



NO MAN'S LAND  
JACK DONOVAN



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# Introduction

The following three-chapter arc was originally intended to be part of a book project called “The Way of Men.” The Way of Men is not about feminism, but most popular writing about masculinity is written by feminists, or men who have accepted a handful of feminist assumptions. My intent here was to locate my own understanding of masculinity within the context of a larger discussion about men that has been happening for the past several decades. I wanted to engage the arguments of others in a comprehensive way and extract common themes. I wanted to “show my work.”

Together, these chapters form a short book about the way that masculinity has been maligned, re-imagined and mis-represented by others.

I have decided to make this book *No Man’s Land* available for free online, because I hope that this material will be useful to other men who are writing about masculinity, feminism, the men’s movement and conflicts between masculinity and civilization. While I have a stack of books on masculinity that come from the establishment—from university presses and from writers approved by the mainstream media—the most interesting writing about masculinity is happening online. You can cite a book, but you can’t quite link to it—not exactly, anyway.

For those inclined to read *No Man’s Land* as a book, I have made it available in Kindle format, and as a downloadable .pdf file, but it will also remain online as a series of pages on my web site.

I would like to thank my Vulcan friend [Trevor Blake](#) for his help editing these chapters.

*One last thing...*

I’m not a tenured academic. I drive a truck for a living. Sorting through this material takes a lot of work. If you find this valuable and want to support my work — toss me a few bucks for beer, guns and books. There’s a “donate” button [on my web site](#).

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# No Man's Land

If you were a science fiction writer freelancing for a men's magazine in the 1940s, you might have dreamed up a lurid dystopian future where women rule. You might have described a "New Girl Order," or titled your tale "The End of Men." For your bizarro tomorrow, you may well have envisioned a world where boys were punished, drugged or expelled from school for the kinds of things you remembered doing as a kid. Males would be referred to as "the second sex," regarded as "louts" and relegated to low paid, low status jobs. Women would be sexually promiscuous, even marching together as "proud sluts<sup>1</sup>," while men would be legally required to ask for explicit verbal permission for every kiss<sup>2</sup>. When it came time to reproduce, females would often raise children (hopefully female children) on their own. Fathers would be considered quaint but ultimately disposable.

Your readers, back then, would have had quite a chuckle.

However, if writers for America's major newspapers and magazines are to be believed, that future is not far off. While their phrasing could be a touch fantastic and things may not yet be quite as bad as they say, there seems to be a growing consensus that unless major changes occur, the future is no man's land.

In May of 2000, Christina Hoff Sommers challenged the prevailing wisdom about sex and education when she wrote for *The Atlantic* that it was, "a bad time to be a boy in America."<sup>3</sup> Throughout the 1980s and 90s, feminist authors including Carol Gilligan and Mary Pipher had convinced educators that schools favored boys and shortchanged girls. Sommers made the case that, perhaps at least in part in response to overzealous attempts to help girls achieve parity, the evidence showed that girls were actually getting better grades and had higher educational aspirations than boys. Boys were dominating "drop out lists, failure lists, and learning-disability lists." Girls appeared to be more "engaged" in the educational process. Boys were still scoring better on some standardized tests (like the SAT) but this was because few "at risk" boys were even bothering to take the test. According to Sommers, the partisans of girls were writing the rules, programs to aid boys had a very low priority, and the gender gap in academic achievement was widening.

*Businessweek* published a cover story in 2003 confirming "The New Gender Gap." Michelle Conlin claimed that boys were becoming "the second sex" from kindergarten to grad school. She reiterated Sommers' conclusions, and described a bleak educational landscape where boys were being labeled as troublemakers or "touchers," and a disturbing number were being diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Conlin identified what she called a "creeping pattern of male disengagement and economic dependency" that started in youth and snowballed through adolescence, the college years (or comparative lack thereof), a declining male voting rate, and professional underachievement.<sup>4</sup> In the same issue, Thomas Mortenson, a senior scholar at the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, told Conlin that the "new economy" was "a world made for women."<sup>5</sup>

Peg Tyre followed up for *Newsweek* in 2006, and found that things had only gotten worse for

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1 Melnick, Meredith. "From Legal Defense to Rallying Cry: How 'SlutWalks' Became a Global Movement." *Time* 10 May 2011. Web. 23 May 2011. <http://healthland.time.com/2011/05/10/from-legal-defense-to-rallying-cry-how-slutwalks-became-a-global-movement>

2 "The Antioch College Sexual Offense Prevention Policy." *Antioch College*. N.p., 1 Jan. 2006. Web. 23 May 2011. <http://antiochmedia.org/mirror/antiwarp/www.antioch-college.edu/Campus/sopp/index.html>

3 Hoff Sommers, Christina. "The War Against Boys." *The Atlantic*. May 2000. Web. 2 Mar 2011. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/05/the-war-against-boys/4659/>

4 Conlin, Michelle. "The New Gender Gap." *Businessweek* 26 May 2003. Web. 23 May 2011. [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/03\\_21/b3834001\\_mz001.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/03_21/b3834001_mz001.htm)

5 Conlin, Michelle. "This Is a World Made for Women." *Businessweek* 26 May 2003. Web. 23 May 2011 [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/03\\_21/b3834010\\_mz001.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/03_21/b3834010_mz001.htm)

boys in education. From 1980 to 2001, the number of boys who said that didn't like school rose 71% in a study conducted by the University of Michigan. When her piece was published, males had become a minority on college campuses, representing just 44% of the student body.

I was able to observe some of this first hand when I was asked to participate in a "21<sup>st</sup> Century Manhood" workshop at a nearby private high school. The school was co-ed and extremely liberal, but the workshop was boys-only. It was well attended, and the boys had a lot to say. While the boys were clearly economically privileged, their female peers were too, so in their world class wasn't a factor. There was a general consensus that the young men felt like wherever they turned, even when it came to athletics, "everything was about what the girls wanted." The teen movie jock vs. nerds status hierarchy also seemed to be inverted. It was the natural "alphas" of the group who seemed to be the most frustrated and disenfranchised. They told me that they were constantly being corrected and told what to say and how to feel. While feminists frequently claim masculinity is merely a role that men "perform," and that feminism frees men from having to conform to an unrealistic ideal, it was clear to me that these boys felt as though they had to watch everything they said and did, and that they never felt they could simply "be themselves."

Media consultant Guy Garcia wrote that, "If men were a brand, their value would be dropping, because society is simply not buying what they're selling."<sup>6</sup> In his 2008 book, *The Decline of Men*, he argued that men were preoccupied with outdated expectations and "hypermasculine" rituals of violence, and that while women were attaining more academic credentials and making more money, men were "opting out, coming apart, and falling behind."<sup>7</sup> He imagined a future when, in a romantic role reversal, men who wanted to get married would end up waiting hopefully by the phone for Ms. Right to call, because men may have very little to offer their affluent, career-oriented female prospects. However, Garcia also worried that men might "yank at their chains and pull the entire temple down with them."<sup>8</sup>

In the same year, pro-feminist sociologist Micheal Kimmel warned parents about the lure of "guyland."<sup>9</sup> Frat boys, the young men who in decades past would have been preparing to pursue careers and get married, were becoming less interested in doing either. According to Kimmel, "guys" were postponing those traditional markers of adulthood well into their thirties. He acknowledged that the media showed married men begging for sex and being routinely "infantilized" by their wives.<sup>10</sup> Kimmel wrote, "If that's your idea of adulthood, of marriage, and of family life, it makes sense that you'd want to postpone it for as long as possible, or at least take the time to figure out a way to avoid the pitfalls so that your own life doesn't turn out that way." He observed that guys were often living in clusters together well after college, perpetuating frat life, working "McJobs," drinking, gambling and "hooking up" with girls for casual sex. Kimmel explained that while young women were coming of age excited about their prospects and believing anything was possible for them, more and more young men were becoming addicted to sports, porn and video games.

By 2009, there was growing evidence that boys were falling behind in school, and that many young men were more interested in partying, getting laid or goofing off than they were in getting married or investing in their own futures. Women were doing well and men were having fun and everyone was making money, so most people didn't really care too much.

However, two events brought "the decline of men" into the spotlight.

The first was what has become known as "the great recession." The severe economic downturn of the late double-oughts included a real estate bust that resulted in layoffs and work shortages that disproportionately affected men in construction and related industries. The term "man-cession" became popular to describe a substantial gap in unemployment between men and women. Men were losing

6 Garcia, Guy. *The Decline of Men*. 2008. HarperCollins e-books. Loc. 738. Kindle.

7 Ibid. Loc 77.

8 Ibid. Loc 4190.

9 Kimmel, Micheal. *Guyland*. 2008. HarperCollins e-books. Kindle.

10 Ibid. Loc. 591.

their jobs at a disproportionate rate, and projected job growth pointed to female-dominated service-sector industries like healthcare.

The second event that brought attention to the trouble with men was a milestone for women. In late 2009, women were poised to claim over half of the workforce. Maria Shriver and the Center for American Progress released a triumphant report, titled *A Woman's Nation Changes Everything*<sup>11</sup>, which named women "The New Breadwinners." Oprah Winfrey wrote an epilogue to the report, which told women it was up to them to turn the world "right side up." *The Economist* put Rosie the Riveter on its cover, and announced that in a "quiet revolution," women were "taking over the workplace" in what was "arguably the biggest social change of our times."<sup>12</sup>

In 2010, Hanna Rosin claimed in *The Atlantic* that it might be "The End of Men," and asked if modern, postindustrial society was simply better suited to women. Rosin wrote that for every two men who earn a B.A. degree, three women will earn one, and that in the fifteen job categories projected to grow in the United States, all but two were already dominated by women. She mused that, "the U.S. economy is in some ways becoming a kind of traveling sisterhood: upper-class women leave home and enter the workforce, creating domestic jobs for other women to fill." Even working class women seem to be running the show at home, as fathers were increasingly absent or simply irrelevant—stripped of authority in household matters because they weren't earning as much as their wives or "partners." And for the first time in history, couples all over the world—even in once strictly patriarchal South Korea—are more often hoping for baby girls.<sup>13</sup>

For *Newsweek*, Andrew Romano and Tony Doupkil complained that even though women were making more money, men were still doing half as much housework and avoiding "girly" jobs in the booming healthcare industry because they were sticking to a "musty script of masculinity."<sup>14</sup> In the *Los Angeles Times*, Neal Gabler wrote that modern men had become "louts," and concluded that "in a world of unrelenting pressures and of threatening sexual equality, men just want to be boys."<sup>15</sup> Days later, in *The Wall Street Journal*, Kay Hymowitz wondered where all the "good men" had gone. By "good men," like Garcia and the others, she seemed to mean a financially successful man who was willing to leave his male friends and the activities they enjoyed—sports, video games, gadgets, action films and sex with multiple women—to commit to a woman and help her raise a family (for as long as she wanted him to).<sup>16</sup>

Women want men to compete with them in the workplace, yet cooperate with them for the purposes of reproduction. Anthropologist Lionel Tiger identified this source of "substantial tension in" his 1999 book, *The Decline of Males*.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, *The Decline of Males* predicted many of the problems that the writers above have been hashing through over the past decade. Playing on the words of Marx, Tiger understood that men were not only becoming alienated from the means of production but also from the means of reproduction.<sup>18</sup> The invention of the birth control pill, combined with the rise of feminism, the industrial/information economy, and the welfare state had produced a "single-mother system." State intervention, intended to help children in need, had created a new kind of family: the *bureaugamy*.

