie, 2016).

104 Social Comparison Theory suggests that humans have an innate drive to self-evaluate via
105 acquiring knowledge about the attributes of others when making self-assessments (Festinger,
106 1954). By conducting comparisons, men determine similarities and differences they hold relative
107 to others (Kruglanski & Mayseless, 1990). When finding the physical qualities of others to be
108 superior (i.e., upward comparisons), men often experience negative affect as achieving these
109 standards can be challenging (e.g., Pila et al. 2014); however, when attributes of others are
110 perceived as inferior (i.e., downward comparisons), men often experience a boost in self-esteem,
111 interpreting their current situation as better-off (Wood, 1989). Most researchers utilizing Social
112 Comparison Theory investigate the impact of upward comparisons (e.g., Franzoi & Klaiber 2007;
113 Keum, 2016), and the way men internalize the attainability of others' attributes perceived as
114 superior (Tsiantas & King, 2001). Research has demonstrated the harmful effects of upward
115 appearance comparisons (e.g., Franzoi & Klaiber, 2007; Sohn, 2010). For example, Cash & Smolak
116 (2011) found that upward comparisons appear to be highly associated with negative affect
117 showing the utility of social comparison as a fruitful framework for further examination within
118 male body image research.

119 Social Comparison Theory has proven to be a worthwhile theoretical framework for
120 investigating male body image as it has direct implications on the health and well-being of men
121 (e.g. Dougherty & Krawczyk, 2018; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009). A body of research exists
122 showing that comparisons remain pervasive, and perhaps one of the most influential
123 psychosocial processes involved in body image evaluations (Schaefer, 2018). Comparisons
124 provide motivation for body enhancement through exercise and healthy diet changes (e.g., Pila
125 et al, 2016), but become detrimental when behaviors such as extreme exercise, and anabolic
126 androgenic steroid use occur (e.g., Breslow & Eklund, 2017). Currently, a body of research exists
127 supporting social comparisons as a common psychosocial process through which men create
128 attitudes and beliefs about body image. However, prior to this study, no other research had
129 systematically examined the relevant body image literature. A scoping review of pertinent
130 literature will assist future scholars to understand the breadth and depth of research. The
131 present work is a compilation, and synthesis of literature related to the implications of social
132 comparisons on male body image.

133 **METHODS**

134 In order to uphold transparency and rigor, the authors utilized a framework recommended
135 by Arksey & O'Malley (2005) for conducting and reporting scoping review results, which
136 included: 1) identifying research question(s); 2) identifying relevant studies; 3) selecting of
137 studies; 4) charting data; and 5) collecting, summarizing and reporting results. Suggestions from
138 Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou (2013) were used to support and supplement charting of the data
139 and themes. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA)
140 flow diagram illustrated the researchers' identification and screening process (Moher, Liberati,
141 Tetzlaff & Altman, 2009).

142 ***Identifying the Research Questions***

143 The authors used facets of Social Comparison Theory to frame the research questions.
144 Constructs of the theory deemed relevant to male body image included: 1) self-evaluations made
145 by men who compared their body to others; 2) self-improvement and enhancement strategies
146 used by men who socially compare themselves with others; and 3) directional (e.g., upward or
147 downward), and target comparisons (e.g., peers, friends, media images). The research questions
148 developed from this effort included:

- 149 • What influences men to make appearance comparisons, and how do comparisons
150 relate to body image dissatisfaction?
- 151 • What themes arise from line coding the literature relevant to male body image and
152 appearance comparisons?

153 ***Study Identification***

154 The PRISMA diagram provided structure for the article identification process (Moher,
155 Liberati, Tetzlaff & Altman, 2009). Literature relevant to male body image and social comparison
156 was searched via library databases including PsychINFO (EBSCOhost), MEDLINE (Ovid),
157 PsycARTICLES, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and Scopus. Literature not
158 available through database searching was identified through Google Scholar. Key terms were
159 selected based on a preliminary review of the literature, followed by a subject and term search
160 conducted via Gale Onefile Psychology using combinations of the three terms "body image"
161 AND "social comparison" OR "appearance comparison" AND "male OR men OR mascul*." Other
162 terms related to social comparison such as "self-enhancement," "self-improvement," and "self-
163 evaluation" were used, but produced no literature containing social comparison elements. Other
164 terms related to male physique were used, such as "body dissatisfaction," "drive for muscularity,"
165 and "muscle dysmorphia," but produced no new, or significant results. Citations, along with full
166 abstracts were imported and saved in EndNote X9 for citation management purposes.

167 ***Study Selection***

168 All searches were merged into EndNote X9. Removal of duplicates took place in three stages:
169 initially with EBSCOhost's de-duplication removal application, followed by EndNote's de-duplication
170 process, and finally by hand searching literature for missed duplicates. Records were screened by the
171 first author for keywords in the title and abstract as many articles neglected to mention body image
172 and social comparison in the title. If titles and abstracts neglected to provide keywords or suitable
173 synonyms about "male," "body image," "social comparison," or "appearance comparison," studies were
174 excluded. If title and abstract criteria were met for inclusion, full-text articles were included for the
175 eligibility process (N = 113). Criteria for inclusion in the eligibility process were limited to: 1) English
176 language and human subjects; 2) peer-reviewed articles published between 2005 and 2018; 3) the
177 presence of men, male, or mixed-gender; 4) study participants above the age of 18; and 5) the use of at
178 least one measure of social comparison in the methods.

179 ***Charting the Data***

180 When conducting a scoping review, Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou (2013) suggest
181 approaching, organizing, and critiquing studies through the use of tabular analysis to
182 descriptively map data and critical themes. Microsoft Excel was used to organize article
183 information into a tabular analysis, which resulted in a key theme chart.

184 ***Collecting, Summarizing, and Reporting Results***

185 Characteristics of each study were organized into a Microsoft Excel file that included: 1)
186 location and year of the study; 2) study design and characteristics, and; 3) sample and participant
187 characteristics. Thematic grouping was used for analysis by systematizing key outcomes from
188 heterogeneous literature (Gough, Oliver & Thomas 2017). The authors constructed a thematic
189 analysis in two stages to organize studies into similar groups. First, the purpose, aims, and key
190 outcomes of each study were extracted into a Microsoft Excel file, followed by line coding of the
191 key outcomes and study conclusions into a second file. Key themes were categorized into groups
192 as they related to the influence of comparisons on body image. See Table. 1 for thematic analysis.

**Table 1.** Tabular Analysis of Included Studies

	Authors	Sample Size	Aim/Purpose	Key Findings & Outcomes
1	Bucchianeri, Serrano, Pastula, & Corning (2014)	(N = 226) University sample (Mage = 25.77)	Examined if body dissatisfaction positively correlated with drive for muscularity in relevance to young, middle-age, and older men.	Young men displayed greater dissatisfaction with their bodies, exhibited greater social comparison tendency, and higher drive for muscularity.
2	Cahill & Mussap, (2007)	Female N = 133, (Mage = 22.42); Male N = 93, (Mage = 22.34)	Examined extent of changes in men and women's emotional state post-exposure to idealized images that predicted unhealthy body changes.	Frequency of comparisons identified as a mediator between state anxiety and decreased state body satisfaction.
3	Davison & McCabe (2005)	Female N = 226; Male = 211, (Mage = 42.26)	Examined systematically the role of body image in men and women.	Men high on self-esteem rated high on body attractiveness, low on body importance, and low on frequency of comparisons. Older men reported less concern with body evaluation and comparisons.
4	Dougherty & Krawczyk (2018)	Female N = 337; Male (N = 137) (Mage = 20.69)	Examined trait appearance comparisons as potential moderators between TV and internet exposure, appearance evaluation, and body satisfaction.	Frequency of appearance comparisons were made in conjunction with high media usage. Appearance comparisons moderated relationships between internet use and body dissatisfaction in men.
5	Fox & Vendemia (2016)	Female N= 908; Male N = 778, (Mage = 29.31)	Examined men's and women's photo posting, editing, and engagement on social media. Measured upward and downward social comparisons with peer photos.	Women socially compared more often than men, and put more effort into adhering to societal norms of beauty.
6	Franzoi & Klaiber (2007)	Female N = 104; Male N= 76, (Mage = 22)	Examined reference group choices of men and women as comparison targets when making self-evaluations.	Comparison to elite athletes and models were not significantly related to negative attitudes about muscularity or strength. Men viewed body as a process rather than object.
7	Franzoi, Vasquez, Sparapani, Frost, Martin & Aebly (2012)	Female N = 90; Male N = 88, (Mage = 18.85)	Evaluated men and women's comparison tendency and body beliefs when evaluating face, body shape, physical abilities, body esteem and personal perfection body beliefs.	Men relied on future temporal comparisons when evaluating body shape. Comparisons were self-hopeful, evoking self-enhancement and improvement.
8	Girard, Chabrol & Rodgers (2017)	Male N = 147, (Mage = 22.09)	Extend literature via modified tripartite dual pathway model to assess male body image and eating concerns in French men.	Sociocultural influences led to appearance comparisons and internalization of the lean and muscular ideal, body fat dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and muscularity dissatisfaction.



