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NEW MALE STUDIES – AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

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INTRODUCTION

Issue two of *New Male Studies: An International Journal* for 2022 includes examinations of topical concepts such as the demographic transition, male disappointment, prejudice against men, and toxic masculinity. Solutions to the problem of thwarted masculine affirmation include gender equalism, healthy identities, and male-framed approaches to men's issues. The seven contributors offer scholarly articles, analysis and opinion pieces, a book review, and a photographic essay.

The first of two articles in this issue, Steven P. Moxon's investigation into the sex-influenced roots of "the globally ubiquitous demographic transition" (abbreviated as DT), presents the reader startling evidence of the complex nature of sexual-and-social affect. Moxon argues, "those who hold DT to be a multi-factorially complex cultural phenomenon, elusive as to locus or level of causation, are obliged to consider that the logic of evolution dictates that all necessarily arises out of biology." Furthermore, he notes, "any and every evolutionary elaboration, not least a facility to engage in culture, functions to feed back to fine-tune and reinforce the very biology that gave rise to it. Otherwise, there would be no basis for such facility to have evolved in the first place." This implies, "it is easy to see what would not work: to try to counteract the problem DT poses of adverse support ratios of workers to non-workers by population replacement through immigration is counter-productive, as this actually still further intensifies DT, so will exacerbate demographically driven economic implosion." Moxon speculates, "if a much greater proportion of the population is either obliged to or comes to realise again profoundly the value of remaining close to family and community roots, perhaps a

significant difference could ensue."

Rob Pluke's article, "Fathers and sons: Disappointment, power and powerlessness." argues that "analyzing fathers' responses" to their disappointment concerning their sons "provides important insights into what power actually feels like for a father who loves his son." Pluke suggests "practitioners need to help fathers see and value the various ways they can draw close to their sons or 'be' with their sons, in the absence of shared activity."

In his analysis-and-opinion piece, "A reminder of what gender equalism is all about," Tim Goldich observes, "Our world is not a *patriarchy*: it is a *patrimatrisensus*—a male-female consensus." He explains that this consensus occurs because, "gender equalism proceeds from the premise that the sexes have always been equal—not the same." Goldich suggests that if we are to understand "Woman and Man as equal partners in the human system," it would be "possible for women to get the respect they're starving for and for men to get the love they're starving for."

Aman Siddiqi argues, in "Prejudice against men: The new focus of the men's movement," since "issues facing men and boys have finally begun receiving attention," the ensuing "positive momentum" could be continued by "focusing the discussion of men's issues around a singular theme: [...] ending prejudice against men." Siddiqi also explores the adverse "consequences of allowing men's issues to be framed by those who are not advocates for men."

Jerome Teelucksingh's "The illusion of toxic masculinity," suggests that, "various theories, models and terms associated with anti-social actions of boys and men need to be questioned" because "some are unscientific, and others promote a false and negative image of masculinity." Teelucksingh argues that toxic masculinity and similar concepts, "create a confused generation of boys and men who are reluctant to express themselves and realize their full potential."

Paul Nathanson reviews Anthony Esolen's topical *No apologies: Why civilization depends on the strength of men*. Nathanson declares, "this is not an academic book and

therefore does not require an academic review." He describes the book as "a cri de coeur," one deserving "a response that is at least partly both subjective and emotional." In addition, he acknowledges his "profound ambivalence over what this book says" because he "agrees with Esolen's general thesis" but "deplores his presentation of it." The resulting bipartite review offers its reader an edifying potted history of the "problem" of masculinity while faulting Esolen's tendency to "cherry-pick" his evidence and to "preach" rather than to argue. Nathanson argues, "both men and women, need healthy identities"; by this phrase he means "the ability to make at least one contribution (to family, community or society) that is (a) distinctive, (b) necessary and (c) publicly valued."

We are pleased to include another photographic essay by Jan H. Andersen in this issue of New Male Studies. Andersen describes these photographs as being, "from a larger experimental series of handhold long exposures in continuous light." They offer images that explore a visual tension between potential male energy and the masculine roles through which maleness expresses itself.

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 thoughtful work done by those who contributed to this issue.

Dennis Gouws
Editor in Chief

THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION IS ROOTED IN SOCIAL STRESSING OF MALES TRIGGERING EPIGENETICALLY INDUCED INFERTILITY OF EXOGAMOUS (FEMALE) OFFSPRING, TO COMPROMISE OUT-GROUP REPRODUCTION, FORESTALLING NATAL GROUP EXTINCTION

Steve Moxon

ABSTRACT

A hitherto unidentified underlying basis of the globally ubiquitous demographic transition is suspected from causality-testing economic models, problems with anthropological hypotheses, and the longstanding opacity of aetiology unrelieved by integrating theory from different fields. Given a newly found main factor of population density, there is an apparent biological basis that rather than out-breeding depression is likely the now-replicated finding of chronic crowding stress of male mammals epigenetically transmitted to female offspring only, triggering multi-generational fertility decline and aberrant reproduction-related behaviours. The mechanistic core is found in humans. It's adaptive in aiding natal-group survival of neighbouring-group hostility, through exogamous natal-group females severely compromising out-group male reproduction, without impeding that of natal-group males; this complementing apparent female clique-based facultative co-operative breeding.

Keywords: demographic transition, social stress, male, epigenetic, out-group

IMPASSE

There continues, as ever, to be little or no advance in understanding the profound decline in fertility known as the demographic transition (DT), first outlined almost a century ago by Thompson (1929). Considered globally ubiquitous (e.g. Lee & Reher, 2011), DT has always been theorised as essentially an economic phenomenon, currently most commonly in the form of *unified growth theory* (e.g. Cervellati & Sunde, 2013), which combines economic development with another putative root factor, emphasised by demographers, of falling child mortality. This last some now claim is the key driver (Mühlhoff, 2021; Ranganathan, Swain & Sumpter, 2015), though it's itself symptom more than cause. Aetiology in economics terms is strained by the heterogeneity of conditions in which DT takes place—any permutation of rich or poor, urban or rural—indicating the likelihood of a more profound underlying basis.

The lack of progress is despite a vast literature that is regularly complained of as being as messily contradictory as it is large (e.g. Shenk et al, 2013). There is "no agreement among researchers regarding the main cause" (Orekhov, Prichina & Shchennikova, 2019). It is "impossible to be precise about the various causal factors", is Frejka's (2016) conclusion, noting this confirms that of 70 years ago by Notestein (1945 and 1953). It cannot even be determined as to what *level* of explanation is primarily causative, according to Colleran (2016), nor the direction of causation (e.g. O'Sullivan, 2013), nor if putative causes are not instead *products* of DT or in a reciprocal relationship with it (e.g. Canning, 2011). Not only is there "no accepted theory of human fertility" (Leridon, 2015), and no single model, with instead "a great diversity" (Zavala, 2022), but no means of deciding between them, given "studies describe and quantify but don't explain", Elspeth (2021) complains. Vishnevsky (2017) goes even further, concluding that existing models "do not allow us to go beyond the descriptive level, and, in fact do not give reason to speak of a theory"; echoing Teitelbaum (1987), who criticised DT modelling as "notably lacking in such components of theories as a specifiable and measurable mechanism of 'causation'" (p421). The upshot, and confirming that modelling thus far has been woeful, is that none has proved to have any predictive value at all (Snopkowski & Kaplan, 2018).

With the quest to find a general aetiology all but stalled, it has given way to studies of particular instances—specific countries within certain periods (the great majority of papers now being published)—or appeals for more complex aetiology and/or to integrate approaches.

Complexity—*economic complexity*—is itself posited as a new factor by Innocenti, Vignoli & Lazzeretti (2021), and chaos & complexity theory is invoked by Erçetin, Ray & Sen (2019). Asking *what can we learn from evolutionary demography?*, Sear, Lawson, Kaplan & Shenk (2016) are unable to point to progress in unravelling complexities; only its prospect in demography taking a more evolutionary biological direction, that Morita (2018) hopes will incorporate behavioral ecology, evolutionary psychology and cultural evolution, in the hope of a "deeper understanding". There appears no less of an impasse in studying from a biological (evolutionary, or a cultural evolution) perspective as from the economic. It may be that indeed it is complexity that has precluded elucidation, but an apparent requirement for ever more theoretical elaboration is a telling sign in science that new, fundamentally different, simpler hypotheses are required.

THE IMPLAUSIBILITY OF CURRENT THEORY

A theory of fertility according to economic principles is inherently implausible. As Pritchett & Viarengo (2012) outline and decry, in economics not only are children regarded as mere *goods*, but *inferior goods* (goods for which demand declines with income); this deemed necessary to explain why socio-economic improvement is linked with declining fertility, given that the overall premise in economics is a motivation to maximise the acquisition of goods, in a cost-benefit analysis by a rational actor. Evolutionary psychology (not to mention common sense) shows decisively that no part of this premise is a basis of human behaviour or cognition. Resources (goods) are instrumental to having offspring, which last are (and are profoundly felt to be) the embodiment of their parents' futures. Children are in no sense goods. Neither is deciding whether or not to have progeny predicated on a child being an indirect means of acquiring resources; that is, envisaged as a potential acquirer of resources in their own right, on behalf of the parents.

In economic modelling it is taken that in precluding child labour the onset of schooling renders children a burden instead of an asset. It is even claimed that as "the generalized child price relative to the child quality price rose, the rising opportunity cost of education was as decisive for the transition as the parental shift to child quality" (Foreman-Peck & Zhou, 2019). Yet a claim that the association of schooling with declining fertility is causal is non-cogent in the very terms of economic modelling. In former times (and as currently in some parts of the world),

even when offspring were maximally exploited as labour they had no economic value for several years, until after middle childhood, and then could be of only marginal value as extra helping hands, either in the home/farm-based economy or in very-low-paid employment. It's by reason of the extra value it conferred to labour—even to child labour—that schooling became necessary, so as to prepare for the different, higher skill-sets required by a more technologically developed economy. Notwithstanding in that this meant children entering the labour market at an older age, in that they did so as more formal, better-paid employees, they thereby contributed significantly more to the family household. In this way, economic development likely actually facilitated fertility rather than precipitated the decline that is the foundational claim in DT hypothesising.

Hardly more plausible is a particular biological perspective that DT may be (straightforwardly) adaptive in there being overall a reproductive pay-off through a smaller number of offspring receiving much higher parental investment. It turns out this produces no more or actually fewer grandchildren and great-grandchildren (Goodman, Koupil & Lawson, 2012; confirming previous findings), and even with very high levels of economic development an anticipated bounce-back of fertility has not materialised (Gaddy, 2021). This is hardly surprising, as economically enhanced upbringing may bring to fruition but cannot actually improve offspring in terms of genetic quality or fertility, the basis respectively of female and male mate choice, which anyway is a zero-sum phenomenon, so that attempting to raise all in effect raises none. So, the conditions that give rise to lower numbers of offspring are likely to result in the maintenance of a lower rate of reproduction, rather than a longer-term uptick.

There has been a failure to establish even the simple cultural evolution hypothesis of kin influencing fertility decision-making—transmitting pro-natal ideation—that in its absence purportedly precipitates DT. Only "mixed evidence" (Stulp & Barrett, 2021). A review by Sear & Coall (2011) reveals merely a "tentative" link to fertility, and even then, this is of mixed direction – fertility may be either decreased or increased in any given set of circumstances, with different kin relationships often being opposed in their impact. In a further review of all studies, Mathews & Sear (2013) find at most only partial support, a very weak effect only, and (of particular surprise) no specific kin relationship as a predominant conduit—not even the female's mother-in-law, who has a very strong evolved interest in her son's pair-bond partner increasing her

reproduction. The data anyway is merely correlational, and they concede "an alternative explanation is that there is some *unmeasured common factor* which predisposes women both to remain close to their kin, and to have relatively high fertility". Also could be posited not presence or absence of some hitherto undiscovered factor that rather indirectly impacts fertility, but one that more directly undermines it.

A CLOSER LOOK AT CAUSATION

Attempting to discover elusive causation, economist-demographers have used sophisticated comparative tests across competing hypotheses. Shenk et al (2013, 2011) used *likelihood theory* as a basis of weighing and deciding even between models whose predictions are not mutually exclusive. In considering several putative principal drivers of DT—child mortality decline, the economic costs of raising children, the benefits of investing in them, and the transmission of low-fertility social norms—they uncovered multiple causal pathways, yet failed to identify a root aetiology. *Panel co-integration estimators* and *Granger causality testing* likewise reveal only a circular causality: Herzer, Strulik & Vollmer (2012) show that the fertility changes in DT are both cause and consequence. In their first footnote, they suggest an as yet hidden underpinning to this circular causality: "Nevertheless it could be that Granger causality (testing) fails to identify true causality. It could be that the co-integrated variables are driven by another neglected process" (Herzer et al., p367). In general, what demographers and economists have discovered may well be merely inter-related second-order processes consequent to an underlying primary cause hitherto entirely missed.

