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PRESUMPTION OF MALE DISPOSABILITY IS BASED ON FLAWED HYPOTHESES

Peter Wright



ABSTRACT

This article examines the concept of male disposability, the notion that humans are an inherently male-sacrificing and female-preserving species that broadly prioritizes women's needs and wants over men's in order to maximise reproductive success. It critiques several prominent theories circulating in academia and social media, exposing their flawed logic. The conclusion advocates for a discarding of male disposability theories in favour of approaches that more accurately and compassionately contextualise the lives of men and boys.

Keywords: fallacious reductionism, gynocentrism, male disposability, Maria Kouloglou, reproductive strategy



Both men and women evolved to be protective of women because one man can impregnate several women, while a woman will usually only bear one child at a time, so it makes sense for societies to keep women safe so they can reproduce. [...] Even if we were to assume that male disposability is, on some level, instinctual, it doesn't mean that society cannot minimize it. The real question is, do we *want* to eliminate male disposability? (Kouloglou, 2019)

In the above quote, sociologist Maria Kouloglou asks a rhetorical question of whether it's possible to minimise male disposability, or perhaps even eliminate it. However, like many theorists, she also entertains the idea that male disposability is “instinctual” and biologically hardwired for the purpose of prioritising women's lives over men's lives, thereby ensuring the reproductive success of the human species. The implication of the “disposability instinct” is that every womb is a precious incubator of human life, necessitating that males sacrifice themselves for women and, by extension, that wider society accumulates gynocentric institutions and conventions to further support that imperative.

In the following I outline similar theories made in support of the “instinctual” male disposability model. The proposed evolutionary mechanisms behind male disposability serve the belief that humans are, or somehow should be, a gynocentrically oriented species for whom women's needs and wants must always be prioritised relative to men's needs and wants if we wish to ensure reproductive success. If women are supported and considered more valuable than men, then according to this theory more babies will be born. In this sense the two concepts of male disposability and gynocentrism are inextricably linked, forming a conceptual dyad.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY THEORIES

Evolutionary theories asserting the necessity of male disposability are not new. Lester F. Ward (1841-1913), a scholar of biological and sociological disciplines, proposed a theory that humans are a gynocentric species designed to prioritise women, and on that basis he underlined the necessity of male disposability in the service of women (Ward, 1888, 1903). Ward was a passionate advocate for first wave feminism and women's liberation and, in a spirit comparable to that of today's *difference feminists*, he spoke about biological differences between the sexes while theorising that women are superior due to higher evolutionary and reproductive value:

Now it is correctly interpreted as an expression of the general law that the primary purpose of the male sex is to enable the female, or type form, to reproduce, after performing which function the male form is useless and a mere cumberer of the ground. (Ward, 1888)

The female is not only the primary and original sex but continues throughout as the main trunk, while to it a male element is afterward added for the purposes above explained. The male is therefore, as it were, a mere afterthought of nature. (Ward, 1903)

Ward delivered his “gynæocentrism theory” speech in the year 1888 to an enthusiastic group of first wave feminists, which included Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Phoebe Couzins, Mary Willis, Jennie June and many others well known (Ward, 1903). The title of the speech *Our Better Halves* (Ward, 1888), consisted of an elaborate theory of women's biological superiority based on evolutionary and reproductive roles, concluding that women deserve to be valued more highly



than males who were described as mere disposable helpers in the evolutionary scheme. In a later work titled *Pure Sociology* (1903), Ward elaborated on his gynæocentric theory which received international acclaim and stirred widespread academic debate (Wright, 2022, 2023).

Ward's feminist audience rejoiced in his deductions because they seemed to prove the claim of women's pre-eminence at a time when the proposition was doubted. Historian Cynthia Davis states that Ward's lending of scientific weight to assertions of female superiority, "*led conservatives to identify Darwin as modern feminism's 'originator,' and Ward as its 'prophet'*" (Davis, 2010).

First wave feminist Charlotte Perkins-Gilman (1860–1935) claimed Ward's theory of gynocentrism was the most important contribution to "the woman question" ever made (Gilman, 1911a; Davis, 2010). Commenting on Ward's theory to sceptics, Gilman declared, "*You'll have to swallow it. The female is the race type; the male is her assistant. It is established beyond peradventure*" (Gilman, 1911b). While lauding the theory as a groundbreaking contribution to the status of women, Gilman further expanded on it by suggesting that women were more evolved than men, and that women were also continuing to advance at a faster rate than men (Davis, 2010).