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11 Shriver, Maria. "The Shriver Report : A Woman's Nation Changes Everything." *The Center for American Progress*. The Center for American Progress, 16 Oct. 2009. Web. 24 May 2011. [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/10/womans\\_nation.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/10/womans_nation.html)

12 "We did it!." *The Economist*. N.p., 30 Dec. 2009. Web. 24 May 2011. [http://www.economist.com/node/15174489?story\\_id=1517448](http://www.economist.com/node/15174489?story_id=1517448)

13 Rosin, Hanna. "The End of Men." *The Atlantic*. July 2010. Web. 24 Feb. 2011. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/the-end-of-men/8135/>

14 Romano, Andrew, and Tony Doupkil. "Men's Lib." *Newsweek*. 20 Sept. 2010. Web. 24 Feb. 2011. <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/09/20/why-we-need-to-reimagine-masculinity.html>

15 Gabler, Neal. "Day of the Lout." *Los Angeles Times*. 13 Feb. 2011. Web. 24 Feb. 2011. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-ca-louts-20110213.0,2024755.story>

16 Hymowitz, Kay S. "Where Have The Good Men Gone?" *The Wall Street Journal*. 19 Feb. 2011. Web. 24 Feb. 2011. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704409004576146321725889448.html>

17 Tiger, Lionel. *The Decline of Males*. 1999. Golden Books. Print. 233.

18 Ibid. 249.

Tiger defined *bureaugamy* as “a family pattern involving a mother, a child, and a bureaucrat.”<sup>19</sup>

The patriarchal kinship system that demanded paternal investment was dismantled by feminists, technology and the legal system. It was replaced with a system that gave women control over virtually all aspects of reproduction, and where a woman could rest assured that the state would step in and provide for her children in the absence of a husband or father. Divorce, most often initiated by women, offered a way for women to seize control of their families at-will, even when a man had chosen to make a paternal investment. Men had become peripheral players in the lives of their offspring, and they could be cut from the team by coach mom at any time. The managing bureaucrat would then determine what role the father would have in his children’s lives—at best he might be offered a co-parenting role, at worst he could be reduced to a mere paycheck.

America may not yet be a matriarchy, but her family structure has become matrilineal, or at least matrifocal. The practice of giving a child his or her father’s surname is a vestigial gesture, an outdated social norm from an earlier time. If women were to stop doing it altogether, or if they were to insist that their names come first in a mother-hyphen-father configuration, any enduring illusion of patriarchy would be shattered. One has to wonder if, in the absence of that illusion, men would invest in fatherhood at all. The switch to a bonobo culture—where males are mere inseminators and helpers—would at that point be explicit and complete. Why *wouldn’t* men simply shuffle about alone or in small, impotent groups, playing games and seeking masturbatory short-term gratification? Why *would* they make the investment or the sacrifices necessary to be good husbands and fathers, when a woman could take it all away on a whim?

None of the scolds have managed to come up with a plan for getting young “guys” to stop drinking, hooking up or playing video games, and start families instead. All they’ve managed to do in exhorting men to “man up” is invoke the “musty script” of a patriarchal system that no longer exists.

To Kay Hymowitz’s credit, in her book titled *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys*, she also recognized that there were “demographic, economic, technological, cultural—and hormonal”<sup>20</sup> reasons why males have been falling behind or opting out, and why for the first time ever, “young women are reaching their twenties with more achievements, more education, more property, and, arguably, more ambition than their male counterparts.”<sup>21</sup> She shrewdly noted that it was not only feminism, but also the Playboy mentality<sup>22</sup> that had worked to erode the love-marriage-baby carriage moral and social prescription that, for so long, encouraged young men to think seriously about their careers and marriage from an early age. More than the others, she also sympathized with the much maligned American male—stuck staring down life in the “cold intimacy”<sup>23</sup> of a domesticated office and treated like a disposable putz.

Hymowitz wondered, “where do boys fit into the girl-powered world?”<sup>24</sup>

She didn’t have an answer. Most seem to shrug their shoulders. Some talk and write about making the educational system more boy-friendly. That couldn’t hurt.

The writers above agree, for the most part, that few industries in any peaceful, global, post-industrial economy favor the aptitudes or the temperament of males. However, as we will see, the very idea that males have a natural temperament chafes against established biases toward cultural determinism and the orthodoxy of feminist sex role theory.

Instead of critically evaluating our society’s plans for the future and trying to create a system that is better for both sexes, most writers have simply demanded that men change their temperaments.

Masculinity, the theory goes, can be whatever we want it to be—so why not “reimagine” a masculinity that better suits the future?

19 Ibid. 159.

20 Hymowitz, Kay. *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys*. 2011. Basic Books. Kindle. Loc. 1558.

21 Ibid. Loc. 819.

22 Ibid. Loc. 1837.

23 Ibid. Loc. 1910.

24 Ibid. Loc. 1035.



# “Reimagining Masculinity”

*“A beast of prey tamed and in captivity—every zoological garden can furnish examples—is mutilated, world-sick, inwardly dead. Some of them voluntarily hunger-strike when they are captured. Herbivores give up nothing in being domesticated.”*

—Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics*

Today, many people would consider it cruel to place an animal in an enclosure that is drastically different from its natural habitat. We design our zoos and aquariums and terrariums to simulate natural conditions as best we can. Enthusiastic hobbyists spend small fortunes attempting to create miniature facsimiles of the natural world. This is to “please” their captive fauna. Although many suppose that the animal would be “happier” in the wild, insofar as animals experience “happiness,” most seem to believe that animals are dumb enough to be tricked into being reasonably content in a half-assed knock-off of the ecosystem they were snatched from. So we spruce up a small glass box with coral to make it *feel* like the ocean, or hang a garland of palm leaves and call it the jungle. Most animals really aren’t that bright, so maybe it is just as well for Mr. Fish to swim around the ceramic pirate ship so long as he is reasonably safe and his belly is full.

Getting men, especially young men, to adapt to the confines and limitations of civilized society has always been a bit of a challenge. Virile restlessness, athleticism and competitiveness have been trained and tamed by sports and games throughout history. Gaming has provided the shoemaker and bricklayer with the *feel* of conflict, danger and war in peaceful, prosperous times. People always assumed that men were drawn to certain kinds of activities, and that providing some sort of release valve for natural male aggression was healthy. It made men happy to do the things they wanted to do, and ways were found for men to exert their virility constructively—or with minimal destruction.

For most men, even “civilized” work was more challenging and demanded more physical exertion than it does now. Work was goal oriented; it required skill and practical know-how. It provided a tangible, personal and immediate sense of purpose. Farming, blacksmithing, and building can all easily be framed as symbolic struggles against nature. Work *felt* more like *aggression* and the exertion of will. On our continuum of masculinity, work was more direct and engaging, less removed from the primal struggle for survival.

The industrial revolution pulled men away from physically and mentally engaging trades and replaced those trades with simple jobs and tasks which required little skill or thought. Increasingly, work *felt* like submission. Sports become more popular and important than ever before. Hobbies like woodworking and hunting and various outdoor activities were promoted as manly pursuits. Men bought pulp magazines filled with lurid tales of exotic adventures they knew they’d never have. Men marveled at strongmen, then weightlifters, then bodybuilders. With decreased opportunities for virile action, men were increasingly drawn to opportunities for virile display. Masculinity became increasingly vicarious, virtual and symbolic.

The transition to a service and “knowledge work” economy made things worse for men. The cubicle *felt* even less like active, aggressive work. Some men are particularly suited to it, or they manage to channel their energy elsewhere, but the “jobs of the future” leave a lot of men inwardly dead. The modern workplace often feels like a fishbowl without so much as a ceramic pirate ship to swim around. If anything, these days it’s a bunch of pink plastic flowers. If you accept the possibility that men and boys, like the males of most other large animals, have in general a different nature and a different set of reproductive interests than the female of the species, it is not difficult to see why the modern, post-feminist world has men “underperforming.”

Unfortunately, when those in the media talk about men in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the questions they ask and the answers they offer usually stink of false naiveté. Like the female reporter who, with a straight face, asked actor Charlie Sheen why he liked to have sex with porn stars, the media remains purposefully and self-righteously clueless about the nature of men.

Feminists claimed the moral high ground, appealing to men’s sense of fairness. They convinced men to help them reorganize society and eliminate the notion that males and females should have different sex roles and responsibilities. Men, perhaps egotistically, agreed that The Way of Men was better, and that it was unfair to prevent women from achieving their full potential in the way that men conceptualized both achievement and potential. Western wealth and technology made this social transformation possible. Manly virtues were neutered and simply became “virtues” — though the Latin root *vir* means “man.” To make women *feel* equal and encourage them to achieve in the public realm, men were encouraged to change the way they talked about manhood. Strength, courage and honor were de-sexed and reinterpreted in more relative terms. To be inclusive, people invented different “kinds” of strength, courage and honor, so that the weakest boy or the meekest girl could somehow feel strong, courageous or honorable. As part of this massive self-esteem building project for women, the idea of “emotional intelligence” was introduced and promoted, though it was never really taken seriously. To explain women’s historical lack of achievement, men as a sex were cast as mere bullies. The achievements of history’s great men were reconsidered and judged according to standards determined by feminist ideology. Noble institutions and social clubs for men that encouraged civic responsibility and “moral masculinity” were renounced as exclusive and patriarchal, or forcibly integrated and rendered impotent and unrecognizable.

Women appropriated everything they wanted from thousands of years of male culture, and men cobbled together a collective identity from what was left—benign macho posturing, fart jokes and beer. Now that imported or micro-brewed “craft” beer is becoming the new wine, and female politicians pose with guns and run around telling folks to “man up,” I’m afraid all that men will have left is fart jokes. This is troubling to me because—despite the persistent efforts of flatulent friends—I still don’t find fart jokes all that funny, much less a desirable basis for my “gender identity.”

In 1974, feminist Janet Satzman Chafetz imagined a utopia where androgyny replaced gender role stereotypes. She hoped that, perhaps by the year 2000, people would move beyond perceiving themselves as being either masculine or feminine, and instead see themselves as merely being human.<sup>25</sup> It is a theme in much of feminist writing that men and women must discover a common humanity and abandon old ideas about the sexes.

However, in the case of women, this has consistently been a case of saying one thing and doing another. Only men are expected to see the world in gender-neutral terms. Women organize consistently as a group to advocate for women’s interests. Even as they have fought for inclusion in every realm once reserved for men, they have created an entire subculture catering specifically to women. As I write this, there is a women’s film festival going on in my town. There are women’s gyms, and a dizzying number of women’s health and health advocacy organizations. Women have their own magazines, television channels, websites, bookstores, and so on. There is, as Hanna Rosin mentioned, a “travelling sisterhood” of women helping each other as women—not merely as human beings. Women are acting collectively in their own interests as a sex.

Women have not abandoned their sexual identities, they have expanded them. Whereas men are told that they can no longer do the things they used to do, and are asked to repudiate their heritage as males, women are told to embrace their past, to keep doing everything that they've always done—and do more!

A common bumper sticker reads:

“Feminism is the radical notion that women are human beings.”

It should read:

**Feminism is the radical notion that men should do whatever women say, so that women can do whatever the hell they want.**

The androgynous feminism of Chafetz has in practice become a feminism that sells women strength and power, but permits them to maintain a distinct sexual identity and organize to advance their own interests as a sex. We have not become simply “human” — we still recognize ourselves as men and women, even in 2011. Chafetz acknowledged that feminism posed a threat to men, because the change would entail, “a loss of many concrete prerogatives.”<sup>26</sup> She was right about that. By any straightforward measure, feminism required men to progressively transfer power to women. If advances in technology and global exchange had been slower, this transfer might have been more orderly and even-handed. However, in Chafetz’s lifetime, economic and technological changes happened so rapidly that women were able to capitalize on them and transform the workplace and the social terrain to their liking at once, while men were left standing with their dicks in their hands.

Guy Garcia hopes that this failure to adapt will liberate men—that, broken by economic and social change, men will remake themselves in the shadow of Amazonian triumph. At the Burning Man festival, he wondered “What better way to welcome the resplendent return of the Goddess than with the symbolic immolation of the male?”<sup>27</sup> Garcia wrapped up *The Decline of Men* with the story of Gerald Levin, who was the architect of the disastrous AOL/Time Warner merger in 2000. When the merger failed, a reeling Levin started talking about bringing “the poetry” back into life during an interview with Lou Dobbs. Levin was approached by a much younger woman who wanted him to invest in a boutique wellness clinic catering to celebrities other high profile clients. Eventually, he left his wife of 32 years for his new business partner.<sup>28</sup> Levin moved to California, where he now serves as the Managing Director of the Moonview Sanctuary. The Moonview Sanctuary specializes in New Age therapy and holistic healing, and Levin has said it is now his mission to “break down male culture.”<sup>29</sup>

The dubious notion that humans once roamed the earth in peaceful, goddess worshipping matriarchal tribes offered a way for feminists and pacifists to reimagine a masculinity completely unlike the strength and aggression based masculinity that has been a relative constant throughout history. If people were once “naturally” peaceful, then all we know of human HIStory could be reframed as an aberration—a fever of male violence that swept over all people in every land. If people were once “naturally” peaceful, then feminism could be reframed as a return to the natural order of things, instead of a departure from nature. Evolutionary biologists Wrangham and Peterson convincingly argued that,

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“It is good to dream, but sober, waking rationality suggests that if we start with ancestors

26 Ibid. 246.

27 Garcia, Guy. *The Decline of Men*. N.p.: HarperCollins e-books. Loc. 4332. Kindle.

28 Stevenson, Seth. “The Believer.” *New York Magazine*. 9 July 2007. Web. 24 Feb. 2011. <http://nymag.com/news/features/34454/>

29 Garcia, Guy. *The Decline of Men*. N.p.: HarperCollins e-books. Loc. 4436. Kindle.

like chimpanzees and end up with modern humans building walls and fighting platforms, the 5-million-year-long-trail to our modern selves was lined, along its full stretch, by a male aggression that structured our ancestors' social lives and technology and minds."<sup>30</sup>

It is most likely that men, armed with greater upper body and overall strength, have used that strength to assert their own reproductive interests over the interests of women and other men in predictable and familiar patterns over and over again. Any other conclusion requires magical thinking.