POPULATION DENSITY IS THE NEWLY FOUND (PROXIMAL) FACTOR

A recently emerging likely basis—that is, a proxy (indirect measure) of a basis—of DT is population density. De la Croix & Gobbi (2017) studied both developed and developing countries, and "find a causal relationship from population density to fertility such that a rise in density from 10 to 1,000 inhabitants per square kilometer corresponds to a decrease in fertility of about 0.7 children. The corresponding half-life for population dynamics is of the order of four-five generations". When De la Croix & Gobbi's data was subjected to a new, better statistical analysis focused on effect size, population density was shown to be a still stronger determinant by a factor of three (Sterck, 2019). A still more recent investigation of 174 nations, controlling for many variables, by Rotella, Varnum, Sng & Grossmann (2021), reveals the same "robust"

association both within- and between-countries. The initial finding of the phenomenon, seemingly ignored at the time, was by Lutz et al (2006) from a study across 145 countries, in a follow up of work in 2002 (Lutz & Quiang). Controlling for key social and economic variables, they found "a consistent and significant negative relationship between human fertility and population density" and "that individual fertility preferences also decline with population density".

As to what mechanism explains why population density seemingly is key, Rotella's team set store by an application of life history theory. LHT (cogently outlined by Ellis et al, 2009) posits a distinction between *fast* and *slow* life history traits; *slow* traits being later onset of puberty, older age of first sexual intercourse & first birth, and increased parental investment. *Fast* traits are held to be prompted by a *harsh* and *unpredictable* environment. LHT is seen to apply to DT in emerging benign conditions precipitating a *slow* life history and consequent falls in fertility, but there are major problems here. The environment attending early stages of DT might be considered to be the very sort of *harsh* and *unpredictable* conditions that would lead to not a *slow* but a *fast* life history: a giving way of profound socio-economic stability of extended-family based small-scale community to internal migration and insecure wage labour in relatively anonymous urban concentrations or new industrialised or agribusiness settlements. It might be argued that a benign and predictable environment emerges only later in economic development, after DT has already ensued, at least in its early stages; and even that a benign, predictable environment is itself in part the consequence of a wide adoption of *slow* life history traits. Such contradiction in conceptualisation is a general issue with LHT, according to Stearns & Rodrigues (2020), notably in determining what is and what is not (and instead the opposite of) a *harsh* environment, and what constitutes a *fast* as opposed to a *slow* life history.

In any case, outline in terms of LHT appears more descriptive than explanatory: a now time-honoured criticism of what is put forward as DT theory. Are the traits less cause than manifestation of a changed attitude to fertility, begging the question as to what is the basis of the changed attitude? And might a changed attitude to fertility itself be a by-product of—a second-order response to—reduced fertility? With fertility reduction being so profound, and fertility matters so central in biology, an underpinning biological aetiology has to be strongly suspected.

COULD ROOT CAUSATION BE OUT-BREEDING DEPRESSION?

Conceivably, as Helgason et al (2008) suggest, this could be out-breeding depression (OD): the well-known phenomenon across species that as genetic distance between sexual partners becomes progressively greater, genetic incompatibilities arise that lower fertility (reproductive output), eventually to the point of sterility, even non-viability. It is the general case, irrespective of species, that fertility measured against relatedness (consanguinity) is an n-shaped curve. Very close relatedness produces the opposite *in*-breeding depression (from the pairing up of deleterious recessive alleles), a degree of non-relatedness being optimal in producing hybrid vigour, but still greater non-relatedness may start to lead to OD.

Helgason et al show that fertility (children and grandchildren produced) indeed follows an n-shaped curve, peaking at an average level of consanguinity of that between third and fourth cousins, in marked contrast to closer relatedness—at the level of second cousins or closer—in which case fertility is decreased, as would be expected through in-breeding. Fertility falls off significantly and monotonically (steadily) with decreasing relatedness from the level of third to fourth cousins (a coefficient of relatedness between roughly 0.75% and 0.2%), and to an extent sufficient to explain the fertility decline seen in DT. The dataset is Iceland's meticulous genealogical records from 1800 to 1965, the period during which there had been a change from a rural to an urban society, when the mean kinship between partners fell by a factor of ten, to that of fifth cousins. Weller & Santos (2013), using data from Brazil, likewise find third cousins to be the level of consanguinity at which fertility is greatest, with a difference on average of almost one child between the progeny of related and non-related couples. Endorsing Helgason, Fox (2015) stresses the importance of cross-cousin marriage in a balance between in- and out-breeding he dubs *mediogamy*, that he finds to be the strategy common to humans, mammals, birds, fish and insects to optimise fertility. It may well be that the third-to-fourth cousins sweet spot of maximum fertility is a primary determinant of the ancestral maximum or optimal size of human groups and their fractal fission-fusion nature, as appears to be represented in *Dunbar's number* (e.g. and including a discussion of relatedness, Dunbar & Sosis, 2018)—especially given evidence against the hypothesis that this is due to a ceiling to the number of other individuals with whom an individual has the cognitive capacity to deal (Lindenfors, Wartel & Lind, 2021).

The problem is that albeit the data fits the theory in being n-shaped, it's a correlation, not a causal relationship. There is an absence of research clearly demonstrating OD in humans, or to show at what degree of unrelatedness it would or might become apparent. Owing to inappropriate ideological concerns (the fear of the possibility of providing support for racism) there is a complete dearth of research extending out of animal studies to humans, bar what is purported to be the first evidence of it, in 2007 (Meyer et al), and this may be criticised for relying on a particular interpretation of the data. According to Reich (2018), studies of inter-breeding between modern human ethnic groups have found no evidence of OD. In general (across species), Frankham et al (2011) point out that "empirical data indicated that populations in similar environments had not developed OD even after thousands of generations of isolation", and that whether or not sub-populations have been separated in the same or different environments is key. They predict low OD for sub-populations separated for less than 20 generations in similar environments. Although there are human sub-populations that prior to very recent mutual contact had been separated for vastly more than 20 generations in different, often very different environments, and with not insignificantly contrasting genotypes, these are along ethnic fault-lines, which have little relevance to most historical DT, as largely it took place within ethnically homogeneous populations. Yet major internal migration often over considerable distances attended DT, so OD has to be considered likely a significant or highly significant contribution to DT, even if for now it cannot be regarded as the primary cause.

SOCIAL STRESS AS ROOT CAUSATION

The merely correlational nature of the data could indicate some other biological mechanism. Most obviously the stress caused by what may co-occur with decreasing mutual relatedness of spouses: potential *crowding stress* simply from the close proximity and high number of others, as a consequence of greater social mobility through dislocation in employment patterns leading to urbanisation and increasing population density. Alternatively, or additionally, the general relative absence of kin—not merely lesser kinship between pair-bond partners—may be stressful either in itself or through its being proxy for something that is. Non-kin in comparison to kin do not clearly share interests, essentially are strangers, and in some respects at least are likely to provide competition, which is an additional dimension to proximity and number of others in considering the impact of population density. Rather than *crowding*

stress per se, therefore, it is more appropriate to consider more generally *social stress*. And with increased population density in mutual relative anonymity a permanent new global reality, any stress caused would be chronic, which is known to have far more adverse, often opposite impacts to stress that is merely acute, having different neuro-hormonal physiology (e.g. Musazzi, Treccani & Popoli, 2015).

Social stress or more specifically *crowding stress* is very well recognised in mammals and in fish, not least in its negative impact on fertility. There is a considerable literature on all this (that is beyond the scope of this review), including on the endocrinology of the impact on the mammalian female menstrual system, with human females being no different in stress causing reproductive suppression (Wasser & Isenberg, 1986). Interestingly, females are more susceptible to experiencing *crowding stress* from same-sex others, as, unlike for males, this is not a function of proximity but of total numbers (Brown & Grunberg, 1995).

For obvious ethical reasons there is far less work on humans than on animal models, though one particular scenario of ostensible *social* or *crowding stress* experienced by human non-kin in close proximity that *has* attracted research is that of co-wives in polygynous households (and their evolutionary homologues, polygynous gorilla females), who sustain significant, even profound negative impact on fertility. Stress-induced infertility is a principal theme of the findings by Tabi, Doster & Cheney (2010) in their investigation of the lives of co-wives. The stress they feel would be more severe still but for male presence: it is now thought that pair-bonding (originally in the form of polygyny) in apes evolved from the need for individual males to be placed between small groups of females to prevent intra-female conflict. [This also is beyond the scope of discussion here: for a mini-review and discussion, placing in context, see Moxon (2021).] Note that again, here we would seem to be dealing with what would best be dubbed *social* rather than specifically *crowding stress*, given the mutual competition among co-wives for the attentions of their shared high-mate-value pair-bond partner.

It is difficult to disentangle the different types or elements of *social stress*, and using mammal models as the basis of understanding human response to population density may be unwarranted with humans instead appearing to cope (de Waal, Aureli & Judge, 2000). Yet this is in terms of not reacting with aggression, which is a superficial appreciation. Social withdrawal is the chief response (Evans et al, 2000), as it often is in mammals. O'Brien (2009) concludes that

people become "psychologically aloof, while also being socially removed from many of their neighbours", leading to a sharp fall in pro-social behaviours, with ensuing anti-social behaviours. Gomez (2017), citing Gray (2001), claims that urban communities, notwithstanding attempts at behavioral and societal modifications, succumb "to the abnormalities occasioned by the experience of cognitive overload or the perception of crowding that follows as a psychological effect of absolute increases in population density" (p9). Watve (2012) claims that "today's unprecedented density of human population is a super-normal stimulus that could change human behavior as well as physiology substantially." Fletcher (2007) theorises that for individuals struggling with the stress of social interaction there is actually a ceiling beyond which it drives reduction in residential density. If this is the case, then for the very many with nowhere else to go, *social stress* levels may rise to seriously compromise functionality.

That *crowding* or more generally *social stress* likely is key is apparent globally in concentration of population in nodes rather than in a uniform distribution. There has been an overwhelming shift to urban living, but the ubiquity of population concentration is still more apparent in considering rural-to-rural migration, that in lower-income countries is far more common than rural-to-urban (Lucas, 2007); with male labourers relocating from subsistence to plantation agriculture, and moving village between dry farming and irrigated areas. This entails proximity to non-kin & strangers and increased population density. In Ghana, for example, rural-rural permanent and seasonal migration of men so as to send remittances home has been the predominant pattern (Primavera, 2005). This was evident several decades ago in Kenya, where 40% of all migration was rural-rural as against 33% that was rural-urban (Oucho, 1984). That split was 68%/25% more recently in Nepal, and similarly in India (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2004). Oucho argued that: "students of migration have shown unwarranted obsession with rural-urban at the expense of rural-rural migration in the developing countries" (Oucho, 1984, p123). Deshingkar & Grimm (2004, pp11, 20 & 21) point out that rural-rural migration is: "the least visible because such migration is usually missed by official surveys (through) the inability to capture seasonal and part-time occupations; covering only registered migrants; and … owing to scattered locations of sending and receiving areas".

THE LIKELY BIOLOGICAL ROOT CAUSATION IN EPIGENETIC TRANSMISSION OF SOCIAL STRESS

A particularly interesting feature of *social stress*, as researched in mammals, is that there are sex-specific effects: a distinct response in males but not females—and this is held specifically to be in respect of *crowding stress* (Laviola et al, 2002). There is paternal transmission to offspring over several generations of chronic variable stress (e.g. Rodgers et al, 2015) or chronic paternal social defeat stress (Dietz et al, 2011); and epigenetic changes within the brains of stressed male individuals (Hunter, 2012). Most profoundly and intriguingly—and again specifically, supposedly, regarding *crowding stress*—is the triggering of an epigenetic transmission to female offspring to produce physiological fertility decline and degradation of reproductive-related behaviours of great effect sizes; this being in turn further transmitted down the female line for at least another two generations (the male's f1, f2 and f3 female offspring) (Saavedra-Rodríguez & Feig, 2012). This has been replicated by Kong et al (2021), who created social instability so as to induce stress, and pinpointed the epigenetic mechanism as the methylation of CAT genes in sperm. Previous investigation of the mechanism shows it entails reduced levels in sperm of certain microRNAs (nucleotide chains transcribed from DNA that regulate gene expression) as the response to stress exposure, and that the same sperm microRNAs were likewise altered *in men* who had been raised in families that were abusive, dysfunctional, or both (Dickson, Paulus & Mensah, 2018), suggesting the mechanism is homologous. That is, it has been evolutionarily conserved, leaving it present in humans as well as in lower mammals: as affirmed in a review by Wilson & Wallingford (2021). Note that in order for the stress to produce a transmissable effect, it has to be chronic, and not merely acute (Fennell *et al,* 2020), which is what applies in the global great increases in population density and concentration in urban and rural nodes.

Further refining research of the phenomenon, (Manners et al, 2019) find that prolonged chronic unpredictable stress of adolescent males not only transmits specifically along the female lineage (to offspring and grand-offspring), but that there is a *protective* impact on male offspring, which is also trans-generational; with this being distinguished in such males from normal (unstressed) males by differentially expressed genes within the amygdala of the brain, altering certain signalling pathways. Further confirming that the depressive impact is on female offspring only, Mashoodh, Habrylo, Gudsnuk & Champagne (2022) likewise discover that there is an

opposite impact on male offspring. Whereas female offspring show increased anxiety and depression-like behaviors, male offspring conversely demonstrate *reductions* in anxiety- and depression-behaviors, and, moreover, *promotion of exploratory behaviour*. It would appear that in contrast to reproductive suppression of female offspring, for male offspring the same mechanism *positively promotes reproduction*.