Since the introduction of Ward's theory, a plethora of arguments for female superiority and concomitant male disposability have been proposed, many of them building on Ward's original thesis, while others have constructed new cases for the same conclusion. Such arguments are too numerous to detail in this article, which will confine itself to a few examples that have proliferated in recent decades, particularly those circulating on social media which have gained a considerable, albeit uncritical acceptance. As with Ward's theory, the following examples rest on an assertion of instinctual male disposability in service to women's biology.

Claim: It is women who fall pregnant, give birth and care for offspring, and very few males are necessary for the perpetuation of the species. Only one male is needed to fertilise a hundred women, therefore most males are redundant for perpetuation of the species and are best suited to serve as expendable resources.

Fact: Fathers' contributions to offspring are referred to as paternal investment, which involves emotionally invested care such as feeding, playing, grooming, and interacting with the child in ways that benefit that child's survival in their local environment, including the teaching of social, physical and emotion regulation skills (Corpuz, 2021; DelPriore, 2021; Geary, 2015). Furthermore, men's collective provision of survival infrastructure such as a safe environment, clean water, food, medical care, sanitation and habitation are also essential for infant survival.

When paternal investment and male infrastructure provision are diminished, children become more vulnerable to predation, starvation, diseases and death (DelPriore, 2021, Geary, 2015), which is why larger populations of men are essential for facilitating reproductive success. Author Peter Ryan summarises the situation as follows:

The truth is that whilst women have an important reproductive role in giving birth and caring for small infants, this function is merely one activity in a vast web of activities that have to occur for genes to be successfully passed on from one generation to the next. A community can have as many women as it pleases and as many children as it likes and the reality is that it will all amount to precisely nothing in evolutionary terms if basic survival requirements are not



addressed. The reality is that the reproductive role of women whilst important, is no more important than many other activities and hardly the overwhelming priority it is presented as. (Ryan, 2022)

Claim: Women's hypergamous behaviour (marrying upward) indicates that human relationships are prioritised around women's desire for protection, provision and status as provided by high value males. This exclusive female imperative is classed as an evolutionary survival mechanism which, in practice, renders lower value males overlooked and essentially superfluous in the reproductive scheme.

Fact: Observations of extreme hypergamy in the behavior of modern women can be equally explained by the rise of cultural narcissism in affluent societies (Twenge & Campbell, 2009), a motive that differs from baseline hypergamy, but which nevertheless involves comparable behaviors of self-enhancement and status-seeking (Wright, 2023). However, narcissism as basis for marrying-up is arguably *maladaptive* in the sense that it contributes to dysfunctional relationships (Green, 2019) and is implicated in plummeting birth rates, suggesting that the status-seeking does not qualify as an adaptive evolutionary imperative.

Narcissism as an alternative motivation for women's desire to mate upward can be discerned by asking women to rate their own beauty (Wright, 2023). Hypergamy, as an innate reflex, doesn't require a woman to overestimate her own attractiveness nor desirability as she seeks to secure the attention of high value males. Narcissism, however, does entail an overestimation by women of their own attractiveness and desirability as they seek to secure high value male partners. If a woman significantly overrates her own beauty or value, it may suggest that her mating-up proclivity is driven by narcissistic motivations. If she rates herself more accurately, then her desire to mate up is likely driven by a modest, adaptive hypergamy which is an evolved trait – not to mention a trait that exists in both females and males. As an adaptive strategy employed by both sexes, hypergamy does not necessitate an exclusive male disposability any more than it necessitates a one-sided female disposability.

Claim: Neotenous features in women (retention of child-like features into adulthood) prove that they evolved to be prioritised and pampered more than males, this due to the human and mammalian instinct to care for juveniles. Males have no neotenous features, which explains the lack of motivation to extend care and consideration toward them: it's the way nature designed it.

