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## TAKING MISANDRY SERIOUSLY

*Paul Nathanson*



### ABSTRACT

*At the core of our research on misandry, discussed most fully and directly in *Replacing Misandry*, is the historical, moral and psychological problem of masculine identity. Everyone needs a healthy identity, both personal and collective. To attain that, everyone must be able to make at least one contribution to family or community that is (a) distinctive; (b) necessary; and (c) publicly valued. Boys and young men must now try to grow up without a healthy identity (that is, with nothing distinctive, necessary or publicly valued to contribute). Neither gynocentrism (which entails the failure to acknowledge that boys and men actually have distinctive needs and serious problems) nor misandry (which entails the fostering, or at least the tacit condoning, of hatred toward men) encourages healthy masculine identity.*

**Keywords:** feminism, gynocentrism, male, masculine identity, misandry

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Over the past thirty or so years, Katherine K. Young and I published four volumes in the series about misandry. Here is a very brief summary of each volume:

*Spreading Misandry: The Teaching of Contempt for Men in Popular Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001) originated as the opening chapter of a single volume on misandry. It is about the depiction of men in American popular culture during the 1980s and 1990s. Of greatest importance in this volume, though, is its chapter on "Making the World Safe for Ideology," which carefully defines "ideology" as a worldview that has all or most of nine characteristic features (the most important of which is dualism), applies that definition to ideologies on both the Left and the Right, and discusses the danger that any ideology presents to liberal democracy.

The first part of *Legalizing Misandry: From Public Shame to Systemic Discrimination against Men* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006) is about events or trials that journalists turn into high-profile venues for ideological feminism; the second part is a comparative study of legal changes that have directly or indirectly rigged the system against men in connection with divorce, custody, sexual harassment and so on. Although legislators now express every law in gender-neutral language (except for the law that requires young men in the United States, but not young women, to register for the draft), the interpretation and implementation of some laws by bureaucrats behind the scenes can be anything but gender-neutral.

*Sanctifying Misandry: Goddess Ideology and the Fall of Man* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010) is about the use of organized religion to give ideological feminism metaphysical legitimation and, in some cases, to replace or fundamentally alter historic religions such as Christianity and Judaism by introducing goddess worship.

*Replacing Misandry: A Revolutionary Theory* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015) shifts attention from women and their theories about men to the historic and current facts of life for men by examining the history of men—which is to say, perceptions of the male body—over approximately ten thousand years. This is a history of cultural and technological revolutions—the horticultural, agricultural, industrial, military, sexual and reproductive

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revolutions—and the resulting need for men to establish a *collective identity specifically as men*. This is our project’s intellectual foundation. (See below).

Two additional volumes have been largely written but are not yet ready for publication. One of these is *Managing Misandry: Men’s Voices on the Meaning of Manhood*. It would not do, after all, to write all these books about men without actually listening to men. The focus is on various men’s movements in our time, most of which, on careful analysis, turn out to be less than helpful. We have included male feminism, even though it is not a men’s movement at all (viewing men through the lens of women’s movements). In fact, the most revealing chapter is about Michael Kimmel.

The series should conclude with *Transcending Misandry: From Feminist Ideology to Inter-Sexual Dialogue*. This volume suggests a new approach, dialogue, to the current polarization of men and women. This is the misandry project’s *moral* heart. Inter-sexual dialogue, which builds on inter-religious dialogue but in a much more disciplined way, is not the solution to conflict between men and women, but it could be the best way to *seek* a solution. Its ten principles, the “Decalogue of dialogue,” could function as the constitution for a new society, one that takes seriously and in equal measure the needs and problems of *both* sexes. Inter-sexual dialogue is thus not only an end in itself—the words that describe it best would be compassion, healing and reconciliation—but also the means to that end.

To sum up: we focuses attention on (1) the specifically *moral* dimension that any critique of misandry requires (in addition to information from the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences); (2) the inability of men to establish a *healthy collective identity for themselves as men*; and (3) the need for inter-sexual *dialogue* (which retains two “voices” and allows neither to trump the other) instead of inter-sexual *debate* (which assumes that one “voice” will triumph over the other and reduce it to silence).