Eco-pacifist Sam Keen also believed in a peaceful, matriarchal prehistory, and many of the ideas presented in his 1991 New York Times Bestseller *Fire in the Belly* rest on the assumption that the ideas we have about masculinity were shaped by a "warfare system" which followed agricultural development.<sup>31</sup> However, like Wrangham and Peterson, archaeologist Lawrence Keeley concluded in his grim catalog of pre-historic violence, *War Before Civilization*, that the notion of a pacified past is, "incompatible with the most relevant ethnographic and archaeological evidence."<sup>32</sup> If calls for a return to a feminine system are based on a peaceful pre-history that never was, then there is nothing to return to.

While some radical feminists, queer theorists, transgendered persons and others have argued for the eradication of gender stereotypes and a move beyond perceiving people as being either masculine or feminine, the fact remains that biologically speaking about half of humans are male and the other half female. Most people seem to be willing to accept the idea that males and females are at least *somewhat* different. Men and women still maintain and prefer distinct sexual identities.

Indeed, much of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century triumphalism about the rise of women and "The End of Men" acknowledges differences between the sexes and celebrates a distinct female identity.

The new way of women downplays the importance of physical differences between the sexes and praises women for their communication skills, their ability to multitask and their preferences for social coalition building and non-violent conflict resolution. The new way of women celebrates female empowerment and the importance of women in shaping history, and chronicles their rise to prominence as a peaceful overcoming of oppression, guided by a desire for justice and equality. Women are taught to take pride in womanhood, and they expect to be able to do just about anything their heart desires.

The problem with the new way of women is that it relies on a transfer of power and opportunity from men, and if this power exchange is to last, men will have to be taught to downgrade their expectations, even as women are taught to expect the world. The new way of women called for a new way of men. Many have attempted to reimagine masculinity in a way that repudiates the old, violent patriarchal "myths" about men, and provides a more peaceful and sexually egalitarian vision of manhood that is compatible with what women want for themselves.

The mythopoetic men's movement attempted to do this in the 1980s and early 1990s. In *Iron John*, poet Robert Bly tapped into folklore and tried help men get in touch with the "wild man." *Iron John* contained some truthful observations, and it got media attention when it was published in 1990. Feminists saw it as a kind of resurgent sexism and mocked it ruthlessly. In 1995, Micheal Kimmel edited a collection of essays titled *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer*. Most of the essays were criticisms of *Iron John*. The profeminists accused Bly and company of everything from homophobia to male hysteria.<sup>33</sup>

Had they given Bly a fair read, they would have seen that his "wild man" was really quite

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30 Wrangham, Richard, and Dale Peterson. *Demonic Males : Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*. New York: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996. 172. Print.

31 Keen, Sam. *Fire in the Belly*. Bantam Books, 1992. 35-48, 88-111. Print.

32 Keeley, Lawrence H. *War Before Civilization*. Oxford University Press, 1996. 2338. Kindle.

33 Kimmel, Micheal S., ed. *The Politics of Manhood : Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)*. Temple University Press, 1995. Print.

tame. Bly's wild way was explicitly meant to exist in harmony with the feminist project. While it was incompatible with the sci-fi unitard androgyny of Chafetz's utopian feminism, Bly's ethos was a response to the way feminism had actually played out on the ground.

Bly stated in his response to profeminist men that it was important for men to "stand up and speak about the pain that millions of women feel" and that as a father he wanted his daughters to have "a fair chance." He also denied charges that he or any of the mythopoetic men had any interest in reestablishing patriarchy, and even went on to say that the "destructive essence of patriarchy...moves to kill the young masculine."<sup>34</sup> Like other feminists and many men's rights activists, he believed that patriarchy hurts most men, too.

In *Iron John*, Bly wrote reverently about the power of the feminine in both myth and reality. His main concern was that men had grown softer and gentler, but that they had "not become more free"<sup>35</sup> because in the wake of feminist advances many young men spent their lives working to please their mothers, girlfriends and wives—while women were working to assert their power at home and at work. He blamed the Industrial revolution for separating boys from their fathers, creating a generation of males who learned "feeling primarily from the mother" and learned to see manhood from the feminine point of view, and found themselves afraid or suspicious of their own masculinity.<sup>36</sup> This observation was astute, and this is likely to be the case for the increasing number of young men who are raised by single mothers. Men have always learned how to be men from older men, and Bly believed that as boys became increasingly distant from their fathers and grandfathers and other potentially positive mentors, they grew up unsure of themselves and uncomfortable in their own skin. His adapted myth of the "wild man" (an ancient, hairy, mysterious woodland mentor) was meant to help men deal with their primal nature and face the challenges of modernity with resolve, but never cruelty.<sup>37</sup>

Bly understood some of the problems men and boys were facing as they stood in the rubble of patriarchy, looking up to rising women. However, his solutions were forced and his New Agey tone had limited appeal. The idea of grown men going out into the woods to sit in drum circles, read poetry and talk about their feelings was cringe-worthy. It also seemed spoiled and self indulgent. But the biggest problem with Bly's reimagining of masculinity was that it lacked balls.

Bly wrote of swords and battle, but his battles were the bloodless cartoon fantasies of the most innocent inner child, not the real, bloody conflicts of men. His use of myth was selectively biased in this direction. He cites Homer often and gives King Arthur as an example of a "male mother,"<sup>38</sup> but passes over the prominent themes of bloodlust and honor-seeking in the Iliad and the lurid orgies of smiting and beheading that peppered Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Bly advocates the cultivation of an inner warrior but belittles the men whose job it is to make war as mere "soldiers." Bly's new age "inner warrior" was told to assert himself, but he could only do so with words. He couldn't back it up. He was impotent.

In Bly's own words:

"If a culture does not deal with the warrior energy—take it up consciously, discipline it, honor it—it will turn up outside in the form of street gangs, wife beating, drug violence, brutality to children, and aimless murder.

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34 Ibid. 272.

35 Bly, Robert. *Iron John*. Vintage Books. 1992. 2. Print.

36 Ibid. 25.

37 Ibid. 8.

38 Ibid. 182.

One major task of contemporary men is to reimagine, now that the images of eternal warrior and outward warrior no longer provide the model, the value of the warrior in relationships, in literary studies, in thought, in emotion."<sup>39</sup>

Bly's "inner warrior" never makes war, and can only survive in a state where he is protected from men who *are* prepared to use violence against other violent men. The world is still a violent place, and the inner warrior would be a joke—and a helpless target—in the ghetto or the Third World. Bly speaks from a pampered Western upper middle class perspective, where people devote their time to "literary studies" and "relationships." The inner warrior attempts to make use of the vocabulary and the virtues that have characterized masculinity throughout history. Without the real world rationales for strength, courage and honor, he is left with a bunch of melodramatic metaphors for a mundane reality.

Sam Keen also attempted to reimagine masculinity by appropriating the language of violent masculinity for disarmed men. In *Fire In The Belly*, he told men to reject the "myth of war" and to become "fierce gentlemen." Keen's fierce gentleman really had nothing to distinguish himself from a fierce gentlewoman. His virtues were Wonder, Empathy, a Heartful Mind, Moral Outrage, Right Livelihood, Enjoyment, Friendship, Communion, Husbanding and Wildness.<sup>40</sup> None of these are particularly bad values, but they aren't gendered concepts and they have nothing in particular to do with any historical sense of manhood. Feminists, to whom Keen genuflected numerous times, have been in the moral outrage business for years.

In his 1996 magnum opus, *Manhood in America*, Micheal Kimmel hypocritically employed the script of traditional strength-based masculinity to shame Bly and Keen in his chapter on "Wimps, Whiners and Weekend Warriors."<sup>41</sup> Their attempts to nurture some meaningful connection to the myth and history of men—however carefully edited, pacified and conciliatory to feminists in spirit—were still perceived as too much of a threat to the agendas of feminist activists and academics. As an alternative, Kimmel offered what he called a "democratic manhood." He defined this as "a gender politics of inclusion, of standing up against injustice based on difference," and suggested that men should embrace feminism, gay liberation, and multiculturalism as a blue-print for the reconstruction of masculinity.<sup>42</sup> Kimmel decorates his democratic manhood with a sense of struggle against adversity and vague feel of heroism, but calling this "manhood" is a crass and condescending manipulation. Kimmel's profeminist man is a no-man. His masculinity is defined by the rejection of traditional definitions of masculinity, save for its reliance on a narrative of self-sacrifice. This democratic no-man must renounce his own sense of identity and devote his energies to helping others attain a "sure and confident" sense of themselves and "their rightful share of the sun."<sup>43</sup> He must commit himself to selfless toil on behalf of others, and he must do so without question or complaint. Kimmel assures men that somehow, by giving up the struggle to "prove manhood," men will finally be free, and be able to "breathe a collective sigh of relief."

If proving manhood is no longer necessary, what will motivate males to strive to prove that they are "democratic men?" Relieved of all but the most high-minded, abstract and legally optional expectations, what is to stop men from collectively putting their feet up, breathing a sigh of relief, and doing...as little as possible?

The pacified, "reimagined" masculinities of Garcia, Bly, Keen and Kimmel all require men to deny their own interests. The only carrots they dangle for men are obscure and philosophical, and therefore naturally have a very limited appeal. Garcia, Bly, Keen and Kimmel have nothing to say to

39 Ibid. 179.

40 Keen, Sam. *Fire in the Belly*. Bantam Books, 1992. 112-122, 152-185. Print.

41 Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America : A Cultural History*. The Free Press. 1996. 316-321. Print.

42 Ibid. 333.

43 Ibid. 334, 335.

the man who is looking for a way to better his own circumstances or make his own way in the material world.

Sensing that men are pacing their concrete cages, the reimaginers of masculinity have attempted to redecorate man's pound with questing narratives and talk of wildness. But a spiritual journey is just a story about thinking. You don't actually go anywhere. The inner warrior never knows what it means to face death head on, or to see the life leave the eyes of his vanquished foe. His victories are petty and his defeats are trivial. The weekend initiate to manhood never feels the earth on his knees, the urgency of hunger or the warmth of fresh blood on his forehead. And the man who denies his own will to power so that others may thrive makes himself a slave.

Kimmel and other feminists frequently goad men who reject feminism and cosmopolitan values by accusing them of escapism and retreat. But the ascetic masculinity that feminists promote requires a retreat inward—guided by a near-religious and open-ended commitment to helping women, gays and racial minorities achieve their own goals. Feminist and pacifists ask men to live passive lives of restraint and self-discipline. There have always been priests and monks and self-flagellators who got off on self denial. A certain kind of man, usually an intellectual, will find this lifestyle to his taste. Men generally seem to appreciate the obsessive fortitude required for internal as well as external battles. Abstinence has its own momentum, and tends to impart a sense of superiority over those who give in to primal appetites. But Kimmel and the others are blind solipsists if they believe a majority of men will ever become equally passionate about their pet projects, or that all men will be equally willing to put aside their own interests indefinitely.

Equality can't demand that one group restrain itself so that the other group can prosper and do whatever it wants. "Equality," if such a thing were even possible, would at least theoretically offer everyone the same opportunity to act in their own best interests as individuals, with limited interference from others.

However, like Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General from Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron," organized feminists consistently demand a measurable equality of outcome. It has not been enough for women to gain an equality of opportunity.<sup>44</sup> If enough women aren't involved in sports or the sciences or if women aren't equally represented as generals and captains of industry, feminists demand that resources be diverted away from programs that help men, and advocate for programs that encourage women. Since the success of such programs can only be measured by the success of women in the desired area (whether they are succeeding or not) any self-interested bureaucrat who wants to please his or her superiors had better have the numbers to prove men and women are equal every which way. The net effect in such scenarios always a soft discrimination against men. The hypocrisy of feminists when it comes to "equality seeking" efforts is evident from their apparent disinterest in rolling back programs which have made women more successful than men in a given field of endeavor, and in their vocal resistance to starting programs that help men in areas where men are lagging. The "equality" script is employed by women when it serves their interests, but many take a more punitive tone when it comes to lifting the bags of birdshot from the necks of men. After all, men *deserve* their handicaps for oppressing women. Men born in the wake of second wave feminism are punished for the supposed sins of their long dead forefathers.