AN ADAPTATION TO REDUCE OUT-GROUP THREAT

This clearly defined, remarkable and surprising mechanism, is initially a puzzle. If it is some sort of adaptation serving temporarily to strategically reduce reproduction (if such could be theoretically conceived), then why, if female reproduction is suppressed, is male reproduction *actually promoted*? Evidently it is not a population-reduction adaptation, at least not primarily, per se. It does not appear to be a maladaptive by-product of an entirely different mechanism; one that although itself adaptive has a deleterious parallel impact. Such an adaptation would have to confer enormous value if it were ever to have been selected to fixation despite all the other selection against it through its deleterious baggage. For this mechanism to be adaptive it would be assumed that it has to *increase* reproduction overall over some time-scale, but a more nuanced understanding is that selection pressure would be greater if, rather, or more specifically, it functioned to *forestall reproductive collapse, indeed local group extinction.* Note that there is no invocation here of *group selection*; either naive or as recently reformulated. The stale debate on that topic having resolved into several empirically equivalent theoretical positions, and not just multi-level selection, satisfactorily explaining evident mutualism. [See the referenced discussion in several of the present author's papers, e.g. Moxon, 2017.]

It might be envisaged that in times of severe environmental, ecological stress and degradation, temporary reduction of reproduction serves to avoid the complete exhaustion of local resources and thereby to avoid local extinction, but unless this were not universal—so as to allow *some* females to continue to reproduce—the mechanism would itself tend to cause the very outcome it serves to forestall. If anyway a temporary *complete* cessation of reproduction could be adaptive, this would not account for why male reproduction is not only unsuppressed but boosted, nor why females rather than males specifically are targeted.

The mystery is resolved by taking into account human female exogamy. Given that human females, along with those of many other species, mostly *marry out* (thereby preventing in-

breeding depression), then male to female epigenetically transmitted fertility reduction would impact mainly not on natal group reproduction but on that of those out-group(s) to which females are exported. Indeed, there is likely no impact on natal group reproduction, in that of the females who remain, most or all would be either of low fertility and don't reproduce (or do so minimally), or are those few retained by—and likely themselves the offspring of—higher status (higher mate-value) natal males. These males, in being high status, are themselves physiologically protected from the impact of stress, so do not produce fertility-compromised offspring: neither female targets nor male vectors. This is through glucocorticoid stress hormones in high-rankers (in comparison to low-ranking males) quickly reverting to a low baseline (e.g. Summers & Winberg, 2006), and the higher testosterone levels in high-ranking males leading to a decrease in glucocorticoid levels owing to mutual antagonism (Glenn, 2009)—presumably through testosterone blocking Type II glucocorticoid receptors. Furthermore, the afore-mentioned actual *promotion* of male reproduction by the epigenetic mechanism would actually *boost* specifically natal-group reproduction, given that males, unlike females, *remain* in the natal group.

The adaptive value of the mechanism now becomes apparent. As it impacts out-group but not natal group reproduction, it would be of great assistance in forestalling any threat of natal group extinction in the face of hostility from an out-group. Such hostility would be chronically stressful for males, and would exist and persist in any scenario in which there is a threat of natal group extinction, not least that from severe local environmental (ecological) stress and degradation. In this scenario, even if there is no threat initially from such an out-group, such a threat would ensue, given that environmental stress almost certainly would be a simultaneous major problem for both the natal group and any groups adjacent, obliging inter-group contest over dwindling resources (De Dreu, Gross & Reddmann, 2022).

Such inter-group conflict, as with other inter-group conflict scenarios, might tend to produce group-reciprocal reproductive suppression of females. Albeit to some extent asymmetrical according to relative group strength, the mechanism then would function also to bring about a more general population reduction, across groups, that is potentially adaptive if, again, it forestalls extinction of each group. And note that adjacent groups are anyway usually related, in likely being sub-divisions of a former single group, given human fission-fusion

sociality, so an *inclusive fitness* perspective is applicable. As it's a mechanism that in extremis would precipitate what it otherwise precludes, overshoot is always a danger, yet if even merely statistically it avoids natal group extinction more than it would occur anyway, then there would be selection pressure in its favour.

COMPLEMENTARY FACULTATIVE CO-OPERATIVE BREEDING IN FEMALE CLIQUES

The mechanism would complement what appears to be human female facultative co-operative breeding in the functioning of human female cliques (Moxon, 2021). As outlined by Powell-Lunder (2013), Wiseman (2016) and Harley & MacNeil (2017), these typically consist of four or five females, the most physically, that is sexually attractive (fertile) of whom is dubbed the *queen bee*. Rather than an alpha in a dominance hierarchy, she's a *first among equals,* exerting firm control over the others, who take pains to serve her on pain of expulsion, though they (especially the *deputy*, the second most fertile female) are biding their time and ultimately aspire to usurp her. The facultative co-operative breeding hypothesis is that in order to head off the distinct possibility of the extinction of the local group at times of local severe environmental, ecological stress and degradation (or when for other reasons there are impossibly limited resources), the *queen bee* either behaviourally and/or physiologically reproductively suppresses the others at least to some degree if not completely. They thereby become available to serve as alloparents, usefully expressing their otherwise redundant reproductive motivation. The *queen bee* then faces no competition (or less so) for resources, as she would if there were parallel breeding females. This helps to ensure that at least one couple per clique produces offspring and that they survive, instead of risking no offspring surviving from any female clique member. The natal group apparently features one clique (often referred to in US high schools as the *populars*) that according to fertility criteria is predominant, and it may be that in extremis only this clique—and, therefore, just one couple—is allocated a reproductive role, with the rest of the local-group females remaining barren.

Clique-based facultative reproductive repression by *queen bees* further reveals that there is no problem posed to natal group reproduction by the epigenetic mechanism herein outlined. To reiterate, any natal females who do not *marry out* tend to be polarised between those anyway who would not reproduce (low-fertility females) and those particularly earmarked for reproduction (highly fertile females, pair-bonded with the most high-mate-value natal-group

males). Given such males do not confer epigenetically-induced reduction in fertility to their offspring (because high-status males are protected from the impact of stress), then natal group reproduction is not compromised. Apparently, the reduced female fertility resulting from clique-based facultative co-operative breeding would work in tandem with the mechanism to epigenetically transmit fertility reduction to females who become out-group members. Both aid natal-group survival by restricting reproduction; one as a temporary strategic narrowing of reproductive output of the natal group, the other as a longer-term blanket imposition on out-group competitors.

CONCLUSION

The root cause of DT is most likely the herein outlined epigenetic transmission to females of *social stress* experienced by males as a result of either disproportionate presence of non-related others, or sheer population density, or both, causing physiological fertility decline and aberrant reproduction-related behaviour that together very significantly lower reproductive output. There are surely additional contributions from direct impact of *social stress* (on both males and females) and—albeit an uncertainty of impact ranging from barely significant to large or very large indeed—from out-breeding depression. But even if DT were this simple at root, its manifestation would be at different levels, in various second-, and third-order processes, physiological, psychological, behavioural and socialital, giving the appearance of an intractable complex chain and mesh of causation. Those who hold DT to be a multi-factorially complex cultural phenomenon, elusive as to locus or level of causation, are obliged to consider that the logic of evolution dictates that all necessarily arises out of biology. Any and every evolutionary elaboration, not least a facility to engage in culture, functions to feed back to fine-tune and reinforce the very biology that gave rise to it. Otherwise, there would be no basis for such facility to have evolved in the first place. [For a fleshing out of this key point, see Moxon, 2010.] There has to be root biological cause, and the truly remarkable mechanism here outlined is the clear favourite as primary.

IMPLICATIONS

Taking *social stress* and the epigenetic mechanism here outlined as key (and possibly also out-breeding depression) the upshot is that with the root cause of DT being biological rather than cultural, it's not clear what or if changes could be made to ameliorate it. That is, there is a

question as to what changes if any could be made to living space so as to reduce the sense of *social stress* for any given population structure or density. [It's an unwarranted assumption in any case that global population reduction from its current and projected extremely high, likely unsustainable level is undesirable.] It is easy to see what would *not* work: to try to counteract the problem DT poses of adverse support ratios of workers to non-workers by population replacement through immigration is counter-productive, as this actually still further intensifies DT, so will exacerbate demographically driven economic implosion. It may be that the social milieu that does not precipitate *social stress* in that it more resembles ancestral communities in terms of structure and size—likely importantly that they feature a sufficient presence of relatively consanguinous individuals and/or a sufficient absence of non-consanguineous individuals—is impossible to re-achieve in highly developed societies. However, if a much greater proportion of the population is either obliged to or comes to realise again profoundly the value of remaining close to family and community roots, perhaps a significant difference could ensue. There may already be data available to be able to consider these questions, and now that the very basis of DT can be appreciated (rather than just its complexity), attempts to answer them might now be made.

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FATHERS OF SONS: DISAPPOINTMENT, POWER AND POWERLESSNESS

Rob Pluke

ABSTRACT

Disappointment is associated with negative parent-child relationships. It is linked to fathers' expectations of what fathering is, or should be, and the emotional and relational density underpinning the hopes fathers carry. Analyzing fathers' responses provides important insights into what power actually feels like for a father who loves his son. Parenting challenges, like disappointment, provide opportunities for fathers to confront themselves and, sometimes, to change. Acknowledging these aspects is important for anyone wanting to understand, or work with men. Practitioners need to help fathers see and value the various ways they can draw close to their sons, or "be" with their sons, in the absence of shared activity.

Keywords: disappointment, fathers, masculinity, power, sons

INTRODUCTION

This article is based on a study that explored fathers' experiences of and responses to disappointment in their sons. I chose this topic because I wanted to give close attention to the kinds of things fathers expected or hoped for in their relationships with their sons. Also, and importantly, I was interested in the ways fathers coped when their hopes and expectations weren't met.

In sharing and discussing the results of the study, I want to highlight the kind of relational and emotional work men do in their significant relationships. I offer this as something of an alternate lens to much of the current work on fathering, which tends to foreground issues around masculinity and power. Of course such factors are important, but when they are the focus, men's personal and emotional experiences tend to be marginalized. And, as Seidler (2006) points out, frameworks that prioritize power give us little sense "of how men can change, or of how they might be engaged in processes of transformation" (p. 56). To get to these questions, Seidler suggests, attention needs also to be given to men's emotional lives, their hopes and desires, and the internal tensions they experience as men.

With this in mind, I turn to fathers' experiences of disappointment and difference in their sons. I think the following excerpts show something of the emotional and relational density underpinning the hopes fathers carry. I think, too, that analyzing fathers' responses provides important insights into what power actually feels like for a father who loves his son. We also see how parenting challenges, like disappointment, provide opportunities for fathers to confront themselves and, sometimes, to change. Acknowledging these aspects is, I believe, important for anyone wanting to understand, or work with men.

BACKGROUND

The problem of disappointment in the father-son relationship is a relatively neglected area of research. Previous studies show that fathers carry particular expectations of their sons (Nydegger & Mittenes, 1991; White, 1994), and Miller-Day & Lee (2001) suggest that sons may be especially affected by paternal disappointment. In fact, generally, disappointment is associated with negative parent-child relationships (Barber, 1996; Miller, 1995). Yet according to Schafer

(1999), while disappointment can be very difficult, it's actually a common and *necessary* aspect of relational life. For Schafer, disappointment can puncture our idealizations, and teach us to tolerate imperfection without diminishing our "capacity for love, hopefulness, enthusiasm and dedicated effort" (ibid. p. 1095).

Disappointment is, of course, linked to fathers' expectations of what fathering is, or should be. Previous research finds that middle-class fathers believe they should develop their children's abilities and character so that their children can enjoy future success (Kremer-Sadlik & Gutierrez, 2013). Consequently, fathers want to get involved in their children's school and sports activities, in order to teach their children important life skills (Kay, 2007). Perhaps obviously, this aspect of fathering has its tensions. Gottzen & Kremer-Sadlik (2012) find that 'involved' fathers have to strike a balance between pushing their children towards achievement, and nurturing their children regardless of their performance. This hints at the relational complications that keep disappointment in the mix. Indeed, Coakley (2009) finds that fathers tend to criticize their children's performances, and pressure them towards acceptable attitudes. Levant et al. (2018) have shown the harmful effects such expectations can have on sons.

The notion of acceptable attitudes points to expectations regarding masculinity, and in this vein, it's argued that father-son disappointment may be linked to the problem of difference. Certainly, from a social constructionist perspective, constructions of similarity and difference are central to doing gender (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). But notions of similarity and difference also underpin orthodox psychoanalytic perspectives on gender development, where the son's masculine identity is established via identification with the father (Benjamin, 1995; Frosh, 2012).

In terms of encountering difference, Benjamin's (1988) concept of *recognition* holds particular utility. It addresses the problem of accepting the independent mind of the other, and the challenge of "bridging-across-difference" (Frosh, 2010, p. 113). Recognition involves seeing the other who exists beyond one's fantasies and desires. It is akin to connecting or attunement with another, and so it is a vital ingredient of healthy parent-child attachment. For Benjamin, interpersonal recognition is a tenuous accomplishment. It exists in constant tension with destruction; the impulse to relate to the other as an object – an extension of one's fantasies and

desires. The challenge, for parents, is to restrain the impulse to control, or to demand, such that the realities of the child's experience can be recognized. Importantly then, there is a level of powerlessness inherent in recognition. It requires being receptive to the other, accepting who s/he is. This reminds us that there are real limits to a father's power, if he wants to enjoy a close relationship with his son.

