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## PREJUDICE AGAINST MEN: THE NEW FOCUS OF THE MEN'S MOVEMENT

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### Abstract

*The issues facing men and boys have finally begun receiving attention. An important step to continue this positive momentum is focusing the discussion of men's issues around a singular theme: men's issues should be framed from the perspective of ending prejudice against men. This paper describes the benefits of unifying discussion around a common theme and the consequences of allowing men's issues to be framed by those who are not advocates for men.*

**Keywords:** antimale, male, men, misandry, prejudice

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, support for issues affecting men and boys has grown extensively through the use of social media. Male-centred perspectives and compelling information from key publications are being disseminated online by those with large audiences. Social media has removed the gatekeeping function to which mass media outlets have traditionally been privileged. The public now has a greater chance of being exposed to issues that affect the lives of men and boys. Consequently, the men's movement has grown in popularity and scope.

As this momentum continues to grow, a cohesive focus to guide the direction of the men's movement should be developed. Without a clear focus, topics affecting men can appear disparate and unrelated. When discussing men's issues, advocates tend to enumerate long lists of male suffering. For example, the high rates of male suicide, incarceration, combat fatalities, and homelessness are often highlighted. However, a unifying explanation is not applied to all these circumstances. Legalized discrimination through military conscription and male circumcision are poignant topics. However, at times they are mentioned only as a rebuttal of concepts such as male privilege. The unfair treatment of men by family courts and domestic violence shelters has readily been attested to by those working in the field. Unfortunately, the blame for this bias is often placed on male victims themselves.

## FOCUSING ON PREJUDICE AGAINST MEN

I propose that all men's issues should be framed through the perspective of *prejudice against men*. When identifying a focus to direct the men's movement, it is important for the culprit behind the many inequities and disadvantages men face to be accurately labelled and directly called out. However, the terms prejudice and discrimination are rarely mentioned regarding men's issues. Discussions on these issues vary in their objective based on the perspectives and political agendas of those raising the topic.

Focusing advocacy for men on the prejudice and discrimination they experience has several key benefits; here are five of them. First, it frames the suffering men experience through a singular lens. When a common theme is woven across the many examples of male suffering, a recurring story emerges. Learning more and more about the forms of prejudice men face creates a



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compelling argument. While many individuals are familiar with distinct examples of male suffering, they often do not see them as related.

Second, the cause of men's suffering is clearly identified. The disadvantages that men face are the direct result of prejudice against them. Pervasive, socially acceptable prejudice allows negative stereotypes to be openly expressed and unfair conditions to persist. It is crucial that the prejudice which underlies each example of male suffering be highlighted. In fact, it is this prejudice that transforms an instance of suffering into a form of injustice. It is the subjecting of an individual to harm due solely to their group membership that is immoral.

Third, identifying men as the targets of prejudice is empowering. All the justifications and denials for the misogyny men experience are cleared away. Men are told in no uncertain terms they are being discriminated against. That is a clear cause to fight against. Prejudice is universally accepted as immoral. Asking to be free from prejudice is seen as a just cause. When men know what they are fighting for, they are empowered to stand up for themselves (CNN, 2012).

Fourth, maintaining a consistent theme helps direct discussions on men's issues towards a productive goal. For example, military conscription is often raised as an example of negative treatment towards men. However, the reason for which this fact is cited is often unclear. For instance, when men are accused of benefiting in every situation through claims of male privilege, phrases like "what about the military draft?" are a common rebuttal. In this case, the individual's view on military conscription is unclear. The objective is only to deny the existence of male privilege in all aspects of life. However, the larger issue of the prejudice behind conscripting only men into military service is overlooked.

Finally, the framing of men's issues must be determined by advocates for men themselves. The causes of male suffering should be outlined by those who understand the male experience. The solutions put forth should serve to seek justice for men and support them in reaching their own goals. However, when men's advocates do not set the tone for discussion, misogynist explanations are put forth in which men are blamed for their own suffering. Furthermore, the solutions pushed forward may seek to undermine men's autonomy and further silence them.



## MISREPRESENTING MALE SUFFERING

In the absence of framing men's issues in terms of prejudice, two broad causes for male suffering are usually attributed responsibility. First, opponents of the men's movement blame men for their suffering. They claim men control all aspects of life and consequently bring suffering upon themselves. They also construe a negative view of masculinity as responsible for inequities men face. These opponents may also reframe instances of prejudice as choices men make themselves. For example, male victims of domestic violence are often blamed for society's denial of their existence through accusations that the victims don't speak up for themselves. Of course, when victims try to speak out, they are ridiculed and denied. The silencing of these victims is framed as men's choices to remain silent. The absence of a well-known, consistent, and clear explanation for male suffering provides opponents of the men's movement with space to blame men themselves.