Although profeminists from Keen to Kimmel attribute women with the noblest and most innocent equality-seeking aims, the truth is that women are neither good nor evil. They are simply female primates, who, like the male of the species, will band together and skew things to their liking if given the opportunity. Women are ascendant, and they have no intention of making any changes that might compromise their advancements. They will err on the side of caution and make sure they are always *a little more equal* than men whenever it really counts. Not because women are evil, but because they will serve their own interests first.

There's a concept within the "men's movement" known as "Men Going Their Own Way"

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44 Vonnegut, Kurt. "Harrison Bergeron." *National Review*. 16 Nov. 1965. Web. 26 Mar. 2011. <http://www.nationalreview.com/nroriginals/?q=MDIINmVmNGU1NDVjY2IzODBlMjYzNDljZTMzNzFIZjc>

(MGTOW). It is a feminist concept in the sense that the MGTOW manifesto generally acknowledges the rights of women to vote and do what they want and does not seek to reestablish patriarchy. The MGTOW movement more or less encourages men to serve their own immediate interests and to do whatever they want, too. It is a decentralized movement that advises men to work against feminist laws that favor women or unfairly penalize men.<sup>45</sup> The basic idea is simply, “you go your way, and I’ll go mine.”

While relatively few men would recognize the MGTOW acronym, it is true that many young men are “going their own way.” And that’s exactly what feminists like Rosin, Kimmel, Garcia, Romano, Doupkil, Gabler and Hymowitz have been fretting about. While there will always be exceptions—the ascetics and the passive, herbivorous<sup>46</sup> “bonobo” boys—young men who were raised by women, processed through a feminist-friendly educational system, who see that women probably have better prospects than they do, and who have been relieved of the responsibilities associated with patriarchy see no reason to toil to help women get the things they want, especially in a society that aspires to “equality” between the sexes. As Rosin and others trumpet a future where girls are for the first time more desirable than boys, they must see the gall in asking men to get excited about speeding the plow.

Young men are becoming cynical and distrustful of a system that is designed to favor everyone but them. Scolding lectures from the agents of diversity culture that tell young men they are simply reacting to a loss of “privilege” certainly don’t inspire them to invest in a future where they have even less “privilege”—especially if it seems likely that this future will “privilege” everybody else.

Young men who see no reason to invest in the future are doing what they always do—they’re thinking short term and taking whatever they can get in the present.

Mark Simpson coined the term “metrosexual” in a 1994 essay, “Here Come the Mirror Men,” to describe a rising male narcissism evident from consumer trends in Western nations. These men, too, were “going their own way”—working out, shopping for fashionable clothes and grooming themselves to attract women (or men) by virtue of their appearances instead of their virility, their accomplishments or their ability to provide economically. Simpson has mused that these “mirror men” were more likely to be in love with themselves than with a woman.<sup>47</sup>

These young men have discovered that good grooming and the appearance of affluence is not all they need to get laid. Pick up artists and advocates of “game” like the pseudonymous authors of the popular blog *Citizen Renegade* (now “Heartiste”) advise men to take advantage of evolutionary psychology and appear to be “alpha”—a primal group leader—when dealing with women. Game advocates say that a man can run game inside a marriage or a long term relationship, but they generally take a dim view of a married man’s chances for well-being and fulfillment—especially financial well-being and sexual fulfillment.<sup>48</sup> Game as a sexual strategy seems to be geared toward providing short term gratification for men and women, but also avoiding long term misery. As my colleague W.F. Price at *The Spearhead* has written, there are no more wives—or at least there are very few. Young women no longer grow up preparing for everyday married life, they grow up planning their careers, their wardrobes and their gauzy, frosted Cinderella fantasy weddings.<sup>49</sup>

There have also been changes in the sexual economy that satisfy the short-term sexual interests of young men. As Tiger noted, available contraception changed almost everything. Women hold more cards in terms of long-term options. Young men know that a pregnant woman can choose to abort or

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45 “MEN GOING THEIR OWN WAY ver. 2.2.” *Men For Justice*. N.p., 9 May 2006. Web. 13 Mar. 2011. [http://menforjustice.net/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=4](http://menforjustice.net/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=4)

46 Otagaki, Yumi. “Japan’s “herbivore” men shun corporate life, sex.” *Reuters*. N.p., 27 July 2009. Web. 13 Mar. 2011. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/07/27/us-japan-herbivores-idUSTRE56Q0C220090727>

47 Simpson, Mark. “Here Come The Mirror Men.” *Independent* 15 Nov. 1994 [UK] . Web. 13 Mar. 2011. [http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror\\_men.html](http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror_men.html)

48 Chateau . “Game And Life Trajectory.” *Citizen Renegade*. N.p., 24 Feb. 2011. Web. 13 Mar. 2011. <http://heartiste.wordpress.com/2011/02/24/game-and-life-trajectory/> (Updated link)

49 Price, W.F. “Stop Looking For a Wife: You Won’t Find One.” *The Spearhead*. N.p., 8 Oct. 2010. Web. 21 Mar. 2011. <http://www.the-spearhead.com/2010/10/08/stop-looking-for-a-wife-you-wont-find-one>

not without input from him, and she can demand child support if she chooses to keep her baby. If he has chosen to make the long-term investment in a family, he knows that a woman—women initiate the majority of divorces—may leave him and demand child support at any time. But when it comes to getting short-term sexual gratification, so long as birth control is employed, “the market ‘price’ of sex is currently very low.”<sup>50</sup> In the past, premarital sex had high social costs (especially for women) and the social costs of out-of-wedlock birth were even higher. However, now that premarital sex has become a norm, contraceptives are widely available, and young women are more likely to be financially successful or self-sufficient, they can afford to demand less long term commitment from men in return for sex. If they demand more, there are other girls who will demand less, and they will be priced out of the market. According to a recent article in *Slate*, this is exactly what is happening, especially on college campuses where there are more females than males. These young women are “are more negative about campus men, hold more negative views of their relationships, go on fewer dates, are less likely to have a boyfriend, and receive less commitment in exchange for sex.” A National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health showed that sex was happening sooner in relationships, and that 30% of young men’s relationships, “involve no romance at all: no wooing, no dates, no nothing.”<sup>51</sup>

Michael Kimmel noted similar campus trends in his book, *Guyland*. He blamed the boys for the fact that the girls have gone wild—“hooking up” promiscuously instead of dating, because that’s what the boys want. It is interesting that even as Kimmel claimed young women have the world on the string, he more or less admitted that they are so desperate for male attention that they’ll gladly debauch themselves for it. Kimmel validated the alpha vs. beta worldview of “game” theorists when he wrote:

“Women sustain Guyland because Guyland seems to be populated by Rhett Butlers, and they are much cooler than the Ashley Wilkeses of the college campus—the guys who study hard, are considerate of their feelings, and listen to them. Those guys are a bit nerdy, good friendship material, but they don’t take your breath away.”<sup>52</sup>

The actions and the unrehearsed words of women reveal that they want something other than what they *say* they want. When women get the fair-minded, negotiating, household-chore-sharing men that feminists say they want, they mock them as “kitchen bitches” and divorce them, as Sandra Tsing Loh did in a piece of comically unrefined misandry she wrote for *The Atlantic* about her own decision to divorce. She mused about a bonobo solution to marriage wherein “the men/husbands/boyfriends come in once or twice a week to build shelves, prepare that bouillabaisse, or provide sex.”<sup>53</sup> Hanna Rosin of “The End of Men” fame responded to the piece with a few confessions about her own husband, who she worried had usurped her in the kitchen by becoming a fine cook who enjoyed cooking for his family. Her feminist solution was to throw a cookbook across the room and “storm” upstairs. Now she rushes home from work to make dinner before her husband can, presumably, so she can feel more like a woman. And her husband, she said, simply “got the message” and “ceded some of the territory” back to her.<sup>54</sup>

As things have shaken out in the aftermath of the sexual revolution, men are better able to assert

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50 Regnerus, Mark. “Sex Is Cheap.” *Slate*. 25 Feb 2011. Web. 16 Mar. 2011. <http://www.slate.com/id/2286240/pagenum/all/#p2>

51 Ibid.

52 Kimmel, Micheal. *Guyland*. 2008. HarperCollins e-books. Loc. 4447. Kindle.

53 Tsing Loh, Sandra. “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off.” *The Atlantic* July 2009. Web. 20 Mar. 2011. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/07/let-8217-s-call-the-whole-thing-off/7488/1/>

54 Rosin, Hanna. “Rise of the Kitchen Bitch.” *Slate*. N.p., 15 Dec. 2009. Web. 20 Mar. 2011. <http://www.doublex.com/section/life/rise-kitchen-bitch>

their interests in short-term relationships, and women are better able to assert their interests in long term relationships. This is a familiar comic theme in film and television—men frustrate women by avoiding “commitment” (to a relationship) as long as they can, and women panic as their biological clocks tick and their viability in the sexual marketplace declines.

As young men, especially young men in disadvantaged socio-economic groups, have invested less effort in education and become less interested in pursuing the kinds of careers that lead to affluence in a global economy, and as the kinds of work many men enjoy has been degraded or exported to countries where labor is cheap, recycled calls to “reimagine masculinity” have become increasingly desperate.

Anti-rape and anti-violence activists like Jackson Katz have been talking for years about the “macho paradox”<sup>55</sup> and telling young men how it perpetuates violence against women.<sup>56</sup> The National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) traces its roots to the 1970s. It counts “unlearning aggressiveness” and “un-learning large parts of the male role” among its basic tenets<sup>57</sup>, and states in its principles<sup>58</sup> that “men can live as happier and more fulfilled human beings by challenging the old-fashioned rules of masculinity.” “Reimagining masculinity” has also been a theme in the men’s movement for some time.

As men struggled after the crash of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century real estate boom with the insult of fewer construction jobs adding to the injury of outsourced manufacturing, previously ignored calls to address the “crisis in masculinity” were finally being heard by a wider audience. In 2010, a Foundation for Male Studies<sup>59</sup> was formed in an attempt to create university programs to study the male condition. Its early promotional content seemed to echo concerns from both the men’s rights and the pro-feminist communities that males are more likely to go to prison, commit suicide, or avoid seeking medical treatment. Many prominent men’s rights activists, in agreement with the feminists they identify as enemies—as well as Bly and Keen before them—now believe that “masculinity has, as it relates to modern realities, corrupt, oppressive and destructive elements that need to change.”<sup>60</sup> Some are positioning men as a new minority<sup>61</sup> group, a new social identity group asserting its interests by competing for a place at the grievance table alongside other sexual, ethnic, racial and religious identity groups.

Feminists have no intention of allowing men to compete fairly with women as a grievance group, and some have turned their pleas for men to “reimagine masculinity” into an impatient command for men to “man up.” Men are being told that they had better get out of their funk and abandon their “musty scripts” of masculinity in a hurry, because the globalist, feminist future isn’t waiting for them any longer. Women are moving up, and if men need to do “girly jobs” to help women make ends meet or become stay-at-home dads to pick up a successful working mom’s slack, then feminists say that’s just how it’s going to have to be. Men had better tie on their aprons *and learn to like it*.

The hypocrisy of feminists telling men to “man up” is that it invokes the same ancient masculine archetypes that all those who have tried to “reimagine masculinity” have been trying to put to bed. They are ham-handedly trying to tap into the power of the very same “male culture” that they want to break down. They are telling men to prove their masculinity, after saying that men should no longer

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55 Katz, Jackson. *The Macho Paradox : Why Some Men Hurt Women And How All Men Can Help*. 2006. Sourcebooks, Inc. Print.

56 Katz, Jackson. *Tough Guise : Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity*. Media Education Foundation. 1999. Video.