METHOD

A homogenous sample of South African, White, English speaking, and middle-class fathers in two-parent families was selected. Participants were recruited through two sampling techniques; utilizing professional contacts, and via participant referrals (Kvale, 1996). Eleven fathers were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, with participants first being asked simply to tell the interviewer about their sons. Invariably, this opening prompt elicited rich reflections, which enabled further exploration of participants' expectations and experiences of disappointment.

The first stage of analysis involved a thematic analysis, which identified the main themes. The second stage involved more detailed analyses of extracts that were selected because of their pertinence and richness of data. Here, a psychosocial lens was used combining social psychological insights with psychoanalytic readings of the texts.

RESULTS

Five main themes were identified and these are presented below. For each theme, an extract is included to illustrate how fathers experienced and wrestled with the challenge of disappointment in their sons.

Theme one: Similarity and difference between father and son

In describing their sons, participants invariably compared their sons to themselves. This meant that issues of identification emerged as central to the challenge of fathering a son, with profound implications for the father-son relationship. Similarity was linked to the ability to understand the son, a like-mindedness, whereas difference was associated with perplexity. In turn, similarity was linked to bonding between father and son and the gratification of shared interests and activities, whereas difference was linked to disappointment, frustration, and the risk

of relational distance. And so two versions of similarity emerged: similarity of attitude, and similarity of interests. Similarity fulfilled men's expectations of fathering which, for some, coincided with performances of heroic masculinity (Wetherell & Edley, ibid.) where fathers could feel like a competent authority and guide for his son. Difference, on the other hand, was constructed as a disappointment that, in some cases, prompted a more reflexive and uncertain fathering.

In the absence of similarity, uncertain fathers had difficulty describing a clear basis for their relationships with their different sons. Some participants resolved this difficulty by taking up attitudes of respect towards difference, such that respect emerged as a common antidote to disappointment. Two types of respect were identified. Some fathers developed an adult respect for their different sons, where fathers suspended their wishes and worked to recognize their sons for who they were. Key to this process was that sons' differences were seen as acceptably masculine and so something with which the father could identify, recognize, and even admire. In other cases, positions of respect were more guarded, with fathers being more distanced and disinvested. Here, the father did not identify with the son's differences. Instead fathers moved to tolerate difference, but this coincided with withdrawal, which is a hallmark of disappointment (Zeelenberg et al. 2000). Of course, fathers could also vacillate between these two stances through one stretch of talk.

In the extract below, we see Jake working to relinquish his assumptions regarding masculinity, in tandem with accepting and promoting his son's different ways:

> *I also just used to worry that he would um... uh ... I used to worry sometimes that maybe he was just too generous, you know, I kind of wanted to - I wanted him to just sort of, just fight a little bit more. But then I started to think "but that's what you were like", you know. Everything I got I had to fight for. And I thought, you know, "I don't want him to have to fight the way I fought". But it took me a good while to kind of come to grips, you know. I wanted him to be – at one stage I almost wanted to toughen him up: "Hey I've gotta make him tougher now!" you know. And then I realized that I was slipping - you know - my thinking was slipping into some old thoughts (ah ok) and if I'm just confident - because to - you know - it's very easy - cos I've been a very conflicted individual, and you know, complex ... just because of perhaps how I was brought up. And everything for me has been just hard work... you know ... nothing at all has just fallen in my lap. I've had to grind and grind and grind and fight (mm)*

and when I was in the corporate world it was very competitive, you know, and you just, you know, you didn't sabotage those around you, but you didn't lift them up either. Because it was all about me and kind of - that was the world I was a part of.

And then I realized I don't want it to be like that, because there is another way, you know. I'm not always able to go, you know, "that's why the other way is better" or ... but I realize ... I look around and I go "Gosh!", you know, and I look at some of the great leaders in the world, who've been successful. They didn't go through life the way I kind of - in my - my thinking. So you know ... he'll be ok, you know. He's gonna be just fine hey. You know, he's – uh – grounded, he's kind, you know. Who's not gonna like a kind person? You know, me – I would – I would have probably taken advantage of people's generosity. And so, you know, in my mind I'm thinking people are gonna take advantage of his generosity (ja), you know.

And so, for a while, you know, I've gone through all these like – they're all me things, um, where a lot of my concerns have kind of come from. But for the most part I just know that um, uh, I'm comfortable with who he is, and I'm comfortable with the choices he's making now

Jake begins by saying he used to worry that his son was "too generous". But what does this mean? And why is generosity contrasted with "fighting"? It seems that what Jake has in mind is an *attitude*, a kindness or, more worryingly, a lack of assertiveness and competitiveness towards others. This contrasts with the masculinity Jake knows. His son is different. In response, and as a loving father, Jake moves to protect his son, both from a world where you have to "fight" and "grind", but also from himself as a "tough", competitive corporate man. So in a sense, Jake the father has to contain Jake the man. Jake has to try to keep part of his own masculinity at bay; to consign this to "old thoughts", so that he can continue to protect, admire and promote his son's different ways.

Yet it's not easy. It's "taken a little while". It hasn't been seamless, or without internal conflict. Jake has had to confront and contain an urge to make his son "tougher", and to resist "slipping back" into old and familiar ways which he established as a way of coming through his childhood and prevailing as a man. Recognizing his son involves seeing that there "is another way", but because this isn't a way that's implicit to Jake, he can't automatically or spontaneously father his son. Instead, he has too look to other mentor figures - "great leaders" who can serve as exemplars for his son. All the while, as the father, Jake has to contain anxiety and uncertainty ("but for the most part... I'm comfortable with who he is"), and to monitor, uneasily, the kinds of choices his son makes ("but for the most part I just know that um, uh, I'm *comfortable* with who

he is... and I'm comfortable with the choices he's making now").

Theme two: Making an Effort

Theme two focuses more closely on difference of attitude by exploring the internal states (Stern, 1985) or attitudes fathers wanted to promote or instill in their sons. Interestingly, although fathers were very reluctant to say they were disappointed in their sons, fathers, *were* prepared to express disappointment when their sons wouldn't make an effort. This was especially so when their sons had potential, but wouldn't use it. In this case, fathers actually felt right to express their disappointment. At the same time, fathers were very careful to separate effort from achievement, mainly to deflect the notion that they were indulging their own desires for success. Of course, fathers did want their sons to achieve, and it was evident that insisting on effort preserved fathers' implicit hopes for future success.

In some cases, the morality of effort was linked to issues of acceptable masculinity, with fathers wanting their sons to possess qualities like animal or killer instinct. This is evident in the extract below, where John struggles to know what to do as a father of a son who fails to demonstrate effort on the sports field:

> *I mean he's a brilliant-he could be a brilliant Rugby player, he um, and I don't - I don't push him. It's just not in my nature to push-push-push. And he's in the A team, but ... like, I've noticed that he lacks that animal instinct. I mean there are some kids out there who are just boom-boom-boom, always in the ruck, on the ball. An-I can see Sean, ugh just taking his time to get up, and looking around for the play, "Agh, I'll go over to where the play is". And I'm like "Sean...Go!" you know (laughs). And so yeah, I mean, then you wanna like kick him up the backside and say "Just don't waste this beautiful God-given talent. You're a big kid. You're strong, and you know, you could really ... I mean look at these other little kids that are not even - you know, three quarters of your size. And they're outperforming you! And look at your ab- at your God-given talent and ability". And I don't say this to him, because I wouldn't wanna, you know, like kill his spirit for it. So yeah, I mean you do. You get disappointed. I mean ... what do I do? How do I...?*

As John opens, we see how he's caught between recognizing and appreciating what is ("he's a brilliant"), and the enticing fantasy of who his son could be, if only he had a better attitude ("he could be *brilliant*"). In a sense then, the son can never do well enough, and the threat of disappointment constantly hovers over John's engagements with his son.

However, John quickly distances himself from being a pushy parent ("and I *don't* push him"). This suggests that the moment John gives voice to his idealized fantasies of success, he needs to defend against a domineering impulse, and this makes John anxious. So, John goes further; he disowns pushing ("it's just not in my nature") particularly of the insistent variety ("push – push – push"). John then points out that his son is "in the A team", which offsets his disappointment. However, ("but"), this is temporary. John has "noticed" that his son "lacks that *animal* instinct". The conjunction "but" restores a sense of dilemmatic tension: John does not "push, push, push", "but" his son lacks a crucial masculine quality that accounts for the gap between his performance and that of a "*brilliant*" rugby player.

John goes on to make unfavorable comparisons between his son and "some kids" who represent acceptable or ideal masculinity. These boys are "out there", physically assertive ("just boom-boom-boom"), tough, and goal driven ("always *in* the ruck, *on* the ball"). In contrast, Sean is passive. The way John sees Sean ("ugh, just taking his time") positions Sean as culpably passive and avoidant ("looking around for the play"). John then "speaks for" his son ("Agh I"ll go to where the play is"), so entrenching Sean's position as both indolent and "less than" his peers. This justifies John's disappointment, and so he wants to induce a more aggressive attitude in his son ("and I'm like '*Sean! Go!*' you know").

John then introduces an imaginary hostile father position which shames the disappointing son. Sean is a "*big* kid" but he is being "outperformed" by "other *little* kids", the shame of which causes John to "wanna kick him up the backside". John justifies his expectation by making it "God-given", which means that, as the father, he *should* get the best out of his son. So John tries to make his son excited about what could be. He wants his son to see that he's "big" and "strong", and that "you could really ...." This phrase expresses John's idealized fantasy which, because it is left unfinished, retains a fantastical allure that he wants his son to see and share.

However, because his son won't comply, John again shifts towards exhortation and shame. He compares his son to "other *little* kids" who are "not even, you know, three quarters of your size", but who are "*outperforming*" Sean. Thus, Sean's physical advantage is emphasized, which undercuts any excuse Sean may proffer for his passivity. Then, to underscore his righteous indignation and his son's culpability, John re-emphasizes the fact that his son's ability is "God-

given".

Following the above outburst, John withdraws from his hostile position ("and I don't say this to him") because of the awareness that he could damage his son ("I wouldn't wanna...*kill* his spirit for it"). The word "spirit" points to his son's vulnerability, whilst the word "*kill*" hints at the destructive capacity of the disappointed father. Nevertheless, by restraining his hostility, John remains disappointed and stuck with a dilemma: "I mean, what do I do? How do I?" John's son could be "*brilliant*" but he won't take up the right attitude, and if John tries to assert his ways, he risks both damaging and losing his son.

However, although John recognizes the possibility that he could damage his son, he is still the father who must get his son to comply ("what do I do?"). Recognizing his capacity to damage his son limits John's options, but it does not alter his fundamental project. John doesn't want to hurt his son, but at the same time he is captivated by the prospect of his son "*outperforming*" other boys: he wants his son to move towards real achievement. "How" to press towards the ideal takes precedence over recognizing and accepting difference. In this sense, remaining disappointed in his son's lack of "effort" preserves the fantasy. But one can also see how, in his disappointment, John is caught between what he wants and the guilt of pushing and then damaging his son in process.

Theme three: Mentoring

Mentoring refers to participants' desire to teach their sons, and guide them towards success. In line with previous research (Kay, 2007; Machin, 2015), mentoring was a key concern for this sample of fathers. Mentoring incorporated a cluster of hopes, which made it a primary site for disappointment. Mentoring preserved participants' fantasies regarding just what the son could achieve, and who the father could be, if only he would accept his father's ways. However, and importantly, mentoring also provided a forum for fathers to bond with their sons and, in many cases, to correct the disappointments fathers experienced in their own childhoods. Hence, in the face of disappointment, none of the fathers entirely relinquished the mentor position. Too much was at stake. Instead, participants commonly vacillated between just loving their different sons and reasserting mentoring positions. This kept hope alive. Here participants commonly warded off their disappointment by remembering that their sons were still young. This preserved the

hope that, in time, the son would turn to the father as mentor, and take up his ways.

One sees something of the emotional significance of mentoring in David's interview. Early on, David describes his own father as authoritarian and uninvolved – he "was there ... and I loved him", but he "did nothing" with David. Now, as the father David yearns to do things with his son. The problem is that David and his son are different. David is "sporty" but his son is not. This means that an amalgam of hope and disappointment is woven into David's encounters with his son. In the extract below, I ask David to describe some of his best moments as a father:

"And the best moments?"

Um... yeah, um... few best moments, I think. Some of which are, (ahem), teaching him something that he learns, like how to canoe... ummm and he listens and he gets it and he practices and, and he actually can paddle the thing that I can hardly paddle, you know (ha). Ummm teaching him things that he learns – wonderful! Yeah, teaching him "You don't bowl like that-you bowl like this" and I see him-all afternoon - bowling (laughs) at a tree or something, you know ... [begins to cry] ... (10 seconds)... (Yes, special hey) mmfh ... (12 seconds) ... Shoo .... Mmhm.... (6 seconds)... (really special hey) .... (8 seconds) (yeah)... (ok).... (13 seconds) Geesh ... mm ... shoo, digs up some emotions these questions!