Fact: Women's somewhat neotenous presentation does exist on average, but can be explained in larger part today by the use of cosmetics, feigned childlike gestures, youthful clothing, and increasingly plastic surgeries which are employed to stimulate men's caring reflexes above and beyond the more modest responses men would show in response to naturally occurring neoteny (Wright, 2018). Such enhancements are learned techniques rather than biological endowments, and their use by women represents a supernormal "hacking" of the human nervous system (Wright & Elam, 2016). In comparison to other primates, human males also display a significant degree of neoteny (somewhat less than human females), though male neoteny is not artificially enhanced to the degree we typically see in women today who employ the kinds of artifice mentioned above (Wright & Elam, 2016). In summary, female neoteny, while evoking a degree caring reflexes in males, is an insufficient basis on which to draw the conclusion that male disposability is a necessary counterpart to it.



Claim: Women are the gatekeepers of sex who unilaterally decide which males get to have sex, and males generally comply with this exclusive female choice.

Fact: This argument restates the fallacy that humans are a tournament species in which male animals typically compete with each other for sexual access to females, and females choose the most dominant males while rejecting the rest. Humans are more accurately classified as a “mutual mate choice” species in which males are also choosy about women’s psychological and physical qualities when it comes to long-term pairbonding and parental investment (Stewart-Williams & Thomas, 2013, 2013b; Miller, 2013; Stewart-Williams, 2018).

Independent confirmation of the mutual mate choice model comes from a 2009 study which investigated stereotypes about sexual gatekeeping. It found that the majority of men do say no to sex in a variety of situations instigated by women, and that men and women were statistically similar in their reported prevalence of gatekeeping. In addition, the men that engage in sexual gatekeeping were found to do so just as often as women (Brian, 2009).

Claim: Robert Briffault (1876–1948), a social anthropologist, formulated a law that governs the behaviour of all animals and humans today; “*The female, not the male, determines all the conditions of the animal family. Where the female can derive no benefit from association with the male, no such association takes place*” (Briffault, 1927).

Fact: Popular among laypersons, ‘Briffault’s law’ is an outdated model of evolutionary biology and psychology, especially as applied to humans. To this we can add that Robert Briffault repeatedly insisted that his “law” applied only to animals and not in any way to humans, a fact that has been curiously omitted by those who continue to recite it as proof of female-determined relationships and male disposability in the human context (Wright, 2023b).

Claim: More females than males reproduced during human history, proving that women determined which males had sex, and they selected only the highest value males for this task.

Fact: Some studies have found that fewer males than females reproduced overall, with evidence pointing to a complex array of causes. Prominent among them is the practice of polygyny (one man selecting multiple women to father children with) which reduces the number of males contributing to the gene pool. This is sometimes referred to as the Genghis Khan effect (Sample, 2014) whereby high-status males sequester multiple wives, leaving fewer women available for the remaining men to reproduce with. These practices indicate that female choice may be a negligible factor in various models of polygyny.

The skew in human reproduction is considerably lower than that found in most other mammals, with findings indicating fairly small reproductive differences between men and women comparatively (Ross, et al., 2023). Moreover, reproductive inequality is not a uniform outcome cross-culturally; e.g., in more monogamous societies the reproductive skew is lower or absent, because reproductive opportunities are more evenly distributed between males and females (Ross, et al., 2023). Such cross-cultural differences indicate that reproductive skews, along with assumed male disposability, are linked to social practices and are not hardwired to form a pre-determined outcome.

Claim: Men go to die in wars for the primary purpose of prioritising and protecting women, thus indicating that women are more valuable to the human species than all other values.



Fact: Historically, men fighting and dying in wars has been for the sake of defending broader affiliations such as religious faith, king, country, democracy, lands or on behalf of entire family networks, and not simply for the sake of women's protection. The medieval invention of romantic chivalry popularised the idea of a man going into battle on behalf of a woman; for example, the first troubadour, William IX of Aquitaine (1071-1126), had a picture of his naked mistress painted on his shield, claiming that he was glad to bear her image in battle as she had borne him in bed. This demonstration of gynocentric chivalry represented a new trend of men going to war with women's exclusive protection in mind, or simply to impress a woman, though it is a misrepresentation to extend this sentiment further back into history where widespread evidence of it is lacking (Wright, 2018).

Claim: Throughout history it has been primarily males who have carried out essential infrastructure jobs, and also males who suffered 90% of workplace injuries or deaths in those jobs. This indicates that men have evolved to willingly dispose of themselves due to a biological urge to provide services to women and children at the expense of their own lives. Naturally it is lamentable to lose a male loved one, however the deaths appear to be in accord with natural evolutionary processes.