	Authors	Sample Size	Aim/Purpose	Key Findings & Outcomes
9	Hanna, Ward, Seabrook, Jerald, Reed, Giaccardi & Lippman (2017)	Female N = 690; Male N = 414, (Mage N = 19.27)	Evaluated social media use and role of social comparison as possible mediator in link between self-esteem, mental health, and body shame.	Social media usage associated with greater social comparison frequency, body objectification, lower self-esteem, and body shaming.
10	Hargreaves & Tiggemann (2009)	Male N = 104, (Mage = 21.4)	Examined the role of social comparison processes in men's response to images of muscular ideal, and male beauty standards.	Men who viewed muscular ideal commercials rated themselves as "less strong" than men who viewed nonappearance commercials. Greater exposure to muscular ideal led to increased upward comparison tendency.
11	Karazsia & Crowther (2009)	Male N = 204, (Mage = 19.37)	Examined association of internalization and social comparison as mediating effects on relationship between social influences and muscle dissatisfaction. Identified common targets of body comparisons.	Internalization and social comparison linked to muscularity dissatisfaction. Comparison frequency more prevalent with targets similar to self.
12	Karazsia & Crowther (2010)	Male N = 210, (Mage = 19.34)	Investigated male engagement in risky body change behaviors. Predicted internalization and social comparison would mediate sociocultural influences and muscularity-oriented dissatisfaction. Body comparisons predicted as mediators of social influence and internalization.	Model did not support social comparison as a mediator between social influences and muscularity related body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction fully explained through internalization.
13	Keum (2016)	Male N = 165, (Mage = 28.13)	Investigated relationship between Asian American internalization of Western media, and acculturative stress. Tested social comparison and media exposure affect.	Internalization of media associated with higher levels of social comparison. Higher acculturative stress linked to increase in social comparison. Men resort to social comparisons as part of acculturation process.
15	Matthews, Lynch & Martins (2016)	Male N = 197	Examined how comparisons to hyper-idealized video game bodies affected women and men's body image dissatisfaction.	Exposure to hyper-idealized bodies caused men with low comparison frequency to report similar negative affect about upper body strength as men with higher comparison tendency.
16	McNeill & Firman (2014)	Male N = 18	Examined age in relation to appearance evaluations, and motives for appearance changes. Participants asked to compare themselves to media and other men.	Young men focused on the lean and muscular ideal, while older focused on health and lifestyle concerns. Overly muscular ideals had no effect on younger males as they were not seen as functional or attainable. Older men reported children and partner as motivation to make lifestyle changes.



	Authors	Sample Size	Aim/Purpose	Key Findings & Outcomes
17	Melki, Hitti, Oghia & Mufarrij (2015)	Male N = 523	Examined association between anabolic androgenic steroid (AAS) use, and media exposure to idealized images.	Men perceived hyper-muscular images as motivators for achieving muscularity goals, and were susceptible to frequent AAS use.
18	Mulgrew & Cragg (2017)	Male N= 116 (Mage = 40.92)	Extended the literature on effects of media on body satisfaction. Music television effect on mood and body satisfaction in diverse age groups were evaluated.	Younger men viewing muscular images made more social comparisons in muscular and average looking condition, and experienced more negative effects than middle-aged or older men.
19	Pila, Barlow, Wrosch, & Sabiston (2016)	Female N = 47; Male N = 40, (Mage = 20.92)	Researchers tested link between upward comparisons, exercise behavior, and association between appearance evaluation and gender.	Men displayed negative appearance evaluations, and more exercise engagement when making comparisons. Upward comparisons resulted in self-enhancement strategies.
20	Pila, Stamiris, Castonguay & Sabiston (2014)	Female N = 5; Male N = 6, (Mage = 20.27)	Examined the experience of upward social comparisons on body related envy. Interviews conducted to understand body envy within a social comparison framework.	Body comparisons were motivating, but also induce body envy with others. Men reported upward comparison's as motivation for exercise engagement.
21	Robl & Mulgrew (2016)	Male N= 103, (Mage = 37.62)	Examined effects of viewing music video clips on male body satisfaction, mood, and social comparison activity.	Men viewing images of idealized bodies reported poor body satisfaction, fitness, and upper body strength. Comparison frequency was higher in muscular and thin condition opposed to average appearance condition.
22	Schneider, Agthe, Yanagida, Voracek, & Hennig-Fast (2017)	Male N = 100, (Mage 24.2)	Explored differences in men with and without muscle dysmorphia in desire for social interaction. Investigated effects of upward and downward comparisons, body schema, and desire for social interaction.	Downward comparisons related to diminished desire for social interaction. Social withdrawal correlated with downward comparisons.
23	Schwartz & Grimm (2016)	Male N = 269	Authors conducted a content analysis of photographs on Queerty.com.	User comments indicated upward comparisons. Explicit comparisons to images were not made.
24	Sohn (2010)	Female N= 419; Male N = 246, (Mage = 19.97)	Examined gender differences in comparison processes and outcome effects on male and female body image processes.	Lateral comparisons produced significant difference in actual-ideal body discrepancy. Men experienced body dissatisfaction after making comparisons.



	Authors	Sample Size	Aim/Purpose	Key Findings & Outcomes
25	Strubel & Petrie (2017)	Female non-users N = 844; Male non-users N = 203; Female users N = 69; Male users N = 3, Age range 18-34	Examined effects of Tinder use and gender interaction in relation to men's and women's body image, internalization process, and self-esteem.	Tinder users displayed high levels of internalization, appearance comparison, and body shame. Dating sites associated with negative body perceptions, likelihood to internalize appearance ideals, and make comparisons.
26	Tylka & Andorka (2012)	Male N = 346, (Mage = 24.7)	Expansion of the Tripartite Influence Model to capture gay men's experience with body image. Internalization and comparisons were hypothesized to mediate mesomorphic ideals, pressure to be muscular, and effects of gay community involvement.	Internalization and comparisons were mediators in the model. Partners and gay community involvement influenced conformation to muscular ideal, and pressured partners to lose body fat.
27	Warren & Rios (2013)	Male N = 100, (Mage 24.2)	Authors examined relationships between Western appearance ideals, perceived pressure, athletic-ideal internalization, social comparison, body image, acculturation, and acculturative stress in Hispanic men.	Acculturative stress correlated with media consumption, comparisons, and poor body image. Acculturative stress correlated with comparison tendencies to both models and Western ideal.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The initial search resulted in 430 studies, followed by 31 studies identified in Google Scholar. After titles and abstracts were screened, 115 full-text articles were assessed for the eligibility process by one author, and 34 articles were retained. The second author reviewed these articles, and both individuals concluded that an additional seven articles should be excluded, leaving 27 studies for final inclusion (Figure 1).

Year and Location of Included Studies

The studies included in this review were published between 2005 and 2018. Prior to 2005 social comparisons were infrequently applied to explain male body image outcomes. In total, $N = 27$ studies met criteria for the qualitative synthesis. The majority of studies ($n = 18$) were published in North America, while five studies were published in Australia, two in Europe, and the remaining two in New Zealand and Lebanon.

Study Characteristics and Design

Most articles ($n = 23$) were identified as quantitative, seventeen were cross-sectional and non-experimental, while four were experimental. Experimental studies used pre and post-test, visual analog scales (VAS), control and experimental (2×2), and ($2 \times 2 \times 2$) priming condition group designs while four articles were identified as qualitative, with study designs including structured and semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a content analysis.

Sample and Participant Characteristics

Eleven of the 27 studies included male and female participants, while the remaining 16 studies only sampled men. Within each article, we separated male and female results when both genders were included. Male participants totaled 5,143 for all articles, and participants per study ranged from three to 778. The majority of studies sampled men attending university ($n = 19$), while the remaining looked at populations of men including athletes, the general community, and gay men.

Thematic Analysis

Results from the thematic analysis formed four unique groups: 1) sociocultural influences such as peers, friends, family members, and media that evoked comparison activity; 2) comparisons influencing men's internalization of mainstream body ideals resulted in positive

and negative physical and psychological effects; 3) outcomes of comparisons depended on the target and direction of comparison; and 4) protective and contributing factors for making comparisons depended on demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, and race. See Table. 3 for the organization of articles by theme.

Table 2. Article Organization by Theme

Reference Number	Study	Theme #1 <i>Sociocultural Influence</i>	Theme #2 <i>Internalization of Body Ideals</i>	Theme #3 <i>Target and Direction of Comparison</i>	Theme #4 <i>Protective and Contributing Factors</i>
1	Bucchianeri, Serrano, Pastula, & Corning (2014)			X	X
2	Cahill & Mussap, (2007)	X	X		
3	Davison & McCabe (2005)				X
4	Dougherty & Krawczyk (2018)	X			
5	Fox & Vendemia (2016)	X			
6	Franzoi & Klaiber (2007)	X		X	
7	Franzoi, Vasquez, Sparapani, Frost, Martin & Aebly (2012)			X	
8	Girard, Chabrol & Rodgers (2017)	X	X		
9	Hanna, Ward, Seabrook, Jerald, Reed, Giaccardi & Lippman (2017)	X			
10	Hargreaves & Tiggemann (2009)	X		X	
11	Karazsia & Crowther (2009)	X	X	X	
12	Karazsia & Crowther (2010)	X	X		
13	Keum (2016)	X	X	X	X
14	Lamarche, Gammage, & Ozimok (2018)	X		X	
15	Matthews, Lynch & Martins (2016)	X			
16	McNeill & Firman (2014)	X			X
17	Melki, Hitti, Oghia & Mufarrj (2015)	X		X	X
18	Mulgrew & Cragg (2017)	X		X	X
19	Pila, Barlow, Wrosch, & Sabiston (2016)			X	
20	Pila, Stamiris, Castonguay & Sabiston (2014)			X	
21	Robl & Mulgrew (2016)	X			
22	Schneider, Agthe, Yanagida, Voracek, & Hennig-Fast			X	

Reference Number	Study	Theme #1 <i>Sociocultural Influence</i>	Theme #2 <i>Internalization of Body Ideals</i>	Theme #3 <i>Target and Direction of Comparison</i>	Theme #4 <i>Protective and Contributing Factors</i>
	(2017)				
23	Schwartz & Grimm (2016)	X		X	X
24	Sohn (2010)	X		X	
25	Strubel & Petrie (2017)		X		
26	Tylka & Andorka (2012)		X		X
27	Warren & Rios (2013)	X			X

Depending on the source of influence (e.g., family, friend, partner, media), the authors found that men experienced different psychological and behavioral outcomes. Media outlets provided the quickest source of comparisons, but were also idealized, and found to be highly unachievable. Fifteen articles discussed various negative repercussions from viewing media. Men felt particularly pressured to use performance enhancing drugs, and start excessive weightlifting routines when posting pictures of themselves on dating sites and social media outlets. Studies experimentally manipulating viewing of media content all shared similar findings; viewing of mainstream media elicited more upward comparisons resulting in adverse outcomes associated with body image. Men in experimental conditions reported post-viewing feelings of being weak, small, and less attractive. However, being in the physical presence of friends, peers, and other men (who held desirable, yet attainable physical qualities) were influential when initiating body change behaviors such as adopting a new exercise regime. For example, two studies found that comparisons with friends who mimicked realistic sources of body ideals offered a source of body related inspiration. Comparisons to peers or friends were less demoralizing as real-life depictions of the male body typically provide unedited, humanistic qualities.