57 “Tenets.” nomas.org (National Organization for Men Against Sexism, official site). N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Mar. 2011. <http://www.nomas.org/tenets>

58 “Principles.” nomas.org (National Organization for Men Against Sexism, official site). N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Mar. 2011. <http://www.nomas.org/principles>

59 *The Foundation for Male Studies*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Mar. 2011. <http://www.malestudies.org/index.html>

60 Elam, Paul. “The Plague of Modern Masculinity.” *A Voice for Men*. N.p., 17 July 2010. Web. 19 Mar. 2011. <http://www.avoiceformen.com/2010/07/01/the-plague-of-modern-masculinity/>

61 Ellison, Jesse. “Are Men The New Minority?” *Newsweek* 29 Sept. 2010. Web. 19 Mar. 2011. <http://education.newsweek.com/2010/09/29/the-new-minority-on-campus-men.html>

have to do that. They are selling men liberation from the “man code”<sup>62</sup> and then telling men how they must behave to be considered “good men.”

In effect, feminists are now saying that a man must be strong, courageous and even heroic in his willingness to sacrifice his own interests for the good of the tribe. From the mouths of feminists, this is crass and manipulative. Males may be faltering in the educational achievement, but they’re not *dumb*. Men in the past have made great sacrifices for honor and glory and the esteem of their male peers—not to mention rewards of booty and women. Feminists want men to shame and abandon the bold manhood of their forefathers for a pat on the head and the privilege of being called kitchen bitches.

The reimagers of masculinity have failed to connect with mainstream men, and they are destined to fail so long as they refuse to deal with men as self-interested individuals. Their reimagined models of masculinity will fail to inspire the majority of men so long as they actively reject the natural primacy of strength in the male hierarchy of virtues.

Osama bin Laden famously remarked that “when people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature, they will like the strong horse.”<sup>63</sup>

All of these “reimagined masculinities” are weak horses.

Calling yourself a wild man does not make you wild, and everyone knows it.

Pacifist “fierce gentlemen” and “democratic men” are restricted to talking tough—they can say whatever they want because they don’t have to back it up. Tough talkers and civilized blowhards of both sexes can speak their mind with impunity only in a lawful society secured by the threat of violence from armed men (and women). If manliness can be reduced to “assertiveness,” as Harvey Mansfield asserted, then he was right to say that Margaret Thatcher was a manly woman.<sup>64</sup>

If “manning up” means taking whatever job you can get to support your family or changing diapers or doing whatever women want you to do, why call it “manning up” at all? Why not just call it “being responsible” or “being obedient?” Writer Amada Hess was correct when she observed that Doupkil and Romano’s calls to “reimagine masculinity” merely re-codified masculinity as “personhood.”<sup>65</sup>

Reimagining masculinity is a self-esteem building project for impotent men, and an impotence-building project for men *with* self-esteem.

To maintain any kind of civilization, men have to give up a certain amount of their personal sovereignty. The Romans used the *fascēs* as a symbol of the collected power of men—a bundle of rods strapped to an axe, wielded by the state. Men agree to surrender some autonomy to the state for the promise of security and order. The state provides a means for men to resolve their disputes and replaces the nasty, brutish and unpredictable violence of total chaos with an orderly dispensation of collective violence. The state becomes the axe.

However, as the state grows, it requires ever greater sacrifices of personal power to maintain order. Men make these sacrifices reluctantly, until over time the state gains enough power to demand and do whatever it wants, with or without the majority mandate of men. Today, our leaders openly mock men who are unwilling to give the state complete control over life and death.<sup>66</sup>

The desire to reimagine masculinity is a symptom of enslavement. Men have given virtually all of their power to the state. Many European countries have disarmed their citizens, and men are at the mercy of states that claim to act in their collective best interests. Even a century ago, men gathered in the streets to violently overthrow corrupt governments. Today, most Americans couldn’t conceive of

62 Schwyzer, Hugo. “How Men’s Rights Activists Get Feminism Wrong.” *The Good Men Project*. N.p., 8 Mar. 2011. Web. 19 Mar. 2011. <http://goodmenproject.com/ethics-values/how-the-mens-rights-activists-get-feminism-wrong>

63 “Transcript of Osama bin Laden videotape.” *CNN.com*. CNN, 13 Dec. 2001. Web. 19 Mar. 2011. [http://articles.cnn.com/2001-12-13/us/tape.transcript\\_1\\_bin-shaykh-al-bahrani-diplomatic-language-services?s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2001-12-13/us/tape.transcript_1_bin-shaykh-al-bahrani-diplomatic-language-services?s=PM:US)

64 Mansfield, Harvey C. *Manliness*. 2006. Yale University Press.

65 Hess, Amanda. “Newsweek’s “the new macho”: It’s the new “person!” TBD. 21 Sept. 2010. Web. 20 Mar. 2011. <http://www.tbd.com/blogs/amanda-hess/2010/09/newsweek-s-the-new-macho-it-s-the-new-person--2051.html>

66 Kuhnhehn, Jim. “Obama says some voters are angry, bitter.” *USA Today* (Associated Press). 12 April 2008. Web. 26 Mar. 2011. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2008-04-11-3235435230\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2008-04-11-3235435230_x.htm)

doing more than holding a candlelight vigil. Many western men have given up sole proprietorships and crafts and other activities that offer the satisfaction of willed agency and traded this kind of fulfillment for comfortable but unfulfilling busywork jobs at large corporations where men are merely ants and women make perkier workers. As women gain political and financial influence, men are giving up their sovereignty at home, becoming mere peasants to capricious, emasculating queens who can call upon the axe of the state the moment they feel challenged or threatened. A mere whisper from a woman can place a man in shackles and force him to either confess or prove that he is innocent of even the pettiest charges.

Feminists and socialists are content to entrust the state with their care, protection and employment. Chafetz admitted that make-work jobs would have to be created to facilitate her gender-neutral utopia, and she fantasized about a world without the guns that “many American males cling to” as an “expression of their virility.”<sup>67</sup>

The reimagers of masculinity have realized, perhaps subconsciously, that men still want to *feel* like men. To humor men and better acclimate them to a captive, powerless existence, the reimagers have taken it upon themselves to decorate the cage a bit. They have attempted to provide safe narratives that offer men the *feel* of expressing a virtual virility without the danger it poses to the interests of women and the status quo. They have brainstormed for ways to empower men without actually giving them any real power. To pacify man, they offered him only the “mother-may-I” masculinities most compatible with the interests of women.

It is truly profound that, when the reimagers of masculinity prepared to sell their domesticated manhoods to everyday man, even they could not imagine a way to appeal to him without resorting to coercive testing language of the male groups, the primal vocabulary of violence or by appealing to his desire to demonstrate strength, courage, mastery and a sense of honor.



# Misrepresenting Masculinity

## “The Forty-Nine Percent Majority”

Over the last few decades, many have attempted to “reimagine” masculinity. People realized that despite the calls of feminists to abandon concepts of gender altogether, and despite—as we will see—the firmly held belief among social scientists that sex roles were merely learned social scripts, men and women still maintained separate social identities. Men were particularly concerned with being perceived by others as being manly or masculine, and with avoiding the emasculating stigma of effeminacy. Women and male feminists continue to find this confounding. Upon finishing a series of studies that connected displays of aggression to maintaining masculine identity, researcher Jennifer K. Bosson recently admitted to *Time* magazine:

“When I was younger I felt annoyed by my male friends who would refuse to hold a pocketbook or say whether they thought another man was attractive. I thought it was a personal shortcoming that they were so anxious about their manhood. Now I feel much more sympathy for men...”<sup>68</sup>

The article, written by a woman, was condescendingly titled “Masculinity, a Delicate Flower.” The researcher said men were “anxious” and the findings indicated that men were more likely to engage in displays of aggression when their status as men was “threatened.” This is characteristic of the way that masculinity is pathologized in the modern media. Concern about masculine status and identity—what I would call *honor*—is presented as a curious male “hang up” that impedes their progress in the march to postmodern utopian feminist bliss. When men assert themselves, when they defend their honor, when they “man up” and demonstrate strength, courage and mastery—they are portrayed as being insecure fakes who are fearful, desperate and weak.

If men are weak and insecure, then, compared to what standard? Compared to women, who spend billions each year on cosmetics, fashion, weight loss gimmicks, plastic surgery, self-help books, psychotherapy, anti-depressants and the mail order spirituality of grifting gurus from Benny Hinn to Deepak Chopra and Oprah Winfrey?

This has been going on for a long time. This kind of biased positioning is evident in the majority of articles, books and textbooks dealing with masculinity. John Wayne died in 1979, and two of the iconic Marlboro men died of cancer in the early 1990s, but these *cliché* feminist *bêtes noires* are still burned in effigy in virtually every mainstream anti-masculinity op-ed.

To better understand The Way of Men, it is important to understand how men and masculinity have been caricatured and misrepresented by those with an ideological agenda. To grasp how feminists have misunderstood men, it is helpful to understand their perception of men. Where do their ideas about traditional manhood come from? What are their working assumptions about masculinity, femininity and sex roles? It is also useful to be able to separate thoughtful writing about masculinity

from so many thoughtless refrains.

In his 1976 book *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*, behavioral psychologist and [NOMAS co-founder](#)<sup>69</sup> Robert Brannon pieced together a folksy model of American manhood for the sole purpose of taking it apart. Brannon claimed that the male sex role in 20<sup>th</sup> Century American society had four dimensions, or basic themes.

- **No Sissy Stuff:** The stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability.
- **The Big Wheel:** Success, status, and the need to be looked up to.
- **The Sturdy Oak:** A manly air of toughness, confidence and self-reliance.
- **Give 'Em Hell!:** The aura of aggression, violence and daring.<sup>70</sup>

*The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* is out of print, but Brannon's list remains influential. Michael Kimmel, who is considered by many to be the leading expert in men's studies, has reprinted or referred reverently to Brannon's list in most of the books he has written on the study of gender. Kimmel's 2009 book, *Guyland*, also included the list. Brannon's four dimensions of the male sex role have been discussed in a wide range of recent books, textbooks and articles on rape, sports, transsexuality, psychotherapy, homosexuality, education, fatherhood, bullying, Alzheimer's, nursing, race and Christian living.<sup>71</sup> While comparatively few people have read the book, Brannon's "no sissy stuff" list continues to shape both popular and academic ideas about masculinity. Once you've read Brannon's introductory essay and flipped through *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*, every argument, every "controversial" headline and every "new" study about masculinity coming from the profeminist camp will read like recycled boilerplate from the age of polyester bellbottoms and pet rocks. It's one of the ur-texts of profeminist men's studies.

*The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* was a collection of essays edited by both Brannon and sociologist Deborah S. David. The book's introductory essay in which the "no sissy stuff" list appears was titled, "The Male Sex Role: Our Culture's Blueprint of Manhood, and What it's Done for Us Lately." Brannon and David wrote that, in attempting to define the male sex role, they were "essentially defining a new area of study."<sup>72</sup> Brannon is normally credited with the "Blueprint" essay, and it is partially autobiographical, so I will refer to him alone as its author for the sake of brevity. Other contributors to *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* included feminists Warren Farrell (*The Myth of Male Power*), Kate Millet (*Sexual Politics, The Prostitution Papers*), Lucy Komisar, Marc Feigen Fasteau (*The Male Machine*) and Jack Sawyer (*On Male Liberation*).

Brannon began with the concept of the social role as it pertained to the theatre. The *role* comes from the French, meaning the roll of paper an actor's part is written on. He offered the role of Hamlet as an example. Brannon then defined the *social role* as "any pattern of behaviors which a given individual in a specified (set of) situation(s) is both: (1) expected and (2) encouraged and/or trained to perform."<sup>73</sup>

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69 "Leadership." *nomas.org* (National Organization for Men Against Sexism, official site). Web. 23 Apr. 2011. <http://www.nomas.org/leadership>

70 David, Deborah S., and Robert Brannon, eds. *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority : The Male Sex Role*. Philippines: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1976. 1-42. Print.

71 A quick Google Books search for "Brannon Big Wheel Sissy" yielded over 200 references to Brannon's list in various books and journals for popular as well as academic audiences.

72 David, Deborah S., and Robert Brannon, eds. *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority : The Male Sex Role*. Philippines: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1976. vii. Print.

73 Ibid. 5.

A role is distinguished from a stereotype, because an individual may or may not be encouraged or expected to live up to a stereotype.

Brannon stated that he and “other young social scientists” at the time believed that the “most promising answer to most questions about human behavior” would not be found by studying ancient history or biology, but by studying the “invisible but almost irresistible social patterns of pressure which shape and direct the behavior of every man and every woman.”<sup>74</sup> Though Brannon didn’t deal with the nurture vs. nature dilemma explicitly, his emphasis on role learning places him deep in the nurture camp with anthropologist Margaret Mead. In fact, Brannon rested his “Blueprint” argument concerning the importance of learned roles in determining sex-differentiated behavior on Mead’s study of three primitive societies in New Guinea: the *Arapesh*, the *Mundugumor* and the *Tchambuli*. Mead’s characterizations of sex roles in these societies, it was later revealed, were either flawed or flat out wrong.