They do... they do ... you're not the only one (mm) and uh, I suppose, it's just, we love these little guys so much hey... Yeah.

Yeah ... (6 seconds) anyway ... (3 seconds) managed to get through the last two

You did David ... You nearly had me going! (We both laugh)

Yeah .... Yeah ... Poor little guy

In the above excerpt, David associates "*teaching*" with his "best moment" as the father. His position as teacher is matched by a son who "*learns*" and "*listens*" and "*practices*". It's "this" complementary relationship between father and son that elevates this mentoring moment to a "best moment", where David is able to feel close to his son, and animated as the father.

This illustrates how significant and rewarding mentoring is for David. It also shows the vulnerability of the mentor position, in that the son holds the power to accept or reject the father's offering. When he is allowed to be the mentor, David can become the proud, enthusiastic father of the achieving son. His son can paddle a canoe that David "can hardly paddle". My response (*ha!*) indicates that I received David's invitation ("you know") to recognize his son's

suitably masculine accomplishment. This accomplishment strengthens David's sense of himself as father-mentor and it activates and strengthens the hopes he carries for his son. However, David's very enthusiasm points to the intense disappointments he has to contain, when his son doesn't or won't listen or learn.

There is a sense of pathos in the image of a non-sporty son bowling "*all afternoon*", just as his father has taught him. At this point in the interview, David becomes very tearful. Perhaps David is moved because this moment signifies hope revived. Perhaps too, as he recalls his son bowling "*all afternoon*", David is able to feel close to his son. The bond is palpable. It is evident that I have resonated with David's emotions, and I articulate this as having to do with a love that David and I both share for our children.

Yet something else is also going on. The discourse "digs up some emotions" for David, which suggests that he is displaying sentiments that are usually suppressed. Perhaps David's sadness is also prompted by his unconscious identifications with the son who bowls "all afternoon" because he so relishes his father's approval and affirmation. David's conclusion "*Poor little guy*" implies this: that his emotions are prompted by recognizing, and perhaps unconsciously identifying with a boy's efforts to please, and enjoy closeness with his father. This is the very closeness that the boy in David has been yearning for, and there is the sense that his own childhood sorrows are caught up *and met* in this mentoring moment. Perhaps too, as he imagines his son "bowling all afternoon", David realizes and identifies with the pressures his son experiences, and the lengths to which he will go, to please his father.

Theme four: Pushing

What does the good father do when he's confronted by a son who won't accept his agenda? As the above extracts suggest, this was a central dilemma for this sample of men. Does the father recognize and accept his son as different, or does the father assert his mind and his ways? All of the fathers worried about this, and none wanted to be seen as pushy. Partly this was based on fears of public censure – being seen as a bad father, but there was also real concern about hurting the son in the process of teaching him. Fathers tried to be encouraging, and the way this was gauged involved supporting what was deemed to be intrinsic to the son. This kind of thoughtful wrangling is evident in the following extract:

I think that the tricky part of parenting is to get that mix right, you know, between encouraging and pushing them (Yeah) to draw the line (Yes) you know, what is where. Because obviously we all want our children to do well, and we're proud when they do. Umm, you know I don't publicly push him, um ... I do encourage him. And I do try and do things with him. And try and show him through experience that um, certain practices lead to success and certain practices don't lead to success.

So for instance I - you know, if I was ...I used to run time trial with him once a week. And umm from that he gained a lot of fitness and as a result he did very well in the cross country season (hm!) at school (hm!), which then, you know he was able to see the benefits of training from ... and which now he understands and which I don't have to say anything to him. He knows and understands the benefits of training.

Umm, you know, there were times where he would have said "No I don't feel like running time trial" and I - I would say 'No. Come run. You don't have to race it – just run at your own pace'. But his natural competitive nature would take over and he's end up pushing himself (mm). So ... but I knew I had to just get him there in order for it to happen (mm) you know, and that...once he was there he would enjoy the experience (Yes, mm) of participating so.

And I think, you know, a lot of parents or people might see that as being- being pushy. But I think that's where a parent needs to get involved (mm) because children often don't - they like to do well, but they don't realize that in order to do well - you've actually got to put some work into it (mm, mm). So if you can get them to put the work in without them even realizing they're putting the work in, then that's great. I mean if you can make it fun for them (mm)

Nick begins by describing parenting as an admixture of encouragement and pushing. Pushing is there, but it's housed in encouragement. The phrase "don't publicly push" makes pushing a private concern, between father and son. In this way Nick looks to avoid the threat of shame, both for his son, and perhaps for himself. Instead, Nick looks to join his son, showing him "through experience" the way towards success. It's orthodox "side-by-side" mentoring that Nick has in mind.

Nick then gives an illustration. He joins his son in a weekly run, thereby giving his son the scaffolding to do "very well" at Cross-country. This leads to the son "seeing" and "understanding" such that similarity of attitude is achieved. Pushing is there, but at the same time, Nick tries to stay close to, or recognize, his son's reality ("just run at your pace"; "pushing himself"). As the father, Nick has to get him there "in order for it to happen". So, with some pushing from the father, the intrinsic emerges ("his natural competitive nature"; "he would enjoy the experience").

Nick also justifies his pushing by splitting his son's inner reality into contradictory "wants". As the father, Nick pushes past his son's inclination towards lethargy, and gets him to do something he doesn't want to do ("work"), so that another part of his son can enjoy the success he actually also wants ("they like to do well"). With the phrase "I mean if you can make it fun for them", Nick ends by containing pushing within playing, which suggests that he tries to make what he wants as the father, "fun" for his son.

Overall, Nick presents this as a successful negotiation of the pushing-encouraging "line". Nick does, however, have to contain some anxiety. He needs to defend against an audience who "might see this as pushing", and what he does do can't be done "publicly". Perhaps, to some extent, Nick realizes that, in the process of encouraging his son, the reality of his son's *reluctance* is negated (or "destroyed") rather than recognized. As such it lives on as an unacknowledged presence within his relationship with his son.

Theme five: Fathers, mothers, sons, and disappointment

How does the father position the mother in his responses to difference and disappointment in his son? In this sample, where similarity and mentoring prevailed, mothers tended to be placed outside the father-son bond. However, where difference and disappointment lay between father and son, fathers tended to feel more like the outsider, looking on at the mother- son bond. This mother-son bond was characterized by understanding, such that mothers tended to be seen as mediators between father and different son. As mediators, mothers represented an accepting and supporting kind of stance that offered a potential solution to the disappointed father. Participants tended to vacillate between taking up this accepting position and then distancing themselves as fathers who must get their sons to take up ways that were valued and recognizable to them as fathers.

Much of Craig's interview went towards describing his acceptance of his son's differences. Craig describes this as a "journey of mourning" where he "stands back" in order to let his son be. In the extract below, Craig shows how this contrasts with the mother-son relationship:

> *"So thinking about that would you say that umm that uh you have a particular uh function as a father that would differ from Sarah? "*

I think increasingly so hey ... and I think that is part of the dynamic because Sarah and I parent very, very differently hey. So I might sort of compensate for her in some ways as she does for me umm. But I'll – I would say uhh my/my current approach with Michael is just to kind of be that uhh parental gaze hey. Uhh and if I can make it more gender specific, that paternal gaze. I just almost feel my job's to pitch, watch and if he then if he invites me, then I'll participate up to the point where he wants me and then he'll fire me and I will go and watch again hey. Um but I seem to be doing a lot of watching of late I must say. Shoo

"Quite a restrained place to be?"

Yes hey! Uh, very restrained. Or being a sort of a-an appreciative audience when I am invited in an' he wants me to have a look at - you know - a drawing or how he's like - changed the pond around. Or how he's, you know, managed to catch a beetle or something stupid you know. Michael!

"And in that way it differs from Sarah- Sarah's role or the way that she does things (Yes!). So for instance Michael's going down the wrong road as far as you can think, but you will be restrained and Sarah's role will be different?"

Yeah Sarah will freaking hey. Sarah will be crapping on him and cajoling him and reprimanding him um but in her particular style that's not, I don't think, traumatic for the kids at all hey. I think that they quite like scrapping with her. They have lots of arguments, um sometimes I think, can get a bit disrespectful - I/ I hear coming out of my own mouth "hey treat your mom with respect" far more often that I would like to have to say um. But there again I think I have also realized that I can't mediate for Sarah and Michael. I've just got to let them have their messy relationship. So I think with me there is lots of restraint and respect, and with Sarah there's uhh a lot of mess and um boundarylessness. But it's also a good experience for him hey. He knows he is - he's deeply loved by Sarah hey... yeah....

Craig begins by making his restraint a counterbalance to his wife's parenting style ("I might sort of compensate"). Craig goes on to reiterate his position of distance and restraint, where the son is given agency ("if he invites me"; "he'll *fire* me") whilst Craig is conscientiously restrained and quite passive ("I'll participate up to the point where he wants me"). It's an attenuated kind of fathering, somehow incomplete. Craig accepts his son's negations of him as mentor father, but his repetition of the word "just" shows that for Craig, this feels incomplete. What appears to be missing is the gratification of identificatory love (Benjamin, 1988), where father and son delight in each other as similar, and the son follows his father into the father's world. In Craig's case, because of his son's rejections, he watches and waits. The conjunction "but" followed by the words "I seem to be doing a lot of *watching* of late, I must say, shoo" indicates that, as a father, "doing a

lot of *watching*" is both frustrating and limiting for Craig. He wants more.

Craig then supplements his "*very* restrained" position with that of being "an appreciative audience". Here, the "I" is consciously performing a father function that has to do with recognizing and appreciating his son's goals and interests. The phrase "or something stupid" signals that Craig is adjusting his attention towards his son's world – trying to attune – and that this activity is *not* personally gratifying for Craig. There is no real sense of father-son delight or enjoyment. This is more akin to the parenting experiences of early mothering, where there is an element of "self forgetfulness" (Hollway, 2007) for the sake of the infant's needs.

The emphasized "*Michael!*" follows after Craig has articulated his son's ways and conveys a mixture of love, appreciation - and vexation. This seems to illustrate Benjamin's (1995) point that recognition entails the pleasure of "contacting the child's mind", but that this requires encountering the difficult paradox "that "you" who are "mine" are also different, new, outside of me" (p. 35).

In terms of power, Craig occupies an interesting position. In one sense he is an authority figure who inserts boundaries of respect between mother and child. But from a relational perspective, he does not or indeed cannot impose his will on his son. The clue as to why this is, lies in the word "traumatic". Craig has the sense that he can't engage as directly or vehemently with his children as can the mother (who can "freak" and "crap" on her children), because he fears that, as the father, he would cause damage. So Craig's restraint is distinctly an act of protective love towards his different son. But it comes at a cost. Craig must contain the anxieties he carries for his son, and he must endure a kind of solitude as a father who cares for an independent minded son.

DISCUSSION

I said at the outset that I wanted to foreground the kind of relational-emotional work that men do in the process of caring for their sons, and I think the above extracts do this. I suggest that this internal work is not motivated by social notions of good fathering as much as it is by the love these fathers have for their sons. My argument goes like this: *because* these fathers care deeply for their sons, they want to help their sons achieve. For these fathers, loving means

promoting. However, caring deeply also means that there's an inherent tension to this relational arrangement, requiring psychological work in the father: I love you, and so I want to help you do well. But, I have to accept that I can't push you beyond a point without hurting you. And so, I have to yield (at least in part) to your will and your ways, so that I don't lose you. Hence, for loving fathers, raising a son incorporates managing the wishes, both conscious and unconscious, that the father has for his son. As Schafer implies then, disappointment should probably be seen as an inevitable and ordinary feature of the father-son bond, which means that the capacity to manage disappointment is very important for engaged and involved fathers. Again though, and contrary to much current work on fathering, the *relationship*, through experiences like ordinary disappointment, plays a key role in changing what fathers believe and how they behave.

This raises the centrality of mentoring to fathering, because this study suggests that it involves multi-layered hopes. Mentoring certainly represented a primary vehicle for these fathers to draw close to their sons, and it functioned as a launch pad for the powerful hopes and desires fathers had for their sons. Mentoring intentions were also nourished by the hurts and disappointments these fathers experienced as children, functioning as a (perhaps unconscious) context where these men could repair or replicate important aspects of their personal stories. Perhaps all this explains why, in the face of disappointment, none of these fathers abandoned mentoring. For them, to abandon mentoring was akin to abandoning the son, and perhaps even the project of fathering itself.

Now, because mentoring is loaded with hopes and expectations, it is a primary site for the challenge of disappointment. And so these fathers have to confront themselves and the biases they carry. As an involved and caring father, John has to work hard to contain a heady mix of "killer instinct" and the potential "brilliance" it could bring. Standing on the side of the Rugby field, John is suffused by masculine aggression, force and dominance. He senses that its expression could "kill his son's spirit", and so he works towards restraint. Ultimately though, he wants his son to take up an idealized version of masculinity. This brings the question of "effort" to the fore, and its links to acceptable masculinity. It also involves the vexed issue of "pushing". This was the clearest manifestation of power and the problems it could cause between these fathers and their sons. Perhaps one can say that the more "effort" is linked to idealized masculinity and

success, the more risk there is for the son. John's excerpt shows how glamorizing "killer instinct" can mean that a boy gets shamed for being "less than" as a boy.