Different body types depicted by sociocultural sources also determined whether men experienced a positive or negative effect from comparisons. For example, when men comparing to muscular bodies in the media, men were more likely to experience adverse outcomes such as feeling thin and weak as the obtainability of these physiques were perceived to be desirable, yet unobtainable. However, when targets of comparison were hyper-muscular, men showed little to no adverse effect. For example, targets such as bodybuilders were seen as too bulky. Conversely, when men viewed targets internalized as realistic and obtainable, they were motivated to achieve

physiques similar to targets. The researchers concluded that comparisons to different body types provided both negative and positive affect depending on one's likelihood of attaining a particular physical quality.

Internalization of body ideals along with social comparisons were noted as separate, yet important psychosocial processes that men navigated when making decisions about body image, and body modification behaviors. For example, Karazsia & Crowther's (2009) study showed that social influences positively predicted the internalization of body comparisons, resulting in body dissatisfaction, and a higher drive for muscularity. Tylka & Andorka (2012) illustrated in an expanded tripartite influence model that internalization and comparison processes positively correlated with body modification behaviors such as disordered eating practices, and muscle-building activities.

Given the role comparisons play for gathering information on mesomorphic body ideals, multiple authors justified internalization as a second psychological process proceeding comparison activity. For example, Karazsia & Crowther (2009) suggested that information obtained through comparisons may influence the extent to which men internalize body ideals, highlighting the worthwhileness of using both when investigating male body dissatisfaction. One argument discussed by Girard, Chabrol, & Rodgers (2017) was whether internalization preceded comparisons, or vice versa. The directionality of this relationship remains unknown and in need of future clarification.

Twelve articles discussed implications of upward comparisons on body image, while two of the twelve additionally discussed effects of downward comparisons. When discussing direction and target of comparison, all but two articles focused on upward comparisons with either proximal (e.g., friends, peers) or distal targets (e.g., media images). Upward comparisons were driven by self-hopefulness with intentions of enhancing physical attributes, but only when comparison targets held qualities perceived as slightly advantageous. When targets possessed difficult to obtain qualities, comparers encountered feelings of inferiority and body dissatisfaction as ideals were conceptualized as impossible to achieve. Physical and psychological health effects of upward comparisons were dependent on contextual factors. For example, comparisons to media content were always upward and detrimental to self-esteem and confidence; however, these comparisons conducted with friends and peers were perceived as

motivating and inspiring. The researchers found that influence from friends and peers overall induced feelings of self-hopefulness, and encouraged comparers to exercise and engage in muscle-building activities.

Comparisons were seldom made to men displaying hyper-masculine qualities such as bodybuilders. Given the body size and bulk of bodybuilders, men found they represented unattainable targets for comparison, and typically held no real-life viewing proximity where motivation could be derived. Rather, upward comparisons were more frequently made to men in physical proximity (e.g., peers, friends, men at the gym). The results of experimental studies consistently suggest that viewing hyper-idealized media was detrimental to men's body satisfaction but limitations of experimental conditions were noted. For instance, experimental conditions directed participants to make involuntary comparisons during prolonged viewing of hyper-masculine media. Given that a more realistic viewing setting would provide participants with commercial breaks, or the option to pause streaming, only state comparison habits could be quantified. Future research should look at men's trait comparison habits as these represent a more stable, and consistent pattern of comparison behavior over time.

Two articles investigated downward comparisons as a means to avoid social threat, or prove superiority by comparing to others holding less desirable physical qualities. Opportunities to make downward comparisons helped participants in one study feel more comfortable and attractive in social situations. Although results from this study were consistent with other literature investigating downward comparison implications (e.g., Bauer & Wrosch, 2011; Van Yperen, Brenninkmeijer, & Buunk, 2006) no consensus was reached on the effect of downward comparisons as only two articles met inclusion criteria. Body image research on downward comparisons exists predominantly in female populations examining eating behaviors (e.g., Rancourt, Schaefer, Bosson, & Thompson 2016), and internalization of the thin ideal (e.g., Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010).

Demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation highly influenced comparison outcomes. For example, men identifying as homosexual reported higher comparison frequency, a greater fixation with leanness, and, on average, a desire for lower BMI compared to heterosexual men. Findings from Tylka & Andorka, (2012) show that comparison activity was positively correlated with gay community involvement, internalization of homosexual ideals, and

body change behaviors such as extreme dieting. These findings show consistency with Calzo, Corliss, Blood, Field & Austin's (2013) study showing that gay and bisexual men's concern with weight and shape often supersede that of heterosexual men.

For men acculturating to western body norms, comparisons were used to self-evaluate and internalize societal representations of physique. To avoid alienation from new social groups, men adopted body modification tactics to increase muscularity and leanness. Castillo and colleagues (2008) support that feeling physically similar to peers increases confidence, self-esteem, and cohesion. Ethnic populations including Hispanic, Lebanese, and Asian American men were particularly vulnerable to comparisons when acculturating to Western norms for body image. For example, performance-enhancing drug use, and intense exercise regimes were reported as the primary mechanisms used when mimicking Western body ideals.

Multiple authors found young adulthood, along with enrollment in higher education as providing unique opportunities for comparison activity. For example, fitting in with new peer groups challenged ideologies of self-identity and worth, including those associated with physique (e.g., Ridgeway & Tylka, 2005). Young men; being unstable in intimate relationships, sources of monetary income, and career; were more likely to see older men as a source of influence for body standards. Conversely, young men often felt pressured to engage in risky behaviors modeled by older peers in order to fit in which included excessive drinking, and drug use. The authors found that younger men were prone to pressure from peer group's influence of masculinity ideologies, which played a pivotal role in shaping men's ideas about body image.

Men identifying as 35 or older showed fewer adverse effects from comparisons, reporting a focus on health and longevity vs. physique and body aesthetics. Previous research shows that comparisons provide an opportunity for men to evaluate personal attractiveness, however adolescent populations report being more preoccupied with physical appearance than older adults (e.g., Gilbert, Price & Allan, 1995). Other studies suggest that ideals set by the media predominantly objectify bodies of younger men, giving older men irrelevant targets with whom to make comparisons (e.g., Peat, Peyerl, Ferraro & Butler, 2011). This review concluded that regardless of age, men rating low on appearance orientation (i.e., the importance of appearance), or high on self-esteem were not protected from the harmful effects of comparisons when viewing media that exposed them to hyper-idealized male bodies. Therefore, protective factors can be

mitigated as behaviors associated with media use impose negative effects. Clinicians should bear these factors in mind when assessing men for body image pathologies, as exposure to media exemplifying mesomorphic idealism can increase comparison activity, and exacerbate body dissatisfaction.

The scope of literature evaluated for the present study was diverse in terms of population sample, study design, and data collection method, while the utility of social comparison as a framework for examining male body image proved fruitful throughout the review. Themes consistently suggested that sociocultural influences evoke appearance comparisons, and, depending on the direction and target of comparison, are internalized either positively or negatively, resulting in newly formed attitudes and behaviors associated with body image.

Social comparison remains a useful framework when explaining male body image outcomes for a variety of reasons. First, because men feel the need to mimic societal norms for gender and masculinity, social comparisons offer an information seeking mechanism for learning about important facets of masculinity, particularly those pertaining to muscularity and body fat. Adhering to social norms for masculinity have many positive affects including attracting romantic partners, gaining favorable judgement from peers, and reports of confidence and high self-esteem (Stefanczyk, Wernecka, Sorokowski & Sorokowska, 2019). Second, social comparison frequency and affect differ among demographic groups, yet remain consistently used across all populations of men. This result showed the utility of applying Social Comparison Theory across an array of male populations.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE INQUIRY

Themes from this review will help direct future inquiry; however, limitations of the study must be addressed. First, the authors included studies that sampled diverse populations of men, who reported different thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes regarding body image and comparison activity. Results of this study are therefore hard to generalize given that demographic variables emerged as an important mediator of body dissatisfaction. Second, this review did not exclude articles on the basis of study design, or methods of inquiry. Since a range of assessments looking at men's comparison tendencies were utilized, it is important to note results in the context of each individual study.

The abundance of literature looking at the effects of upward comparisons left question to the implication of downward comparison activity. Downward comparison research may be more fruitful than previously thought considering that downward comparisons can help preserve self-esteem by reducing self-threat. Future research should investigate if downward comparisons have protective factors against body dissatisfaction (Brown, Ferris, Heller, Keeping, 2007). For example, research in the field of psychology has shown that downward comparisons provide an opportunity to restore self-regard when upward comparisons pose a threat. By using the inferior qualities of others to self-actualize one's situation as not so adverse, individuals can derive a sense of self-hopefulness (e.g. Aspinwall & Taylor, 1993; Gibbons, 1986).

The paucity of qualitative studies in this review indicates that future research could gain a better understanding of men's personal narrative, and experience with comparisons through qualitative inquiry. Since demographics arose as a reliable indicator of protective and contributing factors for making comparisons, future studies might also examine comparison activity among specific populations of men.

CONCLUSIONS

The present scoping review identified 27 relevant articles that utilized Social Comparison Theory to explain body image outcomes in men. In scoping the literature, four themes arose revealing that appearance comparisons had unique effects on male body image. Themes included sociocultural influences that pressured men towards adherence to societal standards for body image. These pressures resulted in men gathering body image information via comparisons, and thereafter internalizing body image ideals. Diverse psychological and behavioral outcomes were a result of comparison directions and comparison targets, however, men experienced protective or contributing factors depending on demographic factors such as age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

The current study gives an in-depth overview of how social comparisons play an integral role in male body image outcomes; therefore, we believe the following points to be efficacious for researchers and practitioners to consider when working with male clients, and creating body image assessment measures. First, mental health specialists might consider assessing male clients for specific factors associated with comparison activity such as comparison frequency, target, and direction as these each play a dynamic role in the extent to which men experience

contributing or protective factors. Furthermore, mental health professionals may utilize results from this study to inform clients of the negative impact that making comparisons can have on body-esteem, confidence, and self-efficacy. When creating new psychometric measures to assess comparison activity, researchers might consider the four main findings of this study to be informative when construction measurement sub-scales (i.e., sociocultural standards, target and direction of comparisons, internalization of ideals, and contributing and protective factors).