According to Brannon’s reading of Mead, both male and female members of the Arapesh tended to be “passive, cooperative and peaceful” and their culture tended toward feminine behavior as a whole. Brannon failed to note that Reo Fortune, who was married to Mead and who studied the Arapesh with her in New Guinea, characterized the Arapesh quite differently. In his 1939 article “Arapesh Warfare,” Fortune explained that although a great deal of war-making had been suppressed by German occupation of their land, the Arapesh maintained a long tradition of wife stealing. This tended to be the major aim of their violent conflicts. The old men of the tribe bragged about their war kills from more violent times, and if they had none, they bragged about their hunting records. Fortune rejected Mead’s claim that the Arapesh expected and exhibited similar temperament in the sexes. Arapesh men even seemed to maintain, as men often do, a hierarchy of masculinity within their clans. Fortune wrote:

“...we may cite the proverb, *aramumip ulukwip nahaiya; aramagowep ulukwip nahaiya*, “Men’s hearts are different; women’s hearts are different,” and also the existence of a class of men called *aramagowem*, “women male,” or effeminate men. The class of *aramagowem* is a definitely assigned class, with definite functions, given inferior food at feasts and special subordinate place. The man, Djeguh, mentioned in our accounts of faction feud and of war, was, for example, an *aramatokwin*, “woman male” (the singular form of *aramago-wem*). He was never suspected of cowardice in war. He was, however, without ability in men’s dances, oratory, economic leadership, and in his understanding. He was found by the writer to be very reticent and quiet.”<sup>75</sup>

Mead also explained away the swaggering, bossy alphas of the villages—the “big men”—as self-sacrificing fellows who, though they weren’t really predisposed to that sort of assertiveness, had to pretend to be “big men” for the sake of the community. In 2003, having visited Arapesh country himself, anthropologist Paul Roscoe reviewed the work of Mead and Fortune. He wrote that Mead “got it wrong,” and that Fortune, “more accurately depicted Mountain Arapesh warfare.”<sup>76</sup> Early reviewers noted that several details of Mead’s own account of the Arapesh seem to invalidate her colored conclusion that they were a peaceful people, and several other anthropologists have agreed that Mead portrayed the Arapesh inaccurately.<sup>77</sup>

Both the men and women of a neighboring tribe, the Mundugumor, are described by Brannon

74 Ibid. 3.

75 Fortune, R.F. “Arapesh Warfare.” *American Anthropologist* 1.1 Jan. (1939): 22-41. JSTOR. Web. 25 Apr. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/661720>

76 Roscoe, Paul. “Margaret Mead, Reo Fortune, and Mountain Arapesh Warfare.” *American Anthropologist* 105.31 Sept. (2003): 581-91. JSTOR. Web. 26 Apr. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3566907>

77 Bashkow, Ira, and Lise M. Dobrin. “The Anthropologist’s Fieldwork as Lived World: Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune among the Mountain Arapesh.” *Paideuma* 53 (2007): 79-87. JSTOR. Web. 27 Apr. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40341946>

(via Mead) as being aggressive and belligerent. There is nothing particularly noteworthy about finding a tribe of warlike people. The relevant point here is that the males and females of the tribe were portrayed as being equally aggressive. One would have to maintain a naïve and sheltered sense of things to imagine that women are non-violent by nature. Indeed, YouTube and reality television frequently provide us with examples of females behaving barbarously. We don't have to fly to New Guinea to observe violent women. Females are clearly capable of aggression. Were both the male and female members of the Mundugumor tribe equally aggressive? Given all of the other data available about humans and other apes, as well as Mead's tendency to see things as she wanted to see them, it's easy to write her assertion off as more subjective interpretation.

To support his theory that culturally determined sex roles are primarily responsible for the differences in behavior between human males and females, Brannon cites Mead's research on the Tchambuli people. Tchambuli males are described as being "sensitive, artistic, gossipy, fond of adornment and emotionally dependent." According to Brannon and Mead, Tchambuli females were expected to be "competent, dominating, practical and efficient," as well as being sexually aggressive. Deborah Gewertz did some fieldwork with the Tchambuli, or *Chambri* (as she referred to them) in 1974 and 1975. She noted in a 1981 paper on the subject that the "(in the literature of women's studies) Chambri women had achieved the status of icons because of their significant and dominant roles within their villages." Her own perception of gender relations among the Chambri was somewhat different from what Mead saw years earlier, and she suspected that what Mead had witnessed was a reduced level of competition between Chambri men due to temporary economic and historical influences. When Mead was observing them, the Chambri men had recently lost a war, and the tribe was in exile. The Chambri women ended up doing a lot of fishing, and therefore temporarily wielded more economic influence. The men were biding their time and looking for ways to re-establish dominance in the region. It was through the fishing efforts of the women that the men were able to re-establish their status among the neighboring tribes.<sup>78</sup>

Gewertz's assessment is particularly interesting in light of the shifts of economic power that are happening between men and women in the United States. Men and women are not interchangeable, and their social roles are not the only meaningful causes of their differing behaviors, but they can occasionally swap duties to help each other through tough or uncertain times. A few years ago, I worked a delivery job with a strapping, competent fellow who eventually decided to stay home with his children because his wife was making a lot of money as a nurse while his wages were barely covering day care costs. It made more sense for him to stay home, and his kids were almost certainly better off for having their father around. He was not an effeminate man by any measure, but one wonders what fanciful assertions Mead or Brannon might have made about the flexibility of sex roles had they studied his family.

As Gewertz alluded, by the 1970s, Mead's research had become extremely popular in feminist circles for what it seemed to imply about human nature and the relationship between the sexes. Based on her interpretation of Arapesh, the Mundugumor and the Tchambuli cultures, Mead famously concluded in 1935 that:

"many, if not all, of the personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of head-dress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex."<sup>79</sup>

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78 Gewertz, Deborah. "A Historical Reconsideration of Female Dominance among the Chambri of Papua New Guinea." *American Ethnologist*, 8.11 Feb. (1981): 94-106. JSTOR. Web. 27 Apr. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/644489>

79 Margaret, Mead. *Sex and Temperament: In Three Primitive Societies*. 1935. Harper Perennial, 2001. 262. Print.

Mead made sex roles appear to be as superficial and arbitrary as fashion, and one can easily imagine the influence that might have had on budding feminist ideologues like Brannon. As we have seen above, however, Mead's depictions of the tribes that led her to draw these kinds of conclusions could charitably be described as "incomplete." As this is the stated basis for Brannon's belief that sex roles are almost wholly learned—and can therefore be unlearned or re-shaped completely—his conception of the male sex role is left standing on extremely shaky ground. As more people study the societies that Mead wrote about, the sex role patterns within those groups have become increasingly familiar.

According to Derek Freeman, Mead's most notorious and persistent critic, Margaret Mead's questionable research played a pivotal part in shifting the anthropological zeitgeist in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century from biological determinism to cultural determinism. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the work of Charles Darwin appeared to validate long held and somewhat reasonable suspicions about the importance of heredity in determining human behavior. Man had long bred animals and been aware that animals had certain temperaments and physical characteristics that could be passed on to the next generation. Groups of humans seemed to have heritable physical and behavioral characteristics, too, so it was not a great stretch to imagine that the future of a human population could be controlled by aiding the process of natural selection through selective breeding.

The study of eugenics<sup>80</sup>—"the self direction of human evolution"—became popular and eugenic laws were passed in both Europe and the United States. Sir Francis Galton, the father of eugenics, had declared in 1873 that, "when nature and nurture compete for supremacy on equal terms," nature is always proven stronger.<sup>81</sup> Evolutionary biologists Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson referred to Galton's framing of the enduring "nature vs. nurture" debate as "Galton's Error," because the forces of nature and nurture are always interacting in humans.<sup>82</sup>

It was during the height of the heated nature vs. nurture debate, however, that Margaret Mead came of age. According to Freeman, Mead's mentor Franz Boas was searching for convincing evidence to substantiate his belief that "social stimulus" had a far greater influence over human behavior than "the biological mechanism." When Mead went to Samoa at the age of 23 to study adolescence there, she was looking for a "negative instance"—a conflicting account that disproved a long held generalization about human behavior. In this case, the long held generalization she hoped to disprove by offering a single exception was the belief that adolescence was a difficult period. Seeking this negative instance, Mead published a gloss of Samoan society that downplayed sources of tension and conflict and portrayed the Samoan lifestyle as one characterized by relative ease.<sup>83</sup> Her example of Samoa was lauded by Boas, immediately became a bestseller, and has since become a favorite of advocates for sexual freedom and feminism the world over. Moreover, the influence of her research and its emphasis on negative instances that seemed to prove the importance of nurture over nature is evident in Brannon's "Blueprint" essay.

Freeman noted that Mead was "denied entry to all chiefly fonos" *because she was a woman* and "had no participation in the political life of Ta'aū." She lived with a Western host family in a Western home, and conducted the majority of her research by interviewing little girls.<sup>84</sup> Freeman, citing his own first hand observations of Samoan political life and the observations of many men who had visited the island over the preceding century, characterized the Samoans as competitive, jealous, prideful and obsessed with rank. Strangely, Mead had portrayed the Samoans as a peaceful, causal people who had no war gods, who didn't esteem bravery, and who didn't give a special place in society to the warrior. Fully half of the pagan Samoan gods were in fact war gods, and the Samoans had a long

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80 Fun fact: εὐγενής, the Greek root of *eugenics* means well-born, of noble race, of high descent. It is also the root of the name "Eugene."

81 Freeman, Derek. *Margaret Mead and Samoa*. N.p.: Harvard University Press, 1983. 10. Print.

82 Wrangham, Richard, and Dale Peterson. *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*. New York: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996. 95. Print.

83 Freeman, Derek. *Margaret Mead and Samoa*. N.p.: Harvard University Press, 1983. 82-94. Print.

84 *Ibid.* 66-73, 131. Ta'aū, the largest island in American Samoa, was the island she famously studied.

history of slaughtering—possibly even cannibalizing—a huge percentage of their rivals. Samoan men believed it was a great honor to die in battle. Political power was given to those who had conquered or shown bravery in battle. When Freeman repeated Mead’s quotes about warriors holding no place of importance in Samoan society to a high ranking Samoan man, he became irate.<sup>85</sup>

The flaws in Mead’s research had not been fully revealed at the time Brannon wrote *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*. However, like Mead, Brannon’s theories relied on wishful thinking. Mead’s research was embraced because it told certain people—people like Brannon—what they wanted to hear about human nature and gender. Brannon’s depiction of the male sex role and the idea that its script can be re-written completely builds on Mead’s wishful thinking, and appeals to feminists because it is essential to their concept of a gender-neutral society.

The hard biological determinism of Galton overshot reality and was used to justify eugenics laws that were sometimes unnecessarily cruel, or based on faulty assumptions. The emphasis on hard cultural determinism advanced by Mead, Boas and Brannon nurtures another sort of hubris, and is employed by enthusiastic social engineers to justify their quack programs and policies. The traditional approach has been to recognize human nature as prone to wickedness and craft social solutions that curb or redirect the aspects of our natures that make civilized living impossible. Humans are social animals, and the human way has always been to seek a balance between nature and nurture.

Do male sex roles exist?

Of course they do.

Do the particulars of the male sex role vary from culture to culture, due to differences in economics, religion, resources, technological advancement, weather, historical factors and innumerable cultural idiosyncrasies and influences?

Of course they do.

However, Mead and Brannon rejected the importance of biological influences in shaping those roles. Culturally determined sex roles undoubtedly influence the way men and women conduct themselves. Brannon’s error—and the error of his many ideological heirs who would attempt, again and again, to “reimagine” masculinity—was in portraying social sex roles as *all-important*. All cultures have different “scripts” for the sexes, but the scripts can’t simply be re-written *from scratch*. To borrow an example from Brannon’s essay, many actors have played and interpreted the role of Hamlet. The role has been re-written and adapted and many different versions have been produced. But you can only fool around with it so much—something of significance has to remain of the original character for us to recognize the similarity. After a certain number of deviations, the character is no longer Hamlet.

Attempts to understand masculinity present a “Ship of Theseus” paradox. Theseus’ ship was preserved as a monument by the Athenians for many years, and according to Plutarch’s account, the Athenians had replaced the old planks as they decayed with new and stronger timber. He remarked that “this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same.”