According to Benjamin's framework, it could be said that, to the extent that the father is invested in idealized masculinity, it becomes very difficult for him to recognize his son as an independent centre of being. Corralled by fixed expectations regarding what a boy should be, the mentor-mentee relationship is biased towards an inequality of realities, with the father's reality in the dominant position. John's extract shows how fathers can become preoccupied with their sons' "internal state", and that if the son lacks the "right" attitude, he is well on course to being a disappointment to his father.

So recognition takes hard work and. It involves, as Nick's extract suggests, ongoing self-reflection and a careful balancing of assertion with sensitivity. It can also involve self-denial, and the acceptance of one's limits. We see this most strikingly in Craig's extract. Readers may wonder why Craig isn't more assertive in his dealings with his son, but again this is the dilemma of the loving father: "What if I hurt or lose my son through my assertions? And how can I tell whether my assertions are founded in self-interest or the interests of my son?" Craig gave a very mature, humorous and insightful take on "fathering on the outside". But where difference prevails, fathers (and perhaps even Craig) could at risk of a certain kind of paternal dysphoria – a disinvestment – and, perhaps, an envious undercutting of the mother-son bond. So what are the alternatives when similarities aren't obvious, and mentoring is stalled? How can fathers enjoy close and affirming relationships with sons who don't want to "do" things with their fathers? What can fathers learn and assimilate from the maternal bond? Practitioners need to help fathers see and value the various ways they can draw close to their sons, or "be" with their sons, in the absence of shared activity.

There is also the question of what, in the face of disappointment, fathers should do with what they know as men, or even with themselves as men. This is important because the above fathers carry an implicit knowledge regarding what it takes to be successful, as a man, and they want this for their sons. And it's a particularly animated wanting. It may be repressed, but as Jake's extract shows, it's never far away. Partly this is because these fathers want their sons to have what it takes to achieve. But also, as David's extract shows, there's an exultant intimacy when the

son "gets" what his father is trying to teach. Those working with fathers will need to be sensitive to this passionate yearning, and help fathers to track its effects on their every-day dealings with their sons. It will also be important for practitioners to acknowledge and embrace the values implicit in "effort talk" and to be ready to share ways that fathers can teach "toughness" and "hard work" without hurting their children.

In closing let me say that talking about hopes and disappointments was not easy for this sample of men. For them, talking about disappointment felt wrong – a betrayal of their sons. Also, and quite often, participants became emotional as the topic was broached. Talk of hopes and disappointments takes one into very personal and usually private relational territory. So one has to approach the topic with respect and care. For me, it was a privilege. I got to witness, up close, the love these fathers have for their sons, how much they want their sons to do well, how powerless they often feel, and how hard they are willing to work to keep their relationships good.

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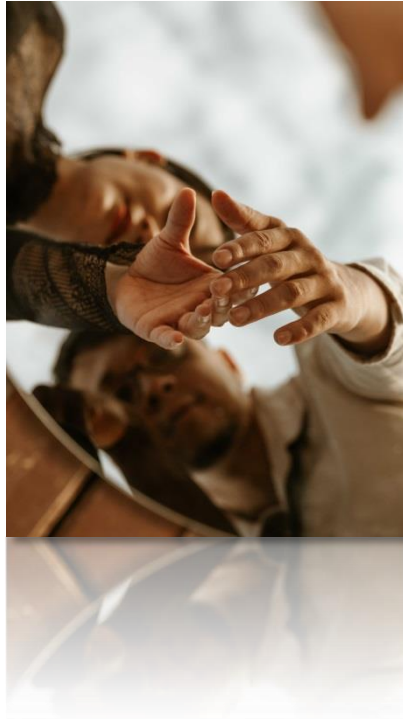
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A REMINDER OF WHAT GENDER EQUALISM IS ALL ABOUT

Tim Goldich

ABSTRACT

Gender Equalism proceeds from the premise that the sexes are and have always been equal—not the same, but equal. The male powers that come of being more respected are matched by the female powers that come of being more loved. Our world is not a patriarchy: it is a patrimatrisensus—a male-female consensus. Understanding Woman and Man as equal partners in the human system makes it possible for women to get the respect they're starving for and for men to get the love they're starving for. Gender reality is mirrored. It All Balances Out.

Keywords: consensus, gender equalism, gender politics, man, woman

Long ago, Woman and Man, in unconscious collusion, made up a story—a story so deep in psychic resonance it has stood for millennia. It rules to this day. The Story is rich in romance and sentiment, instinct and chivalry. It is, in its way, an erotic story of empowered Alpha heroes rescuing fair, fragile, innocent damsels in distress. The Story verily crackles with poetry, Eros and instinct, which is why it's infused throughout the myths and the mythos dating all the way back to the mighty Odysseus and the fair Helen of Troy. Men have the power; women are the victims. Men are to be respected; women are to be loved. The Story *feels* right. Contradicting it feels wrong. As a description of gender reality in its entirety, The Story does not hold up under logical scrutiny. But, against such profound psychic resonances, logic doesn't stand a chance. It truly *is* a *great* story, except . . . it isn't true.

Gender Equalism proceeds from the premise that the sexes are and have always been equal—not the *same*, but equal (the two ends of a balance beam need not be identical to weigh the same). Men and women—equal in number, evenly matched, possessing equal overall weaponry and efficacy—are *equal* partners in a vast gender dance. We believe that, through their own separate channels, the sexes ply an *equal* overall force of influence in the human system and are thus *equally* responsible for outcomes. Knowing what men suffer in homelessness, imprisonment, battlefields, hard-and-hazardous labor, parental alienation, and so on, we can confidently say that what Woman has suffered for being less respected has been matched in full by what Man has suffered for being less loved. Likewise, given female sexual leverage and beauty power, Moral Authority, motherhood power, feminism power, the greater powers to elicit empathy and inflict shame; we are equally confident that the male powers that come of being more respected are matched by the female powers that come of being more loved. Our world is not a *patriarchy*: it is a *patrimatrisensus*—a male-female consensus.

Man is more respected but less loved, and Woman is more loved but less respected. Gender reality is mirrored. For every female complaint there is a mirror-opposite male complaint. In short, It All Balances Out (IABO). I'll say that again. In the benefits enjoyed and in the liabilities suffered, in the power and in the victimization, in the freedoms and the constraints, the joys and sorrows, good and bad, light and shadow, It All Balances Out between Woman and Man—*and it always has*. This is equalism.

It All Balances Out; that is except for one thing: we don't believe that. Instead, we believe what is in accord with instinct and Eros. We believe what we've been taught: our world is a Patriarchy; men have THE power, and women are THE victims. So the one overarching imbalance in the gender system lies in the grossly imbalanced gender *belief* system. But that's no small thing, that's huge with ramifications profound. Belief in the Male-Power and Female-Victimization (MP/FV) paradigm is the source of all our gender-political woes—for *both* sexes.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *feminism* as: "belief in and advocacy of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes expressed especially through organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests." Only when we believe that men have the power and women are the victims, can we believe that women have a special need for and unique entitlement to their own special *–ism*. It is this falsely imbalanced gender belief system that sustains belief in feminism as a righteous corrective whose every effort to empower, protect, and advantage women leads toward the equality of the sexes. And so, in the realms of gender conflict and complaint, gender activism and advocacy, gender ideology, gender defining, gender issues, gender studies, gender politics—gender *anything*—there is feminism on the one hand and on the other hand there is . . . nothing. Feminism (reinforced by chivalry) officially dictates what is true and what is not true in all gender-related matters (which is to say, all matters pertaining specifically to women). That makes *gender* politics a one-party system and that makes feminism a kind of ideological dictatorship. However righteously it may present itself, feminism is the Male-Power, Female-Victimization *half* of gender reality—presented, and dictatorially demanded to be accepted, as if it were gender reality in its entirety. The one-sided MP/FV paradigm is foundational to everything feminism is and everything feminism does. A balanced gender belief system exposes feminism as nothing more than *female-ism*, a special interest group that advocates for females and females *only*. For this reason, if the goal is to bring down the feminist ideological dictatorship and allow admittance of the OTHER half of gender reality, we believe that equalism is far and away the most effective and powerful rhetorical weaponry there is. Equalism, a new gender-neutral gender politics, would continue to address any and all women's issues; it just wouldn't address women's issues *exclusively*.

Emphasizing the truths of Female Power and Male Victimization may seem contrary to what equalism is all about. But equalism's initial goal is to balance out the gender belief system. To that end, we focus on the facts and truths that go on the OTHER end of the balance beam—the facts and truths that are missing. The difference between equalism and either feminism or masculism is that equalism's goal is to put an end to the contest for the coveted title of MVP (Most Victimized and Powerless), to call it even, and to move on to a new era of inter-sex unity, fairness, and forgiveness. Within equalism there is no moral polarity, no Man is Bad (the over-empowered oppressor), and Woman is Good (the *innocent* victim). Within equalism all are welcomed on an equal footing. Gender Equalism takes it as self-evident that, when it comes to the Battle of the *Sexes*, the only win position is a *draw*.

All men and boys, women and girls, need is what equalism provides: truly equal opportunity on a truly even playing field. Lacking that, men do indeed suffer comparison with women in virtually every measure of wellbeing. But these stats are a consequence of how society responds to the MP/FV/MB/WG gender narrative. So, we reject the idea that men have the power, and women are the victims; and we reject the idea that women have the power, and men are the victims. The Victim Crown is simply useless to men (who, having a deep aversion to victimhood, will reject the the Victim Crown regardless). Women, being more loved, elicit more empathy, so women (but not men) can turn Victim into gender-political power—but only at great cost. Besides, there's plenty of victimhood to go around; neither sex is ennobled to claim exclusive ownership.

"Men have sacrificed for women and children—including their lives—for thousands of years," says Camille Paglia; "This sick portrayal of human history as nothing but male oppression and female victimage, this is a way to permanently ensure the infantilization of women." Feminism doesn't address the truest victimization of women because feminism itself is the primary perpetrator. And it all begins with a withholding of accountability, which is indeed infantilizing. It is a withholding of respect—respect for women's power, efficacy, and equal partnership in the human system. It's drowning women in sympathy. It is relentlessly telling women that they are *the* powerless victims in *all* things, which is emotionally self-fulfilling—*and* it is living a lie. It's telling women that All Fault Is Male, which instills poisonous self-

righteousness. It's telling women that a Boogey-man hides behind every bush, which is terrifying. It's falsifying women's legacy as nothing more than property and chattel. And it's telling women that their biology only betrays them, causing women to low-prioritize marriage, home, family; limiting women's immersion within roles and realms in which many are at their happiest. It is the world of *women* that feminism has shamed, disparaged and diminished. Given all this poisoning, it's no wonder that every measure of female happiness has plummeted in recent decades. And all over the world, the most-feminist cultures produce the least-happy women.

According to the statistics, it will appear that women are winning, but both sexes are losing. Men are the targets, but the fallout is endemic. In this gender-political fiasco, at least men retain their integrity. By contrast feminist indoctrinated women are so poisoned with rage, hate, vengeful, vindictive victimhood and self-absorbed, self-righteousness as to be rendered spiritually bankrupt. And that's no way to live. So, again, there's plenty of victimhood to go around. The sick portrayal of Man-Bad (the over-empowered oppressor), Woman-Good (the innocent victim) ensures the infantilization of women and the demonization of men. The fight for gender-political balance is a fight on behalf of *both* sexes. If feminine-*ism* is the primary victimizer of the feminine, it should come as no surprise. In terms of certain emotional addictions, each sex often acts as its own worst enemy, primarily responsible for creating its own predicaments and miseries (while the other sex acts as enabler).

Politicizing the Male-Power/Female-Victimization, Man-Bad/Woman-Good narrative has been disastrous—*all around.* For this reason, a *new* gender politics is given a prime opportunity to present something *better.* Men could take leadership and spearhead this new gender-neutral gender politics, but only if men will lead wisely. A truly conscious gender politics will acknowledge Female Power and Male Victimization but without seeking to oust Woman from victimhood's center seat just so Man can sit there instead.

Accountability without compassion is ruthless. It is what we more often direct at men; it is respecting men but not loving them. Compassion without accountability is infantilizing. It is what we more often direct at women. It is loving women but not respecting them. Gender Equalism lends each sex equal love (empathy) and respect (accountability). Under equalism, gender issues are viewed as matters of shared responsibility. It All Balances Out is best understood as an

outlook, a decision, a leap of faith, an invitation: it's saying, "Hey, we've decided to call it even; come join us!" IABO is not an endpoint; it is a new beginning. It is the light at the end of the tunnel. To the degree that the MP/FV paradigm is the problem, equalists believe that a society wide, default understanding that It All Balances Out is the solution. Having achieved its initial goal, equalism can then shift its focus toward inter-sex unity, fairness, forgiveness, and healthy negotiation with an emphasis on healing the divide and repairing the social fabric. Understanding Woman and Man as equal partners in the human system makes it possible for women to get the respect they're starving for and for men to get the love they're starving for.