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EQUALISM IN GENDER POLITICS: LIBERALS VS. CONSERVATIVES

Tim Goldich



ABSTRACT

At its core, feminism is half of gender reality—the Male Power / Female Victimization half of gender reality—presented, and demanded to be accepted, as if it were gender reality in its entirety. Gender politics need not be viewed as an inter-sex battleground pitting men’s interests against women’s interests. Under an equalist system, men’s and women’s interests and issues would be properly understood as intertwined and inseparable—leading to a systemic gender-political framework more effective at providing solutions to the issues of both sexes.

Keywords: conservative, equalism, gender politics, liberal, sexual politics

40 Under the current system of gender politics, most people understand gender politics as
41 essentially the Battle of the Sexes as it shows up within the gender-political arena (as a battle of
42 women's interests vs. men's interests). It is to be expected that under feminism, we will
43 understand gender politics in these gender-adversarial terms because, at its core, feminism is
44 *half* of gender reality—the Male Power/ Female Victimization half of gender reality—presented,
45 and demanded to be accepted, as if it were gender reality in its entirety.

46 Under a new gender-neutral system of gender politics (what I'll call *equalism*), I believe
47 gender politics can be viewed in a whole new way. Like any other politics, gender politics may be
48 viewed as a battle of conservatives vs. liberals, *not* a battle that pits Woman against Man. In
49 other words, given an unbiased gender belief system, gender politics may be re-understood as a
50 battle between gender-political conservatives (of both sexes) vs. gender-political liberals (of both
51 sexes).

52 I will define *conservatism* as an effort to make the world a better place through a focus on
53 *preserving* that which is judged to be of great and enduring value. I will define *liberalism* as an
54 effort to make the world a better place through a focus on that which is judged to bring
55 constructive *change*. As I see it, both conservatism and liberalism are fundamental, timeless
56 perspectives to be respected.

57 Under feminism's biased gender belief system, we believe that men have *the* power and
58 women are *the* victims. Because we believe that men are *the* beneficiaries of the gender system,
59 we believe that only men could be motivated to *preserve* the sexual-political status quo. Because
60 we believe that women are *the* sufferers of the gender system, we believe that only women could
61 be motivated to *change* the sexual-political status quo. It will appear, then, that sexual-political
62 conservatives are comprised of men and sexual-political liberals are comprised of women. Thus,
63 it will seem that gender politics is a battle of one sex vs. the other.

64 But what if feminism's Male Power / Female Victimization paradigm is one-sided and
65 therefore false? What if our world is not a male heaven / female hell? In fact, what if it all
66 balances out? What if—in the benefits enjoyed / the liabilities suffered, the power / the
67 victimization, the freedoms / the constraints—It All Balances Out between Woman and Man?
68 Under equalism we will come to know and honor the politicized perspectives of *both* sexes. With

69 that *balanced* understanding, the gender-political picture transforms in a healthy way.

70 With the understanding that both sexes benefit and both sexes suffer under the traditional
71 gender system, there comes the understanding that in changing the gender status quo *both* sexes
72 have much to gain and *both* sexes have much to lose. Therefore, members of *both* sexes may be
73 highly invested in *changing* the gender system (a liberal trait) and members of *both* sexes may be
74 highly invested in *maintaining* the gender system (a conservative trait).

75 Should feminism's demand for sisterly solidarity to The Cause loosen its grip, I believe
76 we'll find that gender-political conservatives are comprised about equally of men *and* women.
77 Should men become enlightened to the downsides in their lot in life, I believe we'll find that
78 gender-political liberals are comprised about equally of women *and* men.

79 Of course, there's more to say about all this, but already the potential is clear. Gender
80 politics need *not* be viewed as an inter-sex battleground pitting men's interests against women's
81 interests. Under an equalist system, men's and women's interests and issues would be properly
82 understood as intertwined and inseparable—leading to a *systemic* gender-political framework
83 more effective at providing solutions to the issues of both sexes.

84 Both sexes suffer injustice. These injustices may come out even (balanced), but they're
85 injustices all the same. So, *It All Balances Out* is not a proclamation intended to promote
86 complacency. It is not an endpoint—it is a new beginning! With an understanding of Balance,
87 there comes a breath of fresh ideological air of the sort that promotes maturity, compassion,
88 forgiveness, and constructive *negotiation*.

89 So, again: the Battle of the Sexes need not be a *war* between the sexes. Rather than view
90 gender politics strictly in terms of inter-sex conflicts of interest, gender politics may be viewed
91 like any other politics—a battle between conservatives and liberals—*not* men vs. women.

92 For the problem of a dysfunctional and divisive gender politics that views the two sexes as
93 perpetual adversaries, feminism's Male Power / Female Victimization paradigm is the problem,
94 and *It All Balances Out* is a solution.

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98 **AUTHOR PROFILE**

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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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TONIC MASCULINITY IN THE POST-GENDER ERA

Miles Groth



ABSTRACT

The myth of male power has been associated almost exclusively with sexuality understood in the context of the quite-recent notion of gender. Following a period of much-needed interest in the lives of women, there is a resurgence of interest in male experience and masculinity. Tonic masculinity is an emerging new honesty about male experience at this time. The word tonic has two senses that I want to apply to masculinity. One, found in music, refers to the home key of a composition. The other denotes an invigorating substance or influence. I believe that masculinity is re-emerging of necessity to provide both a sense of harmony as well as much needed positive energy to help heal an ailing social body.

Keywords: boys, males, masculinity, men, tonic masculinity

PREAMBLE

You are probably reading this indoors, in your house or apartment. You are likely reading it on a laptop screen.

At a time when much employment and quite a lot of leisure involves such a device, it is worth recalling that men designed it, its architecture and software. Having launched the communications satellites and built the transmission towers that relay their signals, men made the device viable, receiving and transmitting data. Men also installed the vast cable systems overhead and underground that connect us for business and social purposes via the internet. They ran the coaxial cable to your house.

Whether at home or your office, the physical environment in which you find yourself was built by men. Men hauled and hoisted the beams of the building you are sitting in, laid the brick, built the walls, installed the mechanicals, built the stairways, put down the tiles or carpet, and moved the furniture into place, including the bed you will have sex on later. As you read this, men are putting up dry wall and installing windows and air-conditioning ductwork and their machinery, painting and plastering walls, sanding floors, installing and repairing plumbing, and resolving computer glitches. If you are in a high-rise building, recall that men installed the elevator that lifted you hundreds of feet off the ground to where you are sitting as well as the array of stairways that are there to protect you in the event of an emergency.

As you move from work to home, recall that men dug the tunnels and laid the track for underground and surface mass transit. Men poured the concrete for highways and sidewalks and laid the asphalt for the streets you drive, bicycle, or walk on. They keep the subways and buses operating and repair your automobiles, which they designed. They keep freight and passenger trains moving. Most long-distance and local truck drivers are men. Men built the first seagoing ships and then airships and the airports where thousands of flights now take off and land each day throughout the world. Most pilots are still men.

They built the systems that make the comforts of modern life possible, from reservoirs to the massive conduits that deliver their water to us. They built the underground drainage passages that prevent flooding and sewerage systems that receive our waste. They remove snow and damaged vehicles from roads, and set railroad cars back on track. In most cities, men drive

the buses and taxis.

As you read this, men are lifting and handling millions of heavy parcels and boxes they have unloaded from trucks, boats and trains and have delivered to storage areas. They stack the shelves of supermarkets and other retail outlets. They deliver groceries in big cities such as New York. They haul and lift the bags of garbage from your streets in every imaginable climate.

Men lift and move the dead weight of heavy patients in hospitals and nursing homes. Male orthopedic surgeons reduce fractures of large bones and screw together hip bones, procedures that require large hands and upper body strength.

Men carry people out of burning buildings and bring those who are intoxicated under control in emergency rooms. They are sent out to control rowdy crowds and mediate in civil disputes. Fewer men are being killed in wars these days, but throughout history millions of mostly young men have been sent out to fight and die on front lines for a handful of raging dictators, who mistakenly have served historians as the model for most men. They are the guards and bodyguards of public buildings and powerful and wealthy women and men, whose properties they landscape. Men operate the heavy equipment on farms. They manage and slaughter cattle, mine metals, log trees for lumber, and serve as crews on cargo ships. In factories they often labor only yards away from fiery furnaces. They invented glass and, on Murano, a few still hand-blow masterpieces of transparent, sparkling beauty.

These are males from about age 20 to 60. In bygone days they were as young as ten years old and worked next to their brothers, fathers, uncles and grandfathers in mines and factories and on farms. While technology is making much hands-on work less backbreaking, as long as it required it will be carried out by male bodies for the simple reason that given the number of striated muscle fibers and more numerous nuclei in the muscles of their upper and lower limbs, such bodies are on the whole much stronger than female bodies, regardless of stature. Large hands and feet, wider upper body breadth, and a higher center of gravity optimize the strength. And yet...to be male and to have such a body, we hear, is to exert a poisonous influence in society. The male body is the emblem of so-called toxic masculinity. How did this happen?

THE MALE BODY IN THE POST-GENDER ERA

Destined to do the dirty work, the American male body has usually been covered by the monochrome gray or blue of the worker's uniform or overalls. The body's outlines are hidden. Below the beltline of loose-fitting trousers, two square columns reach toward the ground and rest on heavy shoes. Inside, conducting business, the male body has always been wrapped in equally drab attire, usually a blue, black or brown suit.

After high school, as the boy's body gives way to the grown-up man's body, it has been systematically covered. The junior wrestler's singlet, the basketball player's sleeveless t-shirt and shorts, and the swimmer's or diver's trunks are doffed, replaced by usually baggy, knee-length shorts. Apart from at the beach, a so-called real man still does not display his naked body except in front of the bathroom mirror after showering or in his bedroom. Beginning with the signs of puberty, of course, the adolescent male has been carefully studying the shape of his changing body's shape, but this is a solitary and secret activity performed only for his own interest and benefit.

After World War Two, when families began to decrease in size, only in families where a boy had brothers or a father was he sure how a fully grown body might look. In the contemporary middle-class home, father and son are not expected to shower together, even though a young boy might sneak into the bathroom to watch the procedure of his father shaving. The only exception for the pubescent boy was his high school physical education class where he had an opportunity to observe other developing male bodies. After high school, this might have happened in the military, but in a country without mandatory military service such as ours here in the States, experiences of homosocial living, exploration, observation and familiarization are missing for most men. Only boys who participate in sports really get to know the bodies of non-family males. Common in Europe and Asia, public saunas and bath houses for men are nearly nonexistent except in a few large cities in the States.