Will any script do, so long as it is assigned to biological males and carefully taught to them? If not, how many parts can be replaced or exchanged before what we recognize as masculinity is no longer recognizable? Can a sturdy beam be replaced with a rotten plank?

Most anthropologists are quick to acknowledge the historical importance of Mead’s pioneering work and her contributions to the field of anthropology, but it is clear that she did not succeed in finding a “negative instance” with regard to sex roles. No one else has, either. Donald Brown’s list of Human Universals<sup>86</sup> identifies the following as norms for males:

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85 Ibid. 157-173.

86 Brown, Donald E. “Human Universals.” DePaul University, n.d. Web. 19 Feb. 2011. <http://condor.depaul.edu/mfiddler/hyphen/humunivers.htm>

### **Cross-Cultural Norms for Males in Human Societies<sup>87</sup>**

- Male and female and adult and child seen as having different natures.
- Males dominate public/political realm.
- Males engage in more coalitional violence.
- Males more aggressive.
- Males more prone to lethal violence.
- Males more prone to theft.
- Males, on average, travel greater distances over lifetime.

Is it simply due to an arbitrarily determined sex role—*a script that can be re-written from scratch*—that people all over the world share some of the same basic ideas about men?

Before we review the content of Brannon's list itself, there's another list I came across that puts many discussions about sex roles and masculinity in perspective. It could be considered "the one list to rule them all" because it isn't locked in one time or place or culture. It is neither a "wish list" detailing how someone thinks men should behave, nor a diagnosis. Evolutionary biologist Randy Thornhill and cultural anthropologist Craig T. Palmer came up with a list of predictions, based on evolutionary theory, for male mammals "with a history of greater sexual selection on males than females."<sup>88</sup>

### **Comparative Predictions for Male Mammals, in Species Where Sexual Selection is Greater on Males<sup>89</sup>**

- Males will be larger than females.
- More males than females will be conceived and born.
- Males will die younger as a result of physiological malfunction than females.
- Males will engage in more risky activities in the context of acquiring mates than females.
- Males will have higher mortality than females as a result of external causes, such as combat, disease, and accidents.
- Males will exhibit more general aggression than females.
- More often than females, males will engage in escalating violent aggression that leads to injury and even death.
- Pre-adult males will engage in more competitive and aggressive play than pre-adult females.
- Males will be less discriminating about and more eager to copulate with females than vice-

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87 Ibid.

88 Thornhill, Randy and Palmer, Craig T., *A Natural History of Rape : Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*. The MIT Press. 2000. 37-38. Print.

89 Ibid. Note: Thornhill and Palmer's list was a collection of predictions made wide variety of scientists, who were cited in their original lists. Readers are highly encouraged to purchase Thornhill and Palmer's book, and investigate those references themselves. MIT Press is encouraged to get with it and make this excellent book available via Kindle, iPad, etc.

versa.

As mentioned earlier in this book, evolutionary theory predicts that because the parental effort required of human females is much greater than that of human males, there will be more competition between human males to access that effort, and males will be selected in part for their ability to overcome other males in competition for mating opportunities. For humans living in complex societies, the process of selection is far more complicated than simply having the strength and courage necessary to overcome one's enemies in hand-to-hand combat or achieve a higher status within a group hierarchy, but for most of human evolutionary history, fortune—and females—favored the strong and the bold.

Now, let's take another look at Brannon's list.

Three out of four of his hokey slogans contain advice that is, from an evolutionary perspective, quite sound and in line with the predictions listed above.

**The Big Wheel:** Success, status, and the need to be looked up to.

**The Sturdy Oak:** A manly air of toughness, confidence and self-reliance.

**Give 'Em Hell!:** The aura of aggression, violence and daring.

Brannon presented these themes as part of an arbitrary script, a role society encourages males to play, a false front that men must fake in order to "make it." One of Brannon's intellectual descendants, pro-feminist anti-rape activist Jackson Katz, has referred to this as a "tough guise" and has made a career for himself out of blaming the media for promoting images of violent masculinity. From an evolutionary standpoint, Brannon's slogans are simply folk renditions of solid advice for males who want to win the evolutionary game. In straightforward terms, Brannon's big wheel, sturdy oak and "give 'em hell" themes are messages telling men to signal high status within the male group, and to demonstrate strength, courage and competence.

**No Sissy Stuff:** The stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability.

Brandon listed "No Sissy Stuff," as the first dimension of the male sex role. He correctly noted that while females will naturally identify with their mothers, because they are both the same sex, at some point males will look to male role models to shape their identities. Then he gave several examples of how men and women alike scold boys when they behave like girls, and how men will go out of their way to avoid being seen as effeminate. He employed the standard tactic of taking a fairly innocuous practice that was culturally assigned to women, and then making men look neurotic for wanting nothing to do with something so harmless. One example was a 230-pound linebacker who was asked if he was worried about looking like a "sissy" because he did needlepoint in his spare time. In a cheap, classic *reductio ad Hitlerum*, Brannon then provided a quote by Adolf Hitler, explaining why he didn't want a wife who was overly intelligent. The insinuation, of course, was that any man who was concerned with his own reputation as a man—with masculine *honor*—was morally aligned with Adolf Hitler.<sup>90</sup>

It is true, as Ms. Bosson above "discovered," that men sometimes avoid activities that seem trivial, simply because they are associated with women or effeminate men. Pointing this out is an easy

way to make men and masculinity appear to be absurd or ridiculous. When doing things that are out of sync with the male sex role, men today often joke that they are “secure about their masculinity,” so they aren’t worried about it. Ironically, this is usually a strategy men employ to diffuse criticism and one-up each other. It is a form of bragging that says, “I have so much excess credibility as a man that I don’t need to concern myself with petty infractions of man code.” The need to acknowledge the infraction is an acknowledgement of the code, and an indication that the man in question is, in fact, at least slightly uncomfortable with breaking it. Saying that you are unconcerned with breaking codes of masculinity is an indirect way to challenge male peers and make yourself seem ballsy and invincible, while making others seem fearful and vulnerable.

Cultural codes of masculinity can be idiosyncratic, because they accumulate references and associations over long periods of time—and it is not uncommon for men to avoid behaviors or activities without really knowing why. For instance, there is nothing particularly male or female about doing the dishes. Men engaged in the manliest, riskiest, all-male activities—on whaling ships, in the military, on the frontier—have washed their own cups and plates. However, in married households, women have traditionally ended up with that bit of labor, so there is a lingering cultural association that regards doing the dishes as “women’s work.” This is a bit silly, and most men recognize that, but few men would brag that they *always* do the dishes—at least to their male friends.

Brannon complained that men avoid emotional openness and vulnerability, but he failed to acknowledge or even consider the obvious tactical advantages of being choosy about with whom one shares his tears. In *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*, Warren Farrell (who later wrote *The Myth of Male Power*) elaborated on the theme. He characterized the men of his time as being “emotionally incompetent” and “emotionally constipated,” and associated the male resistance to crying in public with passive resistance to black integration among whites. Farrell wrote that men create a “masculine mystique” by hiding their emotions, and theorized that we would be better policed and governed if our male leaders cried and admitted their failure openly. He naively—almost childishly—wondered why people would question a man’s ability to lead other men, or a nation, if he appeared to be emotionally vulnerable.<sup>91</sup> In the essay that followed, Jack O. Balswick and Charles W. Peek melodramatically referred to the “inexpressive male” as a “tragedy of American society,” but failed to articulate *why* the confident stoicism of the John Wayne cowboy or the James Bond (isn’t Bond British?) playboy was so “tragic.”<sup>92</sup>

Like so many male feminists, the male writers that David and Brannon chose to feature in *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* repeated the sentiments of women without thinking critically about why men behave the way they do. If women were “free” to cry in public, so the logic goes, men would be “freer” if they cried in public, too. The word “vulnerability” has acquired a certain cachet in the gynocentric worlds of feminist thought, but to most men, it remains what it has always been—a technical euphemism for weakness. Exposing a “vulnerability,” to men, is like rolling over and offering your belly to anyone who would take it. It’s not a positive. It’s something you would do only around someone whom you trust completely. Women have a habit of throwing men’s exposed emotional vulnerabilities back at them in heated arguments, and many men have been burned for baring their souls. Even in the context of a private relationship, many men have good reasons to avoid showing women or men the things that really get to them.

If you look at vulnerability from the perspective of a group hierarchy, it becomes obvious why men don’t want to expose their vulnerabilities publicly, and why men distance themselves from men who are obviously vulnerable. Crying is perfectly natural. It’s a perfectly natural admission of defeat, emotional exhaustion, fear or powerlessness. A man who is “vulnerable” is a weak link. He’s shown that he is going to break under pressure, or that he is prone to manipulation. Tactically, this is a problem for the group, and as a result he is going to lose status within the group. Men who appear to be unflappable, however, make the group look watertight. It makes perfect sense for men to want to ally themselves with strong men who can pull their weight, and who don’t dishonor the group. From a

91 Ibid. “The Politics of Vulnerability.” 51-54.

92 Ibid. “The Inexpressive Male: A Tragedy of American Society.” 55-57.

primal perspective, dishonor is danger. It should be obvious why a group of men competing with other groups of men for survival would want to appear to be strong, courageous and competent.

All of this primal posturing may seem absurd, say, in an office or walking around the mall, but status still matters. While the popular media sometimes paints a feminist fantasy of what its most privileged, successful women want from men (usually it still comes down to resources and ego stroking) men on the ground observe women selecting for high status or the appearance of high status *all the time*.<sup>93</sup> Just as many young girls strive to be in and exclude each other from the most popular cliques, it makes sense for men to increase their status by courting high status groups of men. Even the lowest status male in a group of high status males stands a better chance of snagging a decent piece of tail than he might on his own, but the mating game is only part of the equation. Membership in a high status group confers many benefits, including access to desirable social networks, resources and protection from harassment.

Sound a little high-schoolish? Perhaps. Most would agree, however, that a good way to become more successful is to surround oneself with successful people.

Avoiding “sissy stuff” is not merely about a desire to differentiate oneself from one’s mother and find a separate identity among men—although it is certainly that, too. “No Sissy Stuff” is an admonition to young men that routes them away from apparently submissive behaviors and influences and interests that could handicap them—and could make them appear vulnerable—as they compete and socialize with other men. If you’re theoretically trying to be selected by a woman, as a man, why would you want to run the risk of being mistaken for a woman, instead of trying to prove that you’re among the best men? Why *wouldn’t* you advertise yourself as an exemplary man?

When throwing around evolutionary jargon, it is important to remember that as humans evolved they were unaware of evolutionary processes. Even now that we are aware of evolutionary theory, we do not consciously play evolution’s game. Sexual selection simply shaped our bodies and our drives to give us tactical advantages in the primal environment. Technology and the complexity of our civilization has fouled up a lot of the variables, even as our monkey brains remain essentially the same.

For instance, my best pal is a strategic and mechanical thinker with average to above average intelligence. He is a natural fighter—large, quick, strong and athletic. He doesn’t have to put on a show to exude an aura of confidence, toughness, aggression, violence or daring. In fact, he has to make a conscious effort to dial all of those qualities back just to function in polite society. Most men simply allow him to dominate a conversation, even if he clearly has no idea what he is talking about. He has all of the hunter traits, to the extent that even at the age of thirty he can barely sit still and needs to be actively engaged in some kind of challenging task to avoid slipping into a minor, restless depression.

My friend has absolutely no “game.” Healthy, attractive females ask for his number and send him provocative, semi-nude pictures of themselves directly to his phone. I’ve seen it happen over and over. I’ve seen the photos and the desperate text messages. All he has to do is show up at a bar, relax and let nature take its course. In a primal environment, in the absence of birth control, he’d have a sizeable brood of mini-monsters. Ironically, because he can have the pick of the most attractive females, he often ends up dating strippers on birth control who have large breast implants. Their technologically enhanced mammaries probably fool his primal brain into thinking they are ideal for suckling his offspring. Evolution’s game—which he is designed to win—keeps leading his genes to a false victory, and an evolutionary dead end. Due to the dysgenic quirks of our very new, modern world, he is a natural alpha who is being selected out of the gene pool. I’ve often joked with him that, as far as evolution is concerned, he is being trounced by a weak, sickly Mormon accountant raising eight kids somewhere in Utah.