Fact: There is no evidence that male workplace deaths represent an instinct to die; they are accidents rather than pre-programmed deaths. Stated differently, human males are not comparable to male spiders, Atlantic salmon, octopuses, and certain insects which are genetically programmed to die after fertilising a female.

When infrastructure is carefully designed and maintained it is relatively safe, with no male injury or death on the job. In practice however, safety short-cuts are sometimes involved in the workplace which come with a secondary byproduct of injury and occasionally death. Human male deaths, if and when they do occur in the workplace, are typically avoidable accidents. Furthermore, accidental male deaths that occur while tending infrastructure are deleterious to human species as a whole because it takes out one male (or many males) who would otherwise be maintaining and improving survival infrastructure to a more optimal level – thus the loss results in potential infrastructure deterioration for women, children or other men who also rely on these services.

DISCUSSION

There is no evidence that humans are a gynocentric species whose survival depends on acts of male disposability. Men have always engaged in sacrificial gestures for the benefit of the wider family unit, and such acts were typically balanced by commensurate gestures from women and other family members. In the modern era, however, a series of fallacious biological arguments have been constructed whose purpose is to normalise men's disposability as a matter of "instinct" (Kouloglou, 2019), one allegedly built into the human genome to ensure women's wellbeing and reproductive success. Such arguments overlook human history in which men and women lived in a family and community context, and whose lives and labours were a cooperative contribution toward it; not gynocentrism but *team family*.

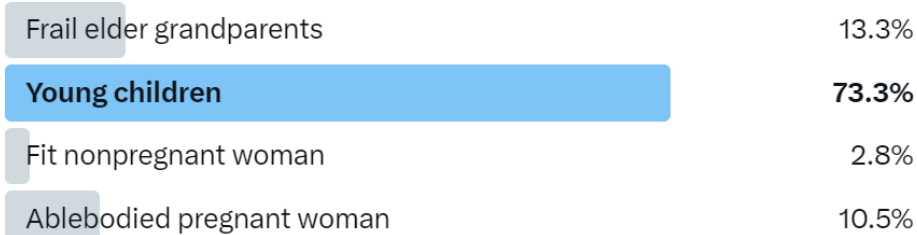
As with all family members, women were occasionally prioritised to receive protections or assistance in recognition that they were valued members of an extended family. This, however, is not motivated by gynocentrism: it's more accurately classified as *storge* (the Greek word for "family love"). To demonstrate the principle that all family members were protected within the traditional family nexus, I recently conducted an informal poll (below) to gauge people's attitudes



regarding protections extended to various family members. I prefaced the poll with the comment that there is debate about whether traditional societies were broadly family-centric, or were more gynocentric (woman centered) in overall character.

There were 825 respondents to the poll which asked which family member, in a traditional society, might men have assisted out of a burning house first? Note that one of the four possible answers included a pregnant woman, because pregnancy is frequently cited as the basis on which women both deserved, and received priority consideration over other family members in traditional settings.

Poll question: In a traditional society, which family member do you think men would have assisted out of a burning house first?



825 votes · Final results

2:44 PM · May 21, 2024 · 12K Views

As suggested by the responses, most people believe that protection and provision are based on the shifting needs of various family members; the person who presents with the greatest need is catered to and cared for first. Respondents did not affirm a *women first* cliché, but instead children and frail grandparents were given priority over both pregnant and non-pregnant women. In the traditional family context, the principle of *all-for-one and one-for-all* applies, and with this principle it is reasonable to assume men, boys, fathers, uncles or grandfathers would also be protected too if they were injured, old, sick, hungry or in need of some kind.

CONCLUSION

Scientific rationalisations of male disposability are at best misguided, and at worst intentionally fabricated to normalise neglect of male issues. Many of these theories remind of Rudyard Kipling's "Just So Stories" in their efforts to explain, or retrofit how male disposability came to be an acceptable reality.

When carefully analysed, the catalogue of theories tends to collapse under the weight of their own illogic. Moreover, they tend to work as a mental constraint that stymies our willingness to address male disposability head on, whereas pushing these spurious theories to one side allows the mind to act in a less dissonant manner, and therefore more efficiently in efforts to support men and boys. In the spirit of an effective advocacy for men and boys, I recommend we apply Occam's razor to these unnecessary theoretical encumbrances.



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