Beginning in the mid-to-late 1950s, however, some remarkable changes occurred which have had important consequences for the topic of this contribution. The unclothed male body, which had been seen only in a few Tarzan features from as early as the 1930s, was in view. Coinciding with the appearance of the notion of gender, films for the first time more openly displayed the male body. The items of clothing that changed it all were the jeans and t-shirt of

the cowboy and inner-city tough. Surfer films set on West Coast beaches even revealed the shirtless young male. For the most part they represented the underclass. Their models included the Marlon Brando of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951). The new middle class was embodied by the James Dean of *Rebel without a Cause* (1955). Beginning with Elvis Presley, that body also began to move sexually, even sensually. The suits of early rockers, including the Beatles, were shed and through the Sixties and the Seventies, some all-male rock bands performed shirtless. Think Mick Jagger or Jim Morrison.

The lower body of the rocker, however, remained covered, although tight-fitting, low-rise jeans hinted at the secrets of the sexed male body. While brief frontal nudity had occasionally been allowed in European movies, to the best of my knowledge this has not occurred in mainstream American-made films. When the male genitals were visible in outline, they were flaccid, compressed and harmless. Oddly, the idioms moved from talk of “the family jewels” to “the package” and “the junk.” Not a very flattering linguistic sequence.

There is one notable exception to all this, which requires us to pause for moment: professional wrestling entertainment. In a gladiatorial setting under stage lighting, two or more men enact a free-for-all of pretend fighting. The scenarios are far more brutal even than urban gang violence and hand-to-hand combat in war.

Popular especially beginning with televised matches in the late 1950s, grappling or *lucha libre* is a spectacle that even the esteemed French philosopher of modernity, Roland Barthes, commented on in a surprising essay published in his *Mythologies* in the early 1971.¹ In a boxing ring or cage, or the more expensive octagon of mixed martial arts, the fully exposed male body is on display in a way not seen anywhere else in public. Men in the States do not even appear at beaches undressed to this extent. Men and women flock to these events live and many more watch them on television. More people annually view events of this genre than they do professional football or baseball games.

¹ Professional wrestling live and televised events have more viewers each year than any of the other professional sports, including American football and baseball—about 4,000,000 viewers annually. See <https://www.fightful.com> for data.

A uniquely American phenomenon in origin, such entertainment is now mimicked around the world and by ever-younger males in what is called backyard wrestling or trampoline wrestling.

Performing *kayfabe* when fighting, these men, I contend, are enacting the experience of the male body of everyday heavy work taken to its limits in so many of the settings already mentioned. The wrestlers who feign inflicting and suffering pain are those of the bodies of the same men whose rough labor was described above. The message is only in part about narcissism, however, especially since many are grossly overweight. Others are bodybuilders or former football players, heirs to the myth of the Charles Atlas male who first appeared in tabloids in the 1920s. The scenarios, which are few in number, are predictable and repetitive. The theme is the capacity of the male body not to give in to exhaustion and pain. A cherished champion's belt is coveted as the symbol of having outlasted one's opponent in some way. In choreographed moves, the men portray the male body as gradually weakened and eventually broken by physical effort. But all of this is not what it appears to be. The contests are not similar to boxing, mixed martial arts and the like where blood is shed. Above all, it is not about the minority of males whose sadistic tendencies are cited as emblematic of the myth of male aggressive power associated with so-called toxic masculinity. What, then, is really going on?

A closer look reveals that there is a second, more important message in this *commedia* than aggression. The performance is above all ironic. The show is, in fact, about men protecting each other from real harm while pretending to damage each other. In order to maximally simulate aggression, the grapplers must look out for each other's bodies with the greatest skill. Endlessly rehearsed sequences of a very few basic moves (tumbling, throws, faked punches and kicks) allow for only a bit of improvisation, which would put the performers at real risk of injury. These are dramas that require the display of the limits of the male body in order to remind us that male aggressiveness has always been chiefly directed by men and boys against other men and boys. The themes are endurance and what Wilfred Owen called "the pity of war" (Andrews, 2014). What is revealed is more than just flesh. Among spectators, the verisimilitude is acknowledged but most are expected to take for real the display of male bodies worked over and taken to their limit—but not just in the theatre of the spectacle. It all reminds us of what the male body endures every day when it labors in dangerous and difficult situations, from mining to

heavy lifting. The professional wrestling entertainer especially displays what is going on under the uniform of the blue-collar worker especially. Behind the gimmicks (the roles) and basic themes such as competition, betrayal and injustice is a more important narrative. The spectacle is a surprising revelation of how men in fact feel about the roles they have been forced to play, from the laborer at work in the most undesirable situations but also as *homo furens* on the battlefield. Obscured by the mayhem and theatricality it is an example of what I take to be an emerging new honesty about male experience and what I term tonic masculinity.

The myth of male power has been associated almost exclusively with sexuality understood in the context of the quite-recent notion of gender, but this has obscured the point much as the male uniforms have. The notion of toxic masculinity has focused on displays of aggression against women in social and sexual settings, but I would contend that it misses a meaning that is more fundamental which society has been reluctant to admit. And that is the story of aggression and most men, who are in contention mostly with other men.

Some understanding may come from considering a few other changes in how the male body is presented and may not be presented. They include very recent interest on the part of many males from adolescence on through late-middle-age who cultivate habits of physical training—working out—and a greater willingness to reveal their bodies, albeit more modestly than girls and women do. What is the source of the changes I have been describing and, in some cases, only hinting at? The answer, it seems to me, is the notion of gender and its disappearance as an explanatory concept.

The term *gender* was not in use except in grammar books until about 1945, when among psychologists it was described as “the socialized obverse of sex” (Bentley, 1945).² Gender was said to point to what sets human beings apart from domestic animals. Gender dimorphism referred to physiognomic features that traditional societies have always exaggerated, beginning with

² Professor Bentley notes that along with language, skill and play, gender (“gendering”) makes the period of age 2-3 to 6-7 “momentous” for the rest of the life course. In matters of “grouping, playing, exercising, reciting and the like,” the “qualifying terms” ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, which are associated simplistically by the preschool child with the physically observable differences of sexual dimorphism (male and female) are psychosocial or sociocultural. Here the comparison is made between human beings and domesticated animals.

primary and secondary sexual characteristics and extending to dress. Exaggerating visible sex differences has always been important in human beings since sexual attraction is mediated for the most part visually and not by olfactory cues, as in other mammals. The danger of confusing one sex with another is avoided by highlighting body parts, hair styling, and make-up (usually only in females). What came to be known as gender identity was important in the context of increased public interest in same-sex attraction, a central topic of 19th-century sexologists. Androgyny became chic. Ironically, however, the confounding of sex with gender led to seeing human beings solely in anatomical and biological terms, since when gender becomes entirely fluid, as we are told it is, the concept becomes superfluous. That has led us into our post-gender era.

The most egregious example of conflating sex and gender is the so-called sex change. Drastic surgical procedures are performed as a medical cure for gender dysphoria, itself a psychiatric term defined as a feeling of confusion about the self-perception of one's body as male or female. Masculinity and femininity are presentations of one's sex. For the most part, they are based entirely on anatomy. The popularity of the rhetoric of so-called bisexuality has added to the mixture of self-perception with social expectation about what is normal for a given sex.

One of the necessary conditions of the gender era was greater openness about sexuality, while at the same time the body increasingly had to become an object of suspicion. If gender was somehow performed and independent of one's sex, the genitalia became problematic. But only they reveal the reality of one's sex. Soon came the idea that one could change one's sex. Of course, that is impossible, since sex is genetic. No matter. Grade school children are now routinely told that there are no differences between males and females, boys and girls, men and women, even before sex differences have been perceived and the maturing body has produced the male- or female-sexed body following *semenarche* and *menarche*

TONIC MASCULINITY

My theme may now be presented against this brief outline of the history of the experience of most males and the appearance and disappearance of the notion of gender. It is my view that, at this time, following a period of much needed interest in the lives of women, there is a resurgence of interest in male experience and masculinity, and that it is poised to act as a much-needed *pharmakon* during a time of often baffling rhetoric based on category errors

regarding biology (sex) and current psychosocial and sociocultural actualities (gender) described above. This is not the place to propose how best conceptual clarity might be restored in the context of powerful ideological and political battles. I leave that to much further discussion. I want to argue briefly only for what a dose of tonic masculinity might provide by way of a cure—a course of treatment—for a great deal of mystification and often ironic ambiguity about sex and gender in developed Western cultures.

But first a word about so-called toxic masculinity. The notion is the stepchild of hegemonic masculinity, an expression that has been in use chiefly in academic circles since about 1980. It was popularized by Robert W. Connell in his book, *Masculinities* (1995), the notion of hegemony having been adapted from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). In his theory of gender, Connell (who transitioned to the feminine gender in his 60s) claimed that, like capitalism in Gramsci's analysis, masculinity as embodied in males had led to the demoralization of society, chiefly by oppressing women via a sociocultural institution termed *the patriarchy*. This is the work of a social scientist, and it is important to realize that, as such, it is a hypothesis. That the sun moves around the earth was also a hypothesis. I have suggested that so-called toxic masculinity does not answer to the experience of most men and that this is related in great part to the way the male body has been used and hidden from view. With changes in these habits of viewing and treating the male body, something new is on the horizon.

The word *tonic* has two senses that I want to apply to masculinity. One is found in music and refers to the home key of a composition. The other denotes an invigorating or bracing substance or influence. I believe that masculinity is re-emerging of necessity to provide both a sense of harmony as well as much needed positive energy to help heal an ailing social body as well as to energize the everyday lives of women and men in troubling times.

If we look at young men today, we can see a certain brightness in them that dimmed down in their fathers and grandfathers. I am convinced that something very positive and nurturing is embodied in a small but vital core group of young men with wide-ranging interests and talents. We will soon see a great deal more of them and hear a great more from them that will vitalize their male peers and perhaps have a leavening effect on their fathers' generation. Tonic masculinity will also have a salubrious effect on the lives of girls and women especially in the context of sexuality, parenting and the family.