The point here is not to say that we need to realign our society to match primal circumstances in every way, or institute some sort of eugenics program. It is simply to say that the male sex role, roughly

as Brannon describes it, endures because it is consistent with the way our species evolved, and the idea that we can simply rewrite the script *from scratch* or re-imagine the male sex role *completely* to suit the preferences of fashionable ideologies is absurd. The apparent de-motivation of men in contemporary society is a direct result of attempts to ignore history and evolution and re-imagine manhood in a way that is inconsistent with human nature.

I've written that Brannon pieced together his folksy model of manhood for the sole purpose of taking it apart. Brannon was not trying to understand men so much as he was trying to change them. I have made a point throughout to characterize his list as "folksy" and "hokey" because I think building the book *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* around a collection of dated, goofy slogans was intentional or at least convenient to his aims. Instead of trying to understand why men behave the way they do, or investigate why men in most cultures<sup>94</sup> seem to revere strength, courage, competence and high group status, Brannon caricatured manly virtues, failed to entertain the benefits of aspirational masculinity, focused on the losers in male hierarchical struggles and portrayed men as clueless marionettes who were simply being manipulated by an out-dated script.

"...like the insecure politicians who decided to "hang tough" in Vietnam, like the ulcer-driven executives in their paneled offices, like the strutting youth-gang leaders, the young G.I.'s at My Lai, the ambitious counter-culture gurus, the casual and unfeeling rapists, and the silent Walter Mitty's who only dream...we each have been dancing the crippling steps, *are dancing them still*. Only recently have we begun to discover the invisible cords which have moved us for so long, to feel their silent tugs at our fantasies, judgments, and fears. One can only dimly imagine what the world would be like if we could somehow turn the music off, cut the cords of sex roles, and discover ourselves."<sup>95</sup>

This "mock the poor, misguided, obsolete, insecure straw man" strategy has become the standard tactic of the pro-feminist men's movement. Feminist Tony Doupkil, in his second man-baiting piece for *Newsweek*, referred to modern men as "Beached White Males."

"As if middle age isn't bad enough. The moribund metabolism. The purple pill that keeps your food down. The blue pill that keeps another part of your anatomy up. Now you can't get an *effing job*? Stuck in your own personal Detroit of the soul, with the grinding stress of enforced idleness. The wife who doesn't look at you quite the same way. The poignantly forgiving sons. The stain on your masculinity for becoming the bread-loser. The night sweats and dark refuge of Internet porn. The gnawing fear that this may be the beginning of a slow, shaming crawl to early Social Security."<sup>96</sup>

Over thirty years after Brannon, male feminists still can't manage to do much more than point and laugh at their own snide caricatures of men, and recommend that men abandon "musty script of masculinity."<sup>97</sup> Talk about a bunch of guys who are stuck singing the same tune. And, when presented

94 Even in Brannon's time, it was known that the majority of cultures around the world revered men who were strong, higher in status and courageous. Mead's "negative instances" caused a sensation precisely because they seemed to be exceptions to a general rule.

95 David, Deborah S., and Robert Brannon, eds. *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority : The Male Sex Role*. Philippines: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1976. 42. Print.

96 Doupkil, Tony. "Dead Suit Walking." *Newsweek* 17 Apr. 2011. Web. 29 Apr. 2011. <http://www.newsweek.com/2011/04/17/dead-suit-walking.html>

97 Romano, Andrew, and Tony Doupkil. "Men's Lib." *Newsweek*. 20 Sept. 2010. Web. 24 Feb. 2011. <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/09/20/why-we-need-to-reimagine-masculinity.html>

with new, post-Margaret Mead era evidence from evolutionary biologists, that tune sounds a lot like “*Nyah, nyah nyah, nyah, I Can’t Hear You.*” When Michael Kimmel was asked by The New York Times to discuss innate differences between the sexes recently, he dismissed the subject completely and said, “That ship has sailed — it’s a done deal.”<sup>98</sup>

Kimmel came up with his own knock off of Brannon’s list—called “The Guy Code”—for his 2009 book *Guyland*.

### **Kimmel’s “Guy Code” (2009)<sup>99</sup>**

- “Boys Don’t Cry”
- “It’s Better to be Mad than Sad”
- “Don’t Get Mad—Get Even”
- “Take It Like a Man”
- “He Who has the Most Toys When he Dies, Wins”
- “Just Do It,” or “Ride or Die”
- “Size Matters”
- “I Don’t Stop to Ask for Directions”
- “Nice Guys Finish Last”
- “It’s All Good”

Like Brannon, Kimmel came up with a list of “current epigrams” that presented basic male concerns about status, strength, courage and competency as a handful of goofy frat boy clichés that he could easily take apart for his readers. Kimmel’s straw man was the “guy,” an overgrown boy who is obsessed with things that really don’t matter. At least, they don’t matter to Kimmel and the frustrated young women who would prefer that the young “guys” were obsessed with well-paying careers, nesting, marriage and starting a (feminist) family.

Kimmel mocked his frat boy students who, despite their apparent ineptitude, manage to keep thwarting his “you-can-have-it-all” feminist supermoms of tomorrow. Brannon’s original list has a more patricidal feel to it. Brannon admitted in the “Blueprint” essay that his grandfather was a “rough-and-ready” frontiersman known for killing lawbreakers, and his father was a football star and lumberman. He then described himself as being an absent-minded 90-pound weakling, who tried but failed to be a man according to the standards of his peers and the men in his family.

Brannon’s list is clearly a list of his father’s values, phrased in the words that men of his father’s generation would have used. His slogans were selected to smack the “daddy doesn’t love me” button and stir up feelings of resentment and insecurity in his readers. *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* is itself a collection of essays thick with the jealous, adolescent, Vietnam-era John Wayne-baiting so typical of spoiled, petulant baby-boomers. Brannon’s feminism is a passive-aggressive critique of his father’s masculinity and the masculine idols of a greater generation. His critical parody of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American manhood and his dissection of its contradictions is in part an attempt to one-up his mocking peers and disapproving ancestors.

98 McGrath, Charles. “The Study of Man (or Males).” *The New York Times* 7 Jan. 2011. Web. 29 Apr. 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/09/education/09men-t.html>

99 Kimmel, Micheal. *Guyland*. 2008. HarperCollins e-books. Kindle. Loc. 902.

Yukio Mishima, who also wrote about being a weakling as a young man, had this to say about men like Brannon:

“The cynicism that regards hero worship as comical is always shadowed by a sense of physical inferiority.”<sup>100</sup>

While this is not true of all male feminists (Jackson Katz advertises himself as a former “all-star football player”) it is apparently true of both Kimmel and Brannon, and their work continues to be extremely influential in the field of men’s studies.

This drive to castrate and discredit the hero-alpha-father is an abstract attempt by low status males to increase or regain status via intellectual means. The sensitive, bookish outcast screams “*Your manhood is false, and you are a fraud!*” and then runs into the arms of sympathetic women who tend his emotional wounds and deftly exploit his exposed vulnerabilities, or into a ghetto of other outcast men.

The outcast, omega or low status male who abandons “The Guy Code” and the “themes” of masculinity idolizes women because fiery women are the foils of alphas. In his telling tale about his father, Brannon was quick to point out that his mother scorned his father for not being a “*real man*” after he failed to kick her door down during a late night quarrel.

This vindictive attraction to strong women and castrating bitch-goddesses finds its ultimate expression in gay camp. Gay writer Daniel Harris described gay diva worship as a “bone-crushing spectator sport in which one watches the triumph of feminine wiles over masculine wills,” and divas themselves as a “therapeutic corrective [to gay men’s own] highly compromised masculinity.”<sup>101</sup>

The pro-feminist men’s movement has much in common with the gay movement, and the two have been allied since the 1970s. Kimmel seems to have sought the approval of feminist superstars like Gloria Steinem every bit as much as the gay males of his generation wanted to reach out and touch Diana Ross’ hand. The intellectual one-upmanship of feminist males has an analog in gay men’s fussy bourgeois “aestheticism of maladjustment.”<sup>102</sup> Together, they mounted a vengeful evisceration of the ineloquent, brawny philistines who gave them wedgies and made them feel like little bitches.<sup>103</sup>

This “argument from failure” was one of the three main arguments advanced repeatedly against “our culture’s positive proscription for masculinity” in *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*. Brannon wrote:

“No one less than Attila the Hun could have lived up to that role all the time; we were all losers. But we believed in the values and norms that made us losers, we reinforced them, and we imposed them on others.”

Brannon was essentially saying that, because no man embodies all of the manly virtues all the time, all men are failures at being men, so men should stop wounding themselves and each other by holding up an impossible ideal. This argument assumes that the costs incurred by men in failing to embody an impossible ideal are always greater than the total benefits accrued as a result of men striving to prove their manhood. There’s no real way to measure these abstract profits and losses. At

100 Mishima, Yukio. *Sun and Steel*. 1970. Trans. John Bester. Kodansha International, 2003. 41. Print.

101 Harris, Daniel. *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*. Ballantine Publishing Group, 1997. 13. Print.

102 Ibid. 10, 26.

103 David, Deborah S., and Robert Brannon, eds. *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority : The Male Sex Role*. Philippines: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1976. 66. Print. (*The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* contains a chapter on “Homophobia Among Men,” and its author, Gregory K. Lehne continues to specialize in “Evaluation and treatment of sexual and gender identity concerns in children, adolescents and adults. Research and theory on the nature of human sexuality, lovemaps, sexual orientations and gender identities.” [http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/psychiatry/expert\\_team/faculty/L/Lehne.html](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/psychiatry/expert_team/faculty/L/Lehne.html))

any rate, evaluating the data will always lead us back to the question: “what is good?” Is the tale of a great hero worth a thousand broken, jealous hearts? Are men better for this collective striving than they would be otherwise?

The argument from failure is to some extent an example of the “perfect solution fallacy,” in which the “perfect” is made the enemy of the “good.” The argument from failure presupposes that for a role to be good, someone somewhere has to be able to live up to that role all the time. It’s a little like telling Christians they shouldn’t bother trying to be more Christ-like, because they will never actually *be* Christ. For Christians, Christ is a perfect Form in the Platonic sense. He is the embodiment of what they’ve identified as ideal qualities. They do not expect to become Christ, but feel that by imitating him as best they can, they become better people. One may agree or disagree with the values that they attribute to Christ, or disbelieve in Christ, but the basic concept of bettering oneself through imperfect imitation is what matters here, because men are essentially imitating what they believe to be the perfect Form of Man. All men accumulate a tally of “sins”, shortcomings and near-misses. Feelings get hurt along the way because all men are not equally able to imitate this perfect Form. These facts are not valid criticisms of the manly virtues themselves.

We could call this “The Fallacy of the Impossible Form.”

These manly virtues should be considered in their own right, not dismissed because no man can be the complete embodiment of masculine ideals every single day of his life.

Is it better for a man to be “open” or circumspect?

Is it better for a man to be “vulnerable” or invulnerable?

Is it better for a man to have high group status or low group status?

Is it better for a man to be successful or unsuccessful?

Is it better for a man to be tough or delicate?

Is it better for a man to be confident or apprehensive?

Is it better for a man to be self-reliant or dependent?

Is it better for a man to be aggressive or passive?

Is it better for a man to be violent or non-violent?

Is it better for a man to be daring or fearful?

Each of these questions can be asked independently, and the “best” answers will vary according to one’s philosophical disposition and the situation at hand. We could speak in Yoda *sensei*-voices and come up with unexpected, ponderous answers. We could cite exceptions to general rules and instances of “too much of a good thing.” But if we refer back to the list of predictions for male mammals in which selection is greater on males, we will see that many of these manly virtues are associated with biological differences between the sexes, and “our culture’s positive prescription for masculinity” encourages behaviors that have helped men compete successfully against other men. Our inherited masculine ideal is the stern but sound advice of our forefathers. It is “nurture” working in harmony with “nature.”

The second argument made against the male sex role as caricatured by Brannon was that this advice was no longer sound—the argument that “**manliness is no longer necessary.**” There is something to this argument. Philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb recently wrote that, “The opposite of manliness isn’t cowardice; it’s technology.”<sup>104</sup>

*The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* contains an essay by sociologist John H. Gagnon titled “Physical Strength, Once of Significance.” Gagnon argued that while the sporting games of boys still produce social hierarchies based on physical strength and prowess, in adulthood physical strength and prowess have little economic value due to advances in technology. This is probably even truer now than it was in 1976. Having spent five years carrying treadmills and dumbbells upstairs into the home gyms of the wealthy—so that they could “get into shape”—I am well aware that hard labor doesn’