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PREJUDICE AGAINST MEN: THE NEW FOCUS

OF THE MEN'S MOVEMENT

Aman Siddiqi

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

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

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 misandry 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, misandrist 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

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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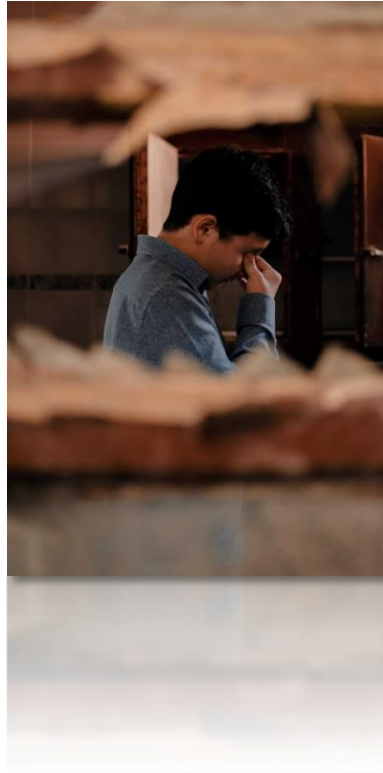
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THE ILLUSION OF TOXIC MASCULINITY

Jerome Teelucksingh

ABSTRACT

The various theories, models and terms associated with anti-social actions of boys and men need to be questioned. Some are unscientific, and others promote a false and negative image of masculinity. This negativity creates a confused generation of boys and men who are reluctant to express themselves and realize their full potential. The result is that many males are vulnerable to mental-health disorders.

Keywords: boys, health, male, men, toxic masculinity

In March 2022, when an American actor, Will Smith, slapped Chris Rock, an American comedian, at the Oscars, the hot topic of toxic masculinity again emerged in the public discourse (Georgiou). Terms as *toxic masculinity* have regularly been used to depict seemingly negative or anti-social male behaviour. During the 1980s, there was *Peter Pan Syndrome*; later the label *Man Child* was used to refer to men who were seemingly trapped in childish behaviours. Some accepted these terms, and a more derogatory and caustic term was introduced into our discourse: *toxic masculinity*. Unfortunately, toxic masculinity and misguided notions of males as *mansplaining* are not limited to pop psychology; they have slowly seeped into mainstream psychology and our daily discourse. These terms attempt to restrict men's freedom of expression.

Such distorted notions of males and masculinity often originate from recognized and acclaimed sources and eventually infect mainstream media. The skewed APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men (2018 APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men) are a good example. Likewise, some companies have inflicted considerable damage on the men's movement as evident from the controversial advertisement from the razor company, Gillette, in 2019. There is a long list of alternative terms—*toxic behaviour*, *toxic environment*, *toxic work environment*, *toxic atmosphere*, *toxic attitude*, or *toxic upbringing*—that could be used in explanations or descriptions of unhealthy and anti-social behaviour. It is obvious that toxic attitudes and toxic socialization contribute to toxic behaviour.

Journalists, practitioners and scholars should be careful when rushing to denigrate masculinity. Many have casually and carelessly accomplished a hatchet job on men, and it might be too late to salvage bruised and battered masculinity. It seems as if everyone is an unqualified expert on masculinity and can easily identify toxic masculinity. Some spout psychobabble whilst others are like snake-oil salesmen peddling false cures for masculinity. It feels as if any writer or speaker has the privilege and authority to casually attach *toxic* to *masculinity* and inadvertently cast aspersions on all men. Millions of men have been wrongly branded, falsely accused, stigmatized and stereotyped. During the past five decades, the above-mentioned unhelpful terms have been devised and liberally used to identify seemingly negative behaviours, attitudes and language of males. These harmful unscientific theories, behaviour models and cosmetic terms can be lumped into a new category: *mumbo-jumbo masculinities*. Yes, men have positions of power,

but not all men are empowered. Yes, a patriarchy exists, but not all men are guilty of creating and supporting this system. Many men and boys are forced into the now-toxic Man Box as they become frustrated that their rational opinions are ignored, and logical arguments are mocked. Furthermore, studies have proven that older men face certain challenges adhering to traditional narratives of masculinity (van den Hoonard). Indeed, in the 21st century, if men attempt to challenge socio-cultural norms, then some persons in our society are quick to judge them as toxic.

Can we separate these two words: *toxic* and *masculinity*, or have the two words become permanently entwined in the 21st century? During the past five years, it certainly seems that toxic masculinity has become a cliché. Unfortunately, it is not a harmless cliché: it has repercussions for masculinity, gender relations and the mental development of our boys and men. It is impossible to use one broad term, *toxic masculinity*, to depict all masculine traits. Furthermore, in any analysis of boys and men not conforming to societal expectations of masculinity, there is need to consider factors as age, religion, ethnicity, class, environment and education level. The environment is often a crucial factor. An illustration is men who have been jailed for such toxic crimes as murder, drug smuggling or kidnapping. The prison is a form of punishment but it is also supposed to have an element of reform to positively transform the lives of the incarcerated. Instead, the toxic prison culture becomes fertile ground for men to continue anti-social behaviour. It is even worse when one considers that the toxic behaviour contributes to poor mental health care in prisons (Kupers).

I agree with the argument that "*Toxic masculinity* is not good for men because it can result in abusing substances, spending time in jail, and committing suicide" (Savin-Williams). Additionally, the links among negative masculine norms, alcohol abuse and aggression among college students should be a cause for concern (Locke & Mahalik). Some of the other negative masculine norms in our society include violence, racism and risk taking. Some have identified these as characteristics of masculinity which have been branded as toxic. It's unfortunate that often traits such as kindness, tolerance, empathy and forgiveness or being providers and protectors are overlooked by many in society as masculine norms. It seems as if masculine norms have a negative label and dominant masculine norms are being twisted to become deviant

masculine norms. Some have a fervent desire to rewrite the masculinity narratives. However, the narratives are being rewritten to seemingly suppress masculine traits that are used as boundary markers in defining boys and men. A recent online pilot study has also proven the negative impact of the term *toxic masculinity* to the behaviour of men and boys (Barry, John; Walker, Rob; Liddon, Louise; & Seager, Martin). Undoubtedly, the ambiguous label is loosely used to make men feel inferior and guilty in our increasingly judgmental, politically correct and overly sensitive society. The volatile scenario is even worse because the cancer of cancel culture has spread and become entrenched in our society. Any efforts to suppress masculine traits and create a genderless or sexless world will have repercussions including an increase in mental health disorders, suicides and a generation of confused boys and men.

Many fail to realize that actions and language deemed as negative by one person can be easily justified as positive or interpreted as beneficial by another. For instance, it is easy to decide that soldiers fighting in a war is symbolic of toxic masculinity. The violence and death amidst a war can be deemed evil, illegal or unlawful. It is debatable that wars are unnecessary and unjustified. However, it certainly seems wrong for peace activists to use a broad brush to claim all soldiers exhibit toxic masculinity. Imagine the world in the 21st century if there were no fearless (and frightened) soldiers fighting for democracy and freedom during the First and Second World Wars in the 20th century. The issue is relevant for today. What about the men in Ukraine defending their homeland, women and children in 2022? Is it fair to refer to these men in Ukraine as toxic? Likewise, it is easy to say that men in protests, revolts and revolutions are displaying toxic masculinity. However, if the seemingly anti-social action is for better working and living conditions or to save lives, then we need to question the use of the adjective *toxic*. If brave men are protesting against racism and religious discrimination, then toxic masculinity cannot be marching alongside these men. These men sacrificed their lives so that many of us can have a better future. Men who decided that the most suitable action is to overthrow a dictator, a corrupt government or end a decrepit institution surely do not display toxic masculinity. Today, the real, ongoing war and revolution is the fight to save the image of masculinity! I am not defending anti-social behaviour, just attempting to defend masculinity from unwarranted attacks. Boys and men who reject current societal expectations are unfairly judged as displaying toxic masculinity. These roles create stress for men (Lash, Copenhaver and Eisler). Why must males allow prescribed

gender role dictate their emotional, psychological responses to negative situations and people?

Some in society have been applauding when they see men crying because they believe that men who cry in the public are not showing toxic masculinity. Indeed, sadness is an emotion but it is not the only emotion. Should men and boys only express sadness? What about anger, fear, aggression and depression? These emotions have been red-flagged as part of the toxic masculinity illusion. Furthermore, men displaying the typical signs of toxic masculinity could be misinterpreted. These could be men suffering from borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder or antisocial personality disorder. Some men have been accused of being toxic because they are not concerned about their health. The reality is that some men are poor and lack insurance to afford proper health care. Furthermore, men who live in rural areas or slums are either not aware of the importance of health care or find it inaccessible.

For the past decade, a friend, who is of Indian descent, described the mental anguish he faced. My friend was overlooked for promotion and bypassed for appointments at a Caribbean university. The issue of merit, quality of service and qualifications were overlooked and non-academic issues of ethnicity and gender were given priority in an academic institution. He felt pain, disappointment and hate – which could be easily classified as toxic masculinity. However, this blatant racism and biased decisions did not result in any outburst, lawsuits or affect his public behavior. Instead, he ignored these racists and flattered these misguided and pathetic persons for their so-called wise decisions and leadership. More importantly, he avoided their presence. Fortunately, he was able to channel this negativity by focusing more on his writings and activism. He focused on his family life and also religion. The cause of my friend's toxic emotions was the injustices against him by toxic men and women, of African descent. He chose to react positively and productively.

Men in similar hurtful, unfair and stressful situations need to identify the origins of the toxicity and avoid reactive and impulsive behaviour that could be wrongly branded as toxic. The next stage is to channel their negative feelings into something constructive and positive. There is an urgent need for males, experiencing any distress, to develop coping mechanisms to adequately handle toxic employees, peers, bosses, teachers and relatives. Non-governmental organizations and groups focusing on helping and saving males need to be accessible to those needing

emotional and psychological support. Groups, especially those comprising fathers, boys, single-men, divorced men, serve as important support systems to prevent or curb the incidence of nervous breakdowns, depression and suicides. It is unfortunate that men seeking help are ridiculed. Those being counselled by a professional as a psychiatrist or psychologist, entering a rehab centre or taking medication are often stigmatized as weak or having mental disorders.

The problem facing society is how and where should we begin to detox and promote positive masculinities. It's a pity that there is an absence of terms and theories to describe and dissect positive masculinity.

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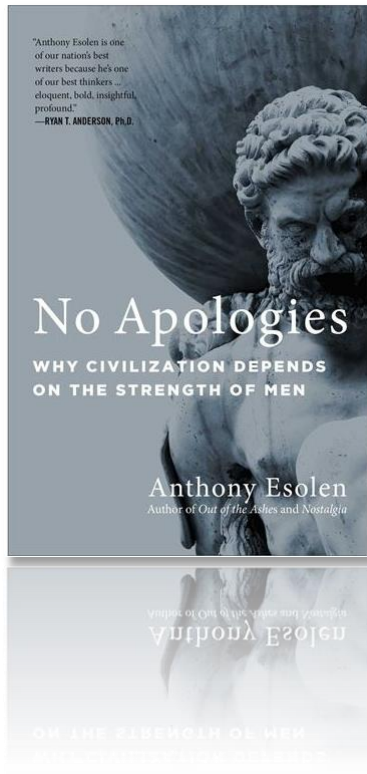
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A REVIEW OF *NO APOLOGIES*: WHY CIVILIZATION DEPENDS ON THE STRENGTH OF MEN, BY ANTHONY ESOLEN (REGNERY GATEWAY, 2022)

Paul Nathanson

Abstract

'No Apologies' is not an academic book and therefore does not require an academic review. The book is a cri de coeur, in fact, and therefore deserves a response that is at least partly both subjective and emotional. With this in mind, I must begin by acknowledging my profound ambivalence over what this book says. On one hand, I agree with Esolen's general thesis. On the other hand, I deplore his presentation of it. Consequently, I have written not one but two reviews.

Keywords: male, men, misandry, myth

1

Anthony Esolen's thesis, a very unpopular one right now (which is no measure of its usefulness), is that men and women are equal in value but also *fundamentally different*. In other words, "equality" is not a synonym of "sameness." This makes sense as long as you describe the sexes in terms of *interdependence* (a.k.a. complementarity). Each sex contributes *what the other lacks and needs,* thus ensuring not only the happiness of each person as either a man or a woman but also the endurance of each family, community, society and civilization. In the five chapters of his book, Esolen describes the specific contributions of *men*, because so few people in our time are willing to acknowledge them. And his primary descriptor is *male strength*, whether he refers to it in physical or metaphorical terms. Although Esolen recognizes some degree of variation among men, he argues (in somewhat tedious detail) that men are *collectively stronger than women* and therefore that men have an innate affinity for two of the masculine functions that have usually prevailed both historically and cross-culturally: protector and provider.

It has taken me many years to reach the conclusion that men and women are different in *significant* ways. As an idealistic young man, I was a fervent supporter of feminism in general and of sexual equality in particular. This was not entirely or even primarily due to altruism. I cared about what equality would mean for women, sure, but I cared even more about what it would mean for men. After all, I was a man. The implication of early feminism for me (though not one that any feminists actually explored then and very few explore even now) was that if women could liberate themselves from cultural tyranny by challenging what they consider negative stereotypes of femininity, men could liberate themselves from cultural tyranny by challenging what they consider negative stereotypes of masculinity.