What forms does tonic masculinity take *in males*? The italicized qualifying clause may seem odd, but I contrast male masculinity with what Judith Halberstam, the well-known feminist, has termed *female masculinity*. The latter is found in only a minority of middle-age and young women who enact *faux* masculinity. Ironically, when this occurs it is in itself evidence for the resurgence of masculinity in the population. Masculinity in males (essential masculinity) is qualitatively different, however, since its principal features derive from anatomy and physiognomy, and only secondarily, by the way, to sexual orientation, the term *male masculinity* is redundant.

Who are these males? Much emphasis has been placed on *homo faber* (man the maker of things) and *homo furens* (man the conquistador and warrior) in discussions of masculinity. The former is reflected in my preamble. I have alluded to the second briefly in talking about ironic performances of aggression in the preceding section. I suggest, however, that we look at the lives of the boys and young men who are part of this renaissance of masculinity as an expression of *homo ludens* (playful man). In *homo ludens* we find both harmonizing and invigorating effects, the two senses of tonic I have already mentioned. We will see that both are not new in human history.

I begin with the latter first. Centering and invigorating, we see in tonic masculinity the dogged intensity of pursuing a task to its conclusion but also a certain impatience with delay in the gratification that comes with a project's having been completed. Tonic masculinity may be seen in creative risk-taking, that is, trying out something that has not been attempted before even though there might be danger involved. In this connection, it is worth noting that nothing is more deadening to this in boys than efforts to get them to settle down in contemporary schooling settings, from preschool through the end of high school. For most males, learning from experience is preferred to acting on information as given and accepted as true. Boys turn to that, of course, but they do so several years later than girls do. Like phenomenologists, boys and adolescent males distrust what is known (what they have been told) in favor of paying attention to what they see whether it be visual, auditory or via any other sensory organ.

I do not have in mind here the sort of challenging that is to be found in competition. Instead, I think of Copernicus, for example, who contested the Ptolemaic idea of the structure of the universe. Had he not, we might still be worried about dropping off the edge of the world

when reaching the horizon. Or had Einstein not challenged the Euclidean order of spatiality and temporality, we would likely still be thinking in terms of horsepower alone. The challenging quality of tonic masculinity can be better seen in the lust for adventure that questions norms and conserves standards, carries out rituals, and formulates the rules and laws that life in large communities requires. Tonic masculinity has been known since ethics was first formulated by the classic Greek philosophers.

Several examples may serve to make this clear. We see it in the dedicated seriousness of the pastor or priest who serves his congregants as much as in the athlete who disciplines his own body to achieve a hard-won performance approaching some ideal of perfection. Those who argue for the toxicity of masculinity have singled out a few team sports such as Canadian ice hockey and American football as exemplary of masculinity. They overlook the international example of *futbol* (soccer) or basketball where power and grace are combined. Little attention is paid to the gymnast or the track and field athlete or the classic wrestler or practitioner of a martial art such as *jiu-jitsu*.

Tonic masculinity in the first sense is seen in the deep male bonds of pairings such as boyhood chums and aging male friends who have known each other for a half century or more having pursued careers and usually marriage. It is also there to be seen in so-called gay males. Even though they are only a very small number of this population, homosexual men no longer present by affecting a feminine persona. Its core is intimacy and friendship, mainstays of classic masculinity. Above all, the harmonizing effect of tonic masculinity is finding a place again in deeply intimate friendships between young men. They have never disappeared from boyhood.

If there is what we may term power in tonic masculinity, it is of the sort expressed by Herman Melville's Ahab. Here we see the drivenness of tonic masculinity in the face of the mysteries of nature, a deep urge not to control nature (another feature commonly alleged as an example of hegemonic masculinity) but to face its absolute power and in doing so realize the limits of human power.

Tonic masculinity is seen in men who pursue careers in public service such as first responders and—alas, as long as there are those few men and women who through history have desired to control extensive land and the lives of vast numbers of men, women and children—

men who serve in the military. It is well known that most men have little interest in harming other men when conscripted to engage in combat with their enemy *du jour*. Like rapists, mercenaries and conquistadors are a tiny fraction of the male population. And we never forget that most of those who have been sent into battle and caused to be harmed were (and are) young, poor and not well educated. Many of them in the West flee fatherless homes.

If we can clear away some of the dense smoke of what a very small fire has produced, I believe we will see clearly the image of tonic masculinity as briefly described here coming into focus. Meanwhile, successful women, some of whom display traits of female masculinity, currently ride high—as well they should, since the responsibilities that come with work in business and the professions, which was for a very long time solely men’s work, is now increasingly in women’s hands. In addition to bearing children, they are now charged with seeing to the outcome of the near future in politics, our major economic institutions, and the professions. They are becoming the majority of doctors and dentists, and given the trends of college attendance, women will dominate nearly all fields in the near future, with the exception of some of the natural sciences. This has relieved men of authority and power, but as I have tried to show, these features are not after all of the essence of male masculinity. The surplus of energy available to males—especially young males—made available by the shift in workforce populations in all areas is the one source of the tonic I claim males are prepared to provide. I anticipate that we will see an increase of creativity among men, especially in the arts. Their role as literally the second sex (all human zygotes are undifferentiated and therefore female—the reason men have nipples, a surprising fact not given much attention) will again bring them into prominence, but no longer as the arbiters of wars and aggressive conquests. Women will be their agents. As the male body becomes more visible it will perhaps come to have the attention paid to it in ancient Greece and Rome and again in the Renaissance. Most men enjoy being objectified, so there should not be any problem with being appreciated for purely aesthetic reasons. My guess is that physical culture and athletics will become more attractive to more men. There was a hint of this in the Sixties when male masculinity made a brief appearance. It went underground again for a little more than forty years—but it is reappearing.

This brings me, finally, to a value of tonic masculinity as I see it emerging that may be surprising. That is the work to be done of restoring harmony between the sexes, to return relations in the nuclear family and local community to a degree of genuine caring for the other and democratic responsibility in the sociopolitical sphere. The much-advertised dissonance of relations between men and women, I believe, will be resolved by tonic masculinity. The result of the longing to do something as remarkable and mysterious as creating another human life can be seen in essential, tonic masculinity as it has pursued its goals in the past in philosophy and science. Men will literally have more time for creative work. We have evidence of this already in the world of social media and the whole world of virtuality in which young men were the pioneers. Perhaps they are already evidence for how tonic masculinity will express itself.

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IS THERE ANYTHING GOOD IN THE MEN'S MOVEMENT? A MASCULINITY EXPERT MALIGNS THE MANOSPHERE

Janice Fiamengo



ABSTRACT

*Men's advocates have hammered away at the hypocrisy of an allegedly compassionate society that consistently turns away from blatant evidence of men's pain. When discussing men's issues, feminist-compliant authors typically respond by concealing, misdirecting, cherry-picking, and outright misrepresenting evidence—all to avoid admitting there is anything good in the men's movement. British writer, James Innes-Smith's recent article in *The Spectator* provides a case study in such tactics. In stressing the dangerous anger of the manosphere, he misunderstands that successful MRAs, MGTOW, and other dissident men recognize that anger is destructive only when it is pathologically turned against the self and others.*

Keywords: feminism, men, MGTOW, misandry, MRA

Over the past ten years, thanks in large part to advocates within the dissident men's movement (which is not by any means a single group but rather a divergent, often discordant, mass of individual advocates, YouTubers, online forums, and formal organizations like the National Coalition For Men), it has become increasingly difficult to maintain the popular fiction that all men—even young heterosexual white men—are [“privileged” by their maleness](#) (Whitley, 2021). As men's advocates have been pointing out for years, young white men with enough [annihilating despair to go on shooting rampages](#) that end with their own destruction can only with willful blindness be considered privileged (McKinley, 2019). Research has shown not only that [young men in general are falling behind](#) their female peers in education and the workplace, but also that, as men's issues expert [Warren Farrell](#), among others, has demonstrated, [mass shooters typically suffer from the effects of fatherlessness](#), family abuse, bullying, and social isolation (Autor & Wasserman, 2013; Farrell, 2018; Kao, 2018). [Many boys and men direct their despair inward](#), committing suicide at a rate nearly 4-times that of girls and young women (Groth, 2013). Men's advocates have hammered away at the hypocrisy of an allegedly compassionate society that consistently turns away from blatant evidence of men's pain.

So what's a feminist-compliant author to do when discussing men's issues? The most typical response involves acts of concealment, misdirection, cherry-picking, and outright misrepresentation, all to avoid admitting there is anything good in the men's movement. A recent article in *The Spectator* provides a case study in such tactics. It used the occasion of the mass shooting in Plymouth, England, by [22-year-old Jake Davison](#), who shot his mother and four people near his home, to suggest that the men's movement may bear some of the blame for his violence (Burke, 2021).

In [“There's More to the Men's Movement than Incels,”](#) British writer James Innes-Smith gives readers the lowdown on what he calls “the manosphere” (a term, as he probably isn't aware, that many men's advocates shun) (Innes-Smith, 2021). He tells us that he is as an expert in “modern masculinity,” having published a book called [The Seven Ages of Man—How to Live a Meaningful Life](#) (Innes-Smith, 2020). A cursory glance at his self-denigrating [web essays](#), in which he confesses a need for [female attention and approval](#), may raise doubt about his authority to pontificate on male meaning, or even his competence to tell us about the men's

movement (Innes-Smith, 2017). Still, his title suggests at least an attempt at even-handedness.

What Innes-Smith gives us, alas, in about a dozen paragraphs filled mainly with bigoted generalizations, is a snarky picture of men as their own worst enemies, inevitably making things worse for themselves and for the young men who, in his words, “fall prey” to their palaver. The only specific MRA (men’s rights advocate) mentioned is Paul Elam, who is briefly acknowledged with a backhanded compliment as “something of a father figure to MRA followers” who “struggled with fatherhood.” The implication is that, having failed in his own life, Elam is passing along his dysfunction to vulnerable surrogate sons; and that’s all we learn from Innes-Smith about one of the men’s movement’s most prolific authors and YouTubers, a counselling therapist by training who is a hero to tens of thousands.