At the *core* of this project, discussed most fully and directly in *Replacing Misandry*, is the historical, moral and psychological problem of masculine identity. *Everyone* needs a healthy identity, both personal and collective. To attain that, everyone must be able to make at least one contribution to family or community that is (a) distinctive; (b) necessary; and (c) publicly

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valued. Our remote ancestors did not sit around and ponder any of this. They simply did whatever they had to do, and could do, in the urgent need for collective survival. Men and women made comparable contributions. And both sexes paid high prices. Men were often killed by predators. Women often died in childbirth.

This general "egalitarianism" began to change in the late Neolithic period due to the rise of horticulture, then agriculture (or pastoralism), which eventually led to urbanization and specialization. These led in turn to states or empires, increasingly elaborate hierarchies, increasingly complex organized religions, symbolic gender systems, international trade, raiding or warfare and so on.

Of particular interest here is the gradually changing relation between maleness (the male body) and masculinity (its cultural interpretation). Most men (and women) were serfs. They did backbreaking work in the fields. Elite men (and women) did no menial work at all. Although chiefs or kings and their male courtiers hunted occasionally, it was to assert their status symbolically, no longer to provide food. Although they led armies into battle occasionally, moreover, they relied on conscript armies to do much of the dirty work (unless it prevented them from producing food). Middle-class men--even ten thousand years ago, there was a small middle class of shopkeepers, traders, artisans, scribes and so on--relied even less often on their male bodies as venues of masculine identity. Rather, they were masculine because they did things that culture prescribed for men, sometimes but not always arbitrarily.

This separation of masculinity from maleness continued slowly for many centuries but increased now and then due to a series of technological and therefore cultural revolutions. Among these were the Industrial Revolution (which eventually separated fathers from their families and replaced male muscles with machines in the factories and mines), the "Military Revolution" (during which modern states adopted a new social contract that turned all men, per se, into citizens but at the cost of becoming cannon fodder to serve the revolution or the nation), the Sexual Revolution (which "freed" both men and women, for the first time in human history, from the biological consequences and cultural responsibilities of sexual behavior but with disastrous consequences for marriage and especially for children), along with the more recent

Reproductive Revolution (which, among other things, reduced the male contribution to a "teaspoon" of sperm at the cost of trivializing the function of fathers within family life and thus expanding the ranks of fatherless children).

At this point, women can do (almost) everything that men can do, which is fine in theory for supporting egalitarianism. Women can provide resources for themselves, for instance, and protect themselves and their children--if not on their own, then with help from state agencies (which have replaced men in the family). Only one contribution of men, per se, remains both distinctive and necessary, and that is fatherhood. But even that has been either trivialized or attacked for decades in order to assert the "autonomy" of women. The fragile position of fathers might gain strength in view of many studies that indicate great advantages for children with live-in fathers. It would require another cultural revolution to turn things around at this point, however, for the good not only of children and men but also of society as a whole.

Meanwhile, consider what happens to the increasing number of boys and young men who must now try to grow up without a healthy identity (that is, with nothing distinctive, necessary or publicly valued to contribute). Some of them abandon schools that either explicitly or implicitly treat them with contempt, ignorance and suspicion. Others abandon a society with no room for them as men by resorting to drugs and antisocial behavior such as crime. Still others abandon life itself. No good can come of this.

The solution to this problem remains a mystery. One thing, however, is clear even now. Neither gynocentrism (which entails the failure to acknowledge that boys and men actually have distinctive needs and serious problems) nor misandry (which entails the fostering, or at least the tacit condoning, of hatred), will take us to a better place.

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## AUTHOR PROFILE



**Paul Nathanson** has a BA (art history), a BTh (Christian theology), an MLS (library service), an MA (history and philosophy of religion) and a PhD (comparative religion). Of particular interest to him is the surprisingly blurry relation between religion and secularity: how religious patterns of thought underlie 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.

**Contact details:** [wordwatcher@videotron.ca](mailto:wordwatcher@videotron.ca)

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