Second, advocates for men do not always present a cohesive thesis or objective when discussing male suffering. As noted above, examples of men's issues may be brought up in rebuttal to claims of male privilege or the effects of the patriarchy (British GQ, 2018). These discussions can leave the listener unsure what to take away from the debate and may appear like a battle of which gender suffers more. Similarly, academic publications that identify instances of male disadvantage tend to attribute responsibility to benign psychological or social forces. The authors usually avoid labeling men as experiencing prejudice. For example, a seminal work, based on six experiments spanning three countries, found that participants consistently denied victimhood to men who were harmed and projected victimhood onto female abusers. However, the authors did not label their findings as prejudice. Instead, they stated "women more closely match the cognitive prototype of victim than do men" (Reynolds et al., 2020, p. 123) and "men more closely fit the cognitive prototype of perpetrator (Reynolds et al., 2020, p. 122). They describe findings of clear and pervasive prejudice against men as "moral typecasting." This type of benign framing may be due to the knowledge that labelling their results as prejudice against men will impede the publication of their work.



Furthermore, when researchers who are not advocates for men find evidence of prejudice and discrimination, they bury their findings in a brief summary of correlational data. It is often the case that authors who find evidence of prejudice against both men and women highlight only the female examples, and reframe the male examples as neutral (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994). At other times, male victims of violence and abuse are simply excluded from research, even when they occur in equal numbers as female victims (Coney & MacKey, 1999; Golden, 2014). In some cases this is intentional. At other times it may result from a lack of exposure to concepts through which to interpret men's issues.

## MOVING FORWARD

It is crucial that the public become accustomed to hearing the phrase *prejudice against men*. The more we hear about an idea the more conventional it becomes to our unconscious. This process is guided by the availability heuristic, which states that individuals estimate the probability of an event's occurrence based on the ease with which examples come to mind (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). The more a person hears about prejudice against men, the less strange of a concept it becomes. The more examples are labelled as prejudice against men, the more commonly a person will assume it occurs. As the concept of prejudice against men gains recognition, it will be addressed more and more by the media. At this point, frequency is replaced with importance. The concept of agenda setting demonstrates that the more media coverage a topic receives, the more likely it is to be viewed as important by viewers (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). When an issue is covered often and with emotionally impactful storytelling, the public tends to feel it is a pressing and pervasive problem. Now, through the proliferation of online video, mass media outlets no longer dictate what messages get the most air time. Coverage of prejudice against men can flourish from advocates themselves.

Moving forward, advocates for men need to speak with a unified voice and a consistent message. When bias is displayed by news reports or misandrist statements are made online, responses such as "if that was said about another group it wouldn't be accepted" have not been effective. Instead, the news reports and statements should clearly be labelled as prejudice. Even if they are not pulled, they will be recorded in people's minds as an example of prejudice against men. When sitcoms and commercials portray men as selfish buffoons, asking "why are men



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depicted this way?” invites justification and trivialization (Chambers, 2016; MacLean, 2017). The portrayals should be called out as prejudice so the objective of highlighting them is clear.

When the video of a woman assaulting a man is posted online and garners ridicule of the victim, criticisms often include “this wouldn’t be allowed if the roles were reversed.” While true, this critique does not highlight the reason the video is harmful. Denying victimhood to men suffering abuse is discrimination and trivializing the harm they experience is an example of prejudice. Advocates should clearly state that physical and verbal abuse against men is being encouraged by prejudiced videos and biased reactions such as this.

When a man is compelled into physical hardship or obliged to sacrifice his personal safety in place of a woman, pointing out that “I thought women wanted equality” does not evoke sympathy for male suffering. Catching someone in a hypocritical bind does not save men from mistreatment. Social norms that tell men their comfort or safety is worth less than a woman’s must be definitively declared as prejudice. When men are compelled, against their personal choice, into these situations, they do not have to comply.

When domestic violence perpetrators are referred to simply as *men* and victims of assault as *women*, responses such as “men can be victims too” often invite disdain. The incorrect assumption that men are rarely victims of violence encourages people to brush-off criticism of gendered terminology. When domestic violence shelters exclude male victims or are named Women’s Shelters, complaints that male victims are overlooked tend to be dismissed. Deniers claim that men can find somewhere else to go or may be allowed into a women’s shelter. Instead, these should all be labelled as instances of discrimination. It is prejudiced to use the term women as synonymous with abuse victims and, according to federal law, it is discriminatory to provide resources only to female victims (U. S. Department of Justice, 2014). Regardless of the opposing individual's resistance, this must be the consistent message on the topic.

## **WHAT DO MEN'S ACTIVISTS WANT?**

Both those in support of, and those opposed to, men’s causes are asking “what is the point of the men’s rights movement?” In some cases, it appears to be attacking feminism. At other times, it involves lists of examples of male suffering. However, many still ask “what do they want?”



I believe the objective should be to end prejudice and discrimination against men. To that end, every instance of unfair treatment should be labelled as such. The familiarization and education of the general populace on the many forms of prejudice against men will help the men's movement evolve into a generally accepted cause of humanity.

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