Innes-Smith also makes no mention of the six international conferences on men’s issues, organized mainly by Elam himself and political activist and author Mike Buchanan, that have been held since 2014 with hundreds of featured speakers, including academics, authors, journalists, artists, politicians, and victims of domestic violence. He is also completely silent about the many women who regularly voice their public opposition to feminist attacks on men, including Bettina Arndt, Erin Pizzey, Diana Davison, Karen Straughan, and the women of Honey Badger Radio. And despite ending his snooty survey with a warning that more acts of mass violence may be on their way “if marginalised young men continue to feel that society is weighted against them,” Innes-Smith leaves no doubt that the *last place* any troubled young man should turn is to any branch of men’s advocacy or self-help. His essay is thus a good illustration of the dead end mainstream pundits often create for men in crisis: acknowledging their problems, but warning against avenues by which they might name and overcome them.

One might hope from Innes-Smith’s title that he would focus on the tens of thousands of men, including [self-described incels](#) (involuntary celibates), whose [online discussions don’t lead to violence or even verbal unpleasantness](#) (worth viewing, in this regard, is a much-watched [Middle Ground episode](#), a recorded discussion in which the intelligence, reasonableness, and good nature of three dissenting young men stand in contrast to the petulance and ignorance of three over-confident feminist women) (Speckhard, 2021; Whitley & Zhou, 2020; *Men’s*, 2019). Completely missing from Innes-Smith’s overview are the multitude of compassionate male voices seeking to end the gender war by highlighting male goodness and by proposing

productive ways forward (in addition to those already named, see also, for starters, published work by Roy Baumeister, Robert Bly, Tom Golden, Tim Goldich, Peter Lloyd, and David Shackleton).

Instead, the essay bogs down about halfway through in the predictable recital of the very few cases of incel violence with which most readers are already all-too familiar: Toronto's van killer [Alek Minassian](#), who infamously proclaimed "The Incel Rebellion has already begun" on the morning of his vehicular killing spree in 2018, and Isla Vista gunman Elliot Rodger, whose manifesto [My Twisted World](#) first brought incel rage to public notice in 2014 (*Toronto*, 2021; Rodger). We learn nothing about them not already well chewed over by feminist commentators, including a tone-deaf howler of a comment on their alleged motives, which Innes-Smith seizes on in order to blame "men's unrealistic expectations," purportedly caused by "a raft of movies featuring obnoxious overweight stoners winning the hearts and bodies of inordinately beautiful, underwritten female protagonists." His implication—in addition to his point about female protagonist deserving better scripts!—would seem to be that the "obnoxious" uglies amongst us would be far better off accepting that they're *never* going to be loved. That would calm their despair, indeed.

Innes-Smith's naked contempt for incels is matched by his disdain for men who refuse to make female approval the center of their lives; he refers without apology or qualification to MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way, some of whom avoid contact with women altogether) as "a controversial online community of sexual misfits." Even men who agreed to speak to him for his book on masculinity don't escape his jeering guffaws. He comments of 36-year-old Phil, for example—who has done nothing worse than opt out of traditional relationships with women, with a clearly articulated rationale for doing so—that he is a "true believer" who is "convinced that there is a 'covert move against men'" in society. It's hard to imagine Innes-Smith deriding a woman as a deluded "true believer" because she decided against relationships with men and judged her society misogynistic. But double standards are part of this writer's stock in trade.

Innes-Smith makes clear that there is nothing in the men's movement that should be accepted as honest appraisal or useful life strategy, and never concedes a single factual claim made by men's issues activist, though most MRAs online are nothing if not fervently and sometimes formidably fact-based. He refers, for example, to men who "complain about the

prison sentencing gap” (the gap in criminal punishments between female and male offenders) but he doesn’t indicate whether such a gap actually exists (it definitely does: see the research of [Sonja Starr](#)) (Starr, 2012). He mentions with skepticism “an allegedly unfair justice system” but makes no mention of the research of [Stephen Baskerville](#) into the denial through the family court system of millions of fathers’ right to parent their own children (Baskerville, 2003). He notes that MGTOW believe “romantic relationships pose too much of a risk both emotionally and financially” but carefully refrains from mentioning objective risks such as false allegations of sexual assault or abuse, neatly sidestepping the findings of Helen Smith, in *Men on Strike*, about why so many men are reluctant to marry or procreate (Smith, 2013).

Innes-Smith paraphrases MGTOW as believing that “authorities have consistently refused to acknowledge where real inequality lies,” but doesn’t tell readers what these “real inequalities” might be (inequalities in legal rights, schooling, health outcomes, access to services, life expectancy, treatment under the law, abundantly documented by [William Collins](#)) (Collins). Innes-Smith mentions “a consensus across the manosphere” that the MeToo movement “has managed to widen the divide between the sexes by pathologizing masculinity” but steers clear of any examples of such pathologizing (see Paul Nathanson and Katharine Young’s voluminous *Legalizing Misandry* for many blood-curdling examples) (Nathanson & Young, 2006). His covert dishonesty on this score means that any reader who hasn’t already looked into anti-feminist claims—but who has a hunch that the deck is stacked against men—will come away from this faux-informative essay with the uneasy impression that men’s advocates are mired in self-pitying fantasies.

Innes-Smith also frequently repeats feminist claims about dissident men as if they were true. He accepts that men’s rights activists exhibit an “anti-female stance” (rather than an anti-feminist one) and have “ideological links to neo-conservatism.” In fact, as any honest researcher would acknowledge, MRAs occupy the full ideological spectrum, from the dissident right to the dissident left and everything in between; many such men openly avow their love and respect for women and their commitment to equality before the law. Innes-Smith accepts without feeling the need to provide any evidence that Plymouth killer Jake Davison was inspired by incel discussion groups, never mentioning what else is known about the triggers in Davison’s life, particularly his strained relationship with his mother, whom he called “vile, dysfunctional, and

‘chaotic.’” Innes-Smith also alleges with oblivious feminist confidence that “Inceldom’ grew out of a sense of male entitlement and a belief that having sex with women is a right of all males regardless of circumstances.” No link is provided for this typical feminist smear, and Innes-Smith clearly regards it so highly that he has to say it twice for its atrocity to register. In fact, as the vast majority of incel posts make clear, [“entitlement” is the last thing most incels have experienced](#) in lives often barren of love, sexual touch, intimacy, or even friendship (Sweeney, 2021).

In a surprising twist, Innes-Smith ends his article by quoting from two academic researchers who express more empathy for male experience in a few sentences than Innes Smith has done (or dared) in his thousand-plus words. Psychologist Brenda Todd argues that “there has been too much criticism of men as a class” which has “tainted male identity, giving young men the impression that there is something problematic about being a man” while anthropologist Samuel Veissiere condemns the “growing tendency to label all masculinity as toxic.” Both offer unambiguous indictments of modern culture’s demonization of masculinity—somewhat surprising (and refreshing) from professionals in an academic milieu long in thrall to anti-male ideology. It’s unfortunate that their sensible comments come after so many dismissive slurs that it is likely most troubled men will have stopped reading before reaching them.

Yet the irony is striking: these authority figures are saying what men’s advocates have been saying for decades, and what Innes-Smith had pooh-poohed earlier in the article, when he scoffed at MRA allegations of an “anti-male world.” It’s highly unlikely that these few academics today would have been able to articulate their insights without the ground having been laid by decades of male-positive activism.

Innes-Smith would have us believe that dissident men are dangerous, and provoke violence, because they give themselves and other men permission to be angry. What he misunderstands, perhaps because he has spent his life self-confessedly courting female approval, is that successful MRAs, MGTOW, and other dissident men understand that anger is destructive only when it is pathologically turned against the self and others. The men’s movement at its best—I’ve mentioned only a few of its many leading lights (apologies to those I’ve unjustly neglected)—is about focusing justified anger on men’s problems in order to find creative ways to oppose, solve, lighten, or live with them. That’s what good men have always done with problems. The fact that Innes-Smith couldn’t find a single positive thing to say about this eclectic and vibrant

group of thinkers and doers makes me doubt his declared concern about “marginalised young men.”

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UNINTENDED EFFECTS OF TRANSGENDER ACTIVISM ON MEN'S ISSUES

Peter Wright



ABSTRACT

Debates over the potentially damaging effects of transgender individuals' participation in women's sports, as well as hormone treatments for "transgender children," have dominated public discussion on the merits of transgender identification. This focus however leaves out many other areas of life in which trans individuals participate. The following article explores further contexts in which trans activism may provoke a tangential but potentially positive effect on men's access to social support, participation and greater life options.

Keywords: activism, male, men, men's issues, transgender

Equalities legislation dictates that it is illegal to discriminate against social participation of individuals based on their chosen gender identity. A notable result of such legislation is the increase in the numbers of trans women participating in women's sports, a participation that redefines traditional notions of gender, and traditional sporting conventions based on them. Trans women can now be seen winning first place awards over their female-born competitors in fields such as wrestling, mixed martial arts, mountain-bike riding, track running, weightlifting, netball and more.

The displacement of sex-based categories has provoked a chorus of frustrated social commentary expressing concern that trans-inclusion ensures these individuals will unfairly dominate the podium in female sports, thus resulting in a disenfranchisement of (biological) women's opportunities to achieve status and awards on a level playing field. The material differences, say critics, that make mock of traditional competitor classes based on weight, height, strength, speed and so on, can be reliably differentiated based on a competitor's sex – and so should be.

Generally speaking, women-born women (WBW) have been vocal in their opposition to the trend, along with trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERF) and cultural feminists who have been particularly virulent in their opposition to the inclusion of male-born women in female sports – this due, they say, to women's lack of sexual safety in sports locker rooms and showers, and due also to the physiological advantages trans women possess in the sporting arena. Some critics claim trans women are still biological males who may be sexual predators in potentiality or in actuality, and that their only interest lies in traditional masculine forms of domination over female competitors.

These popular talking points, however, are far from providing a full picture of the impact of transgender activism on traditional gendered boundaries. Leaving aside debates over the wider merits of transgender ontology, I will for the remainder of this article focus on the disruptive and indeed *disintegrative* effects of transgender activism on traditional gendered privileges enjoyed by women. While it is reasonable to challenge the deleterious effects of trans activism in the sporting arena as mentioned above, or to denounce the advocating of extreme medical interventions for children thought to be trans-gendered, trans activism can otherwise prove to be of benefit to men and boys in certain contexts which I describe below.