These masculine stereotypes were of central importance to *me*, because they didn't fit me. I was not only a man but also a *gay* man. I had had endured *relentless identity harassment* every day in both elementary school and high school (though not at home) during the 1950s and 1960s. If the early feminists were correct, then the children who had persecuted me, both boys and girls, had been wrong to do so. And they had been wrong not only on moral grounds, which I had long understood, but also on factual grounds. In college, I moved beyond feminist articles in the newspaper to heavy-duty feminist tomes. I called myself a feminist, in fact, long before I called

myself gay. But I was wrong.

Fast forward to 2022. Most feminists (though not necessarily most women) either still insist that men and women are equal in the sense of interchangeability (with legal, economic, technological or other help from the state if necessary), or now insist that men and women are not equal (women being innately superior to men). Both paradigms are eseentialistic. Esolen's thesis falls very clearly into a third version of essentialism. Men and women are of equal value, he insists, but innately very different. Many feminists consider this "misogynistic" or "patriarchal" and therefore despicable for supporting oppressive historical stereotypes of women (but don't care about oppressive historical stereotypes of men). I no longer consider myself a feminist.

From my point of view, Esolen's contribution to what I call "inter-sexual dialogue" is an important one. It is to state the obvious—that is, to re-state what has *always and everywhere been self-evident* (until the rise of transgender ideology): that men and women have evolved not as interchangeable cogs, not as two rival species, but as *collaborators* within the same species. Men and women have a great deal in common but not everything. In short, we *need* each other and cannot produce a healthy society by competing with or undermining (let alone attacking) each other. This is common sense and should lead to common decency toward men (but won't as long as feminist and woke ideologues control the public square). Esolen defines masculinity not only in physical and occupational terms but also in psychological terms. He argues that men prefer traditional societies—he provides many examples not only from Western literature but also from ancient, tribal and other non-Western societies—for reasons that are either *indirectly* associated with the male body or directly associated with *lack* of female bodies. However, little about women except for the fact that they give birth and men do not. Women internalize this existential fact by focusing on the here and now, on the immediate needs of their infants. Men, he says, focus instead on the larger world and how it works. All of this is familiar in conservative circles that rely on nostalgia for the *non*-feminist essentialism of "traditional" society.

My own research on men, conducted with Katherine K. Young at McGill University, has taken me to a position very close in some (but not all) ways to that of Esolen. Like him, probably, I was motivated originally by a need to oppose feminist misandry—that is, to expose ideological

lies about men—but also to propose more helpful ideas about men. As a result of four volumes on misandry[1] and many articles, I have come to the conclusion that misandry (the sexist counterpart of misogyny) is pervasive but has been, until very recently, unacknowledged. Its baneful effect on boys and men in everyday life is what I call "identity harassment." No attempt to cure this disease, which is both psychological and spiritual, will succeed without acknowledging that self-evident fact of life in modern Western societies. But unlike Esolen, probably, I don't think that masculine identity has become problematic due only to the implacable hostility of feminist and woke ideologues and their relentless attempts to destroy our allegedly patriarchal society in order to create a utopian one on the ruins.

Masculinity did not become problematic with the advent of feminism. Rather, it has been a slowly growing problem since the Neolithic period—that is, since the Agricultural Revolution with the consequent rise of settled communities or cities, warfare, occupational specialization, elaborate political hierarchies and elaborate gender systems. These technological and cultural innovations affected lower-class men, middle-class men and upper-class men in different ways. Lower-class men—that is, most men by far—became serfs. Their masculine identity was directly correlated with backbreaking work in the fields and thus required the physical strength of male bodies. Middle-class men—the relatively few merchants, traders, artisans, scribes and administrators—did not depend on male strength. They depended on brains, in fact, not brawn. Their work was defined by education and mental or artistic skills. Upper-class men—the very few aristocrats and members of the royal entourage—sometimes carried on ancient hunting traditions (although they did that more for prestige than for food) and sometimes led armies (although most of the soldiers were conscripted peasants). Even though prowess in hunting and warfare were features of elite masculinity, however, so was leisure. This was an early step in the very long process—a series of technological and cultural evolutions that gradually reversed the status of the male body. During the Industrial Revolution, for instance, machines soon displaced the male body. Men with the lowest status still tended some machines in factories or dragged coal out of

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[1] Paul Nathanson and Katherine K. Young, *Spreading Misandry: The Teaching of Contempt for Men in Popular Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). Paul Nathanson and Katherine K. Young, *Legalizing Misandry: From Public Shame to Systemic Discrimination against Men* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006). Katherine K. Young and Paul Nathanson, *Sanctifying Misandry: Goddess Ideology and the Fall of Man* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010). Paul Nathanson and Katherine K. Young, *Replacing Misandry: A Revolutionary History of Men* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 201.

mines (alongside women and even children until reform movements removed them). Men with the highest status did no work at all (either marrying money or winning it at gambling casinos). More recently, computer technology has continued to erode the importance of male bodies, and new technologies have undermined its importance even in reproduction.

My point in this brief romp through history is that all people, both men and women, need *healthy identities* and also that no society can endure any other way. By a "healthy identity," I mean the ability to make at least one contribution (to family, community or society) that is (a) *distinctive,* (b) *necessary and* (c) *publicly valued.* Trouble is, women can do almost everything that men can do (if not by themselves, then with help from the state). Only fatherhood remains, and many people (notably single-mothers-by-choice) believe that women can be fathers too because fatherhood amounts to nothing more than assistant motherhood. Men, therefore, find it difficult to do anything distinctive (let alone necessary and publicly valued).

Failing to find a healthy identity, boys and young men soon wonder if even a negative (anti-social) identity—conveniently provided by the prevalent feminist or woke lies about men—might be better than no identity at all. In our time, at any rate, we have a growing epidemic of boys and young men who *abandon society*. Some do so by dropping out of school (becoming an unemployable underclass) or by becoming addicted to drugs or video games. Others, especially those without fathers, abandon society by resorting to either street crime or mass murder as their way of abandoning a society that has no room for them as men. Still others abandon life itself by committing suicide. These obvious signs of pathology are far more common among young *men* than they are among young women. Esolen doesn't spell this out, but I think that he would agree with me. His entire book, after all, is an indirect warning about what can happen to any society that fails to find room for men, per se, and honor their contributions.

2

Although I find that Esolen's basic thesis is convincing (that men need to recover some function that is not only distinctively masculine but also closely related to maleness that can be changed or abandoned at will), I find also that his *presentation* is very alienating, misleading and *unconvincing*. That is why these two reviews are utterly

incompatible. Choosing between them is up to readers.

Esolen writes very clearly and sometimes beautifully, although he comes up with more than a few vaguely sanctimonious or highly romanticized clichés. But never mind style. In effect, this book is not only a personal cri de coeur but also, and primarily, a *sermon*, a collection of five closely related and somewhat repetitive sermons. I will now evaluate it on that basis.

Many of Esolen's quotations happen to be biblical and Christian (and the book gradually becomes more and more overtly Christian), but his gospel, as it were, would be accessible to many non-Christians or even to all people, religious or secular, who reject what now passes for conventional wisdom about sex and gender—especially that of feminism, and other derivatives of postmodernism. Christian or not, though, Esolen is a preacher. Like many other people, I don't like to be preached at. It's not that I object to reading polemical works, especially if I already agree with the general point of view, but that I expect even polemical works, whether academic or popular, to take opposing arguments seriously by *quoting them* (in context) and arguing with them. Esolen doesn't do that.

Like Robert Bly, founder of the "mythopoetic" men's movement[2], Esolen has ransacked world folklore and literature in order to support his point of view. Because you can find almost anything if you look hard enough, though, that method is not particularly convincing as evidence for a thesis. It's called "cherry picking." You can easily point to traditional stories about heroic men who protect or even sacrifice themselves for women, after all, but also to ones that are about nothing of the kind. Esolen refers often to biblical stories, especially to those in Genesis, but he ignores the one about *Dinah's rape* (Genesis 30:21; 34; 46:15), which would clearly *not* support his point of view. If men were driven by nature to protect women, then how could we explain the men who rape and kill women? Most men don't, but some do. Are they all genetic mutants?

Sometimes, Esolen refers to literary works, especially to works of poetry. Usually, though, he refers to myths. I have no problem with that. In fact, much of my own research has explored mythic themes. But I discuss them as *symbolic* stories about how things were in the beginning, how things have come to be as they are now or how things will eventually be once again. They are

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[2]   Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1990).

not descriptions of everyday life and not necessarily even prescriptions for social arrangements. The heroes are *idealized* or even divinized, not real people. Each hero provides a model of behavior, sure, but in the cosmic context of either the primeval past or the eschatological future. Millions of Hindus admire Rama and Sita, for instance, but very few imagine that they are or could ever be like them (at least not consistently). Not all would even want to be like Rama or Sita. Similarly, millions of Christians admire Jesus and Mary, but very few imagine that they could ever live up to those divine standards or even want to do so. Besides, both Hindu and Christian societies have more than one ideal of human behavior. These are expressed in the stories about countless saints, local heroes, movies, videos and so on. I don't want to argue that he is wrong about the ideal of manhood that he advocates or that he has mistakenly read this ideal into oral and written genres. I do want to argue that the experience of ordinary men in daily life does not add up to the ideals of mythic or poetic archetypes. Real life is much messier than Esolen imagines.

Consider the *Titanic*, which has become a *secular* myth. According to the myth, male passengers sacrificed their own lives in order to save female passengers and children. Well, some of them did (partly because the ship's officers had been ordered to shoot men who dared to get into lifeboats). Those men were in first class. To their credit, they not only understood that the gender and class systems had given them some advantages over women and other men but also found it hard to imagine living on (after this extraordinary event) without paying the price for those advantages (and would otherwise have been killed socially, even if not physically). Not nearly as many men in second class acted so nobly. Hardly any men in steerage did or would have done if they had managed to reach the boat deck at all. But the *Titanic* soon took on mythical overtones not only for men but also for women. Within weeks, feminists were arguing about "women and children first." Some argued, correctly, that this traditional sentiment worked in favor of elite women but against sexual equality.

Although Esolen mentions war as a traditional masculine occupation, he never mentions military *conscription*. That would defeat his purpose. If men were *instinctively* eager to risk or sacrifice their lives—and he does say that, not once but many times—then why would governments find it necessary to *force* men into combat by law by a combination of bribery

(rewards for the survivors and fame for the others) and intimidation (shame and even execution for "cowardice")? Why, in fact, would it require such a huge cultural effort to create the illusion of men *sacrificing themselves* ("giving" their lives on the nation's "altar") but also deny the reality of those men *being sacrificed* by the state (and thus, in democracies, by their own parents)? Here again, there's a huge gulf between what Esolen sees as a given of nature for men and what others see as a given of culture.

It's all very well to argue that traditional notions of manhood are nobler and more effective than the current ones, but I draw the line at the notion that men are "expendable" or "disposable." That notion is implicit in much of the book but also explicit here and there. Esolen could (and probably will) write another book to say precisely that by drawing on the currently popular work of evolutionary psychologists. And I would argue against that on *moral* grounds among others. It's true that we have evolved from the apes, but we have evolved into *moral* apes. Life must make sense to people. No community can endure unless most people, male and female, believe that working, striving, fighting, risking and even dying for it is worthwhile. That's the most fundamental social contract. No society that considers my life innately less valuable than someone else's life, which is surely the ultimate in dehumanization, would be worthy of my respect. So this feature of Esolen's book repels me on moral grounds, even though I do agree with his larger thesis of sexual differentiation combined with sexual equality.

It wasn't exactly fun for me to read this book as a *gay* man. I do realize that gay people are a small minority of the population and always will be. I don't believe that my preferences should take precedence over the needs of society as a whole. I don't support gay marriage for instance, because I think that children need both mothers and fathers, not two mothers or two fathers. And I think that, moreover, because, as Esolen says, fathers are not assistant mothers; their function is very unlike that of mothers. Even so, he has written a book about *men* without once even *mentioning gay* men. Speaking for myself at any rate, we are men, and yet our entire lives do not revolve around women, let alone risking our lives for women. And I do suspect that many directly or indirectly gay men would say the same thing. From Esolen's point of view, we have no purpose, no meaning, no healthy identity, which makes us nothing more than aberrations. So, if that's what he would like to say, then he should say it and be prepared to defend it.

I conclude with a more practical matter. Whatever men might think of *No Apologies*, what would *women* think of it? As he himself notes more than once, men and women are interdependent. Whatever affects one sex affects the other. In this book (as distinct perhaps from some future one), Esolen declares that his point of view is the best (in theory, as exemplified on the Titanic) but refrains from explaining how to make it work (in practice). Almost all of his examples are drawn from pre-industrial societies. Assuming that most men would actually want to live as hunters or farmers, which I don't assume, would women want to restore a patriarchal system? Okay, he defines patriarchy as hierarchical but benevolent, and yet patriarchal benevolence would amount to *paternalism at best*. I doubt that he could convince many women to go along with that.

AUTHOR PROFILE

Paul Nathanson has a BA (art history), a BTh (Christian theology), an MLS (library service), an MA (religious studies) and a PhD (religious studies). Of particular interest to him is the surprisingly blurry relation between religion and secularity: how religion underlies seemingly secular phenomena such as popular movies and political ideologies. With Katherine Young, he has written a series on the problem of masculine identity in an age of identity politics and sexual polarization.

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