With a few notable exceptions, social and mainstream media commentators are allied with women's frustration in the sporting context. But what about other contexts in which women have enjoyed exclusivity or privilege, such as enjoying the lion's share of public funds for medical issues such as breast cancer (over comparable male health issues); domestic violence protections and associated housing supports; exclusive political bodies tailored to addressing women's needs alone; and free 'women only' legal assistance? These, and many other social issues are where the levels of sympathy expressed over women's disenfranchisement might be less enthusiastic, and indeed less deserving.

Before we go further, we need first to reflect on where the rise in trans activism began, which takes us back to second and third wave feminists who championed the breaking down of gendered barriers which they believed to be based on oppressive and arbitrary social constructs. By removing these barriers for women, and by extension for smaller satellite minorities who might serve as mascots to the feminist cause, feminists imagined that a utopic social order would ensue characterized by unrestricted participation and so-called inclusiveness. Within this worldview, if someone presumed to exclude women or indeed any other satellite demographic such as LGBTI people or ethnic minorities from the banquet of life, then he or she was clearly a bigot.

Fast forward to the present day when the feminist dream of unlimited participation for minorities is being realized – realized not so much by the white, Anglosphere feminists who set the project in motion (and who have long enjoyed unprecedented participation), but by those very minorities who are now taking the originating feminists to task. Women of color feminists, gay, lesbian and transgender individuals are now asking their former cis white feminist saviors to sit back, shut up, and share some of the power they have long accreted to themselves.

For some feminists the newfound access and participation wielded by minorities strikes as a veritable Titanomachia, with these individuals usurping the formerly exclusive place of cis white feminist women and thus triggering the reactionary growth TERF or "gender critical feminism" to drive the now threatening, polymorphous perversity of trans individuals back into repression (Berry, 1982). Said differently, the inclusion of trans and other people in women's traditional domains of privilege tends to weaken Anglosphere feminist hegemony, and elicits a hostile response that has been referred to as *aggrieved gynocentric entitlement* (Gouws, 2018;

Wright, 2019).

In fairness, a degree of aggrievement appears reasonable in the context of sporting competitions where women-born women are being forced to compete against male-born women. In *other* domains of female exclusivity, however, the aggrievement is self-inflicted (insofar as it arises from the feminist philosophy of inclusiveness), and is also a necessary part of relinquishing hegemonic gender privileges that should be equally accessible to all people – including men and boys – in an equitable society.

Advocates for men's issues have been more ambivalent about the results of transgender activism. On the one hand they tend to agree with the unreasonableness of biological women being forced into athletic competition with trans women – and they also tend to abhor needless experimentation on children with surgeries and hormone treatments designed to make children's bodies align with perceived transgender identities. On the other hand, men's advocates may find some value in instances of trans women breaking down gynocentric barriers that they have proven impotent to breach during the last 200 years of men's advocacy (Wright, 2017). For example, attempts to exclude trans women from various activities or privileges has led to protests and sometimes legal action against women's services. Examples of exclusive female privileges include domestic violence services, emergency accommodation, elite female-only gym and exercise clubs, legal services, and so on. Moreover, some legal actions have led, often inadvertently, to women's groups being ordered to open their services to not only trans women, but also to men and boys – with the threat of de-funding or further lawsuits for failure to comply with the spirit of anti-discrimination legislation. Four examples from the current year (2021) are given below as evidence of transactivism-induced male inclusion:

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES BECOME GENDER NEUTRAL

Successful challenges to discriminatory services for female-born victims of domestic violence are becoming increasingly common, with unwillingness to comply with equalities legislation leading in some cases to loss of funding. These challenges are frequently launched by (or on behalf of) trans activists, and such activism has sometimes resulted in men being able to access services for the first time (Leo, 2021). Such penalties apply also to free legal services offered exclusively to female-born victims of domestic violence (Wong, 2021).

HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICES BECOME GENDER NEUTRAL

Some debate has occurred regarding the need to include trans women, and LGBT individuals, in housing supports previously enjoyed by biological women alone. These have traditionally included crisis accommodation and housing for low income and socially disadvantaged women. Discussions regarding equal access for trans women have included mention of men's need for access to these kinds of support, as evidenced in a recent court decision in Andhra Pradesh, India. In that instance it was determined that the "100% for Women" housing policy of local Government was unconstitutional because it discriminated against both transgender individuals and men. (Pathak, 2021) In such cases one wonders if men would have gained any access to women's services were not for the prior work of trans activists.

ENCOURAGING THE RECOGNITION OF "FATHER'S MILK"

As a result of activism aimed to secure parental rights and recognition of trans individuals as fully involved parents, the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine has issued guidelines that suggest employing such terms as "chestfeeding," "human milk feeding," "parent's milk," and "father's milk," to promote what it calls "gender-inclusive language," and to do so in place of the exclusionary practice of linking infant-feeding only with biological mothers. (Richardson, 2021) This discussion may seem foreign to readers unfamiliar with transgender concepts and experiences; however, the revised infant feeding guidelines break down petrified gynocentric structures that helps to render it of value to men and men's advocates: specifically, it de-genders the infamous "tender years doctrine" that has long afforded women hegemony over the childcare domain while dis-empowering men in the same sphere. (Hartenstein, 2016)

This hegemony over the childcare sphere and its alienating consequences for father involvement (particularly in the event of parental separation) has been a problem since at least the time of English barrister E. Belfort Bax who in 1896 wrote the following about the results of child-custody battles in his time:

Nevertheless, fundamental and necessary as the rule [of a father's-responsibility to his children] may be, the pro-feminist magistrates and judges of England are bent apparently on ignoring it with a light heart. They have not merely retained the old rule that the custody of infants of tender years remains with the mother until the child attains the age of seven. But they go much further than that. As a matter of course, and without considering in the least

the interests of the child, or of society at large, they hand over the custody and education of all the children to the litigant wife, whenever she establishes –an easy thing to do– a flimsy and often farcical case of technical “cruelty.” The victim husband has the privilege of maintaining the children as well as herself out of his property or earnings, and has the added consolation of knowing that they will be brought up to detest him.

Even in the extreme case where a deserting wife takes with her the children of the marriage, there is practically no redress for the husband if in narrow circumstances. The police courts will not interfere. The divorce court, as already stated, is expensive to the point of prohibition. In any case the husband has to face a tribunal already prejudiced in favour of the female, and the attendant scandal of a process will probably have no other result than to injure his children and their future prospects in life. (Bax, 1896, p.16)

While the language change gives a nod to trans men who may produce milk from biologically female breasts, it obliquely acknowledges that people other than biological women can nurture and comfort infants with milk. This should come as little surprise to a civilization that has bottle fed infants for at least 7,000 years with various kinds of animal milk (Gannon, 2019; Dunne, et.al, 2019), allowing men in both the past, and now, to fully participate in infant care. The language change thus helps to formalize inclusion of trans women, *and* biologically male fathers with recognized social value. In another sense it provides an acknowledgment of what has long been the case: fathers as actively involved in infant and child care.



Figure 1. Terracotta infant feeding bottle, Italy, 4th century B.C.¹

¹ Terracotta feeding bottle, *Wikipedia Commons*, donated by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

THE VITRUVIAN FACTOR: MALE-BORN WOMEN ENTERING, AND WINNING, BEAUTY CONTESTS

One arena not suffering from the disproportionate competitive advantages of bodily strength is beauty contests, in which trans women have recently competed with, and even bested their woman-born competitors (Staff, 2021; Gilmore, 2018; Reporter, 2013; Hall, 2010). Popular belief holds that biological women are generally more attractive than men, thus endowed with superior aesthetic qualities by the fortunes of an XX chromosome. That consensus holds that while *some* rare males fare well in a contest of good looks, males will generally fall short of the bone structure and other qualities of the female aesthetic, thus reinforcing the popular trope of Beauty and The Beast in its varied guises. The oft-lamented beauty myth (Wolf, 2013) with its expectation of female attractiveness has as its binary opposite an assumption of male unattractiveness – males as stiffs in suits, appropriately topped with a castrating crew-cut.

Male-born women entering or winning beauty contests has invited a revision of these assumptions, and perhaps a re-connection with classical images of male beauty; the marble David, Vitruvian man, the Vikings and Romans growing long hair and combing it before going into battle, the beauty of Adonis admired even by the gods. The attractiveness of male teeth and smiles, the eyes, cheeks, long hair, tanned limbs – male-born beauty sufficient to hold its own in attracting the proverbial gaze. These are the men of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*, hardy, clean, and deserving of poetry.

If beauty represents raw power (Friday, 2014), trans women are succeeding in breaking down cultural conventions and teaching us that it need not remain a hegemonic power belonging to one biological sex. Such a change in perception, however, has not come without a degree of aggrieved entitlement from women-born women, who are now seeking and enact bans on trans women entering future beauty contests (Mellor, 2015; Herron, 2019). Such are the high stakes of gendered customs, with trans activists shaking up the calcified beauty conventions we've grown accustomed to and, perhaps, leading to some benefit for men and boys in the realms of aesthetic self-perception and yes, social power too.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Terracotta_feeding_bottle_MET_DP1280.jpg

CONCLUSION

Transgender identity remains a binary perspective, with the twist of colonizing those cherished social customs that came to be associated with biological sex. The usurpation of those sexed privileges, along with women's aggrieved entitlement response to trans women's infiltration, is providing insight into social structures that society has heretofore taken for granted.

The practice of misandry, involving shaming narratives against males (Nathanson & Young, 2001), has been deployed against trans women by gender critical feminists and others claiming that trans women are simply perverted males, comparable to most other males whose goal is to domineer women's spaces with an intent of sexual subjugation. Surprisingly, trans women are proving less vulnerable to these misandric narratives in terms of being canceled, perhaps a result of the *woman* identification of trans-women which offers cultural protection because any attempts at attacking female identity would be, or rather *are*, misogynistic – essentially a cultural taboo.

In giving this brief analysis of trans activism I hope to have demonstrated that the associated shifts in language and customs are affording some unintended, small, but clearly recognizable benefits to men and boys. The degree to which trans activism might detract from or otherwise assist men's issues is yet to be fully understood, with such activism being very much in play with many consequences as yet unknown. We can however draw the preliminary conclusion that over the last century our framing of gendered customs has become increasingly captured by a gynocentric turf war between traditional women, and progressive feminist forces (Wright, 2020), with trans activism being one of the few novel forces that are actively working to disrupt it. Time will tell if the melee opens up more, and better options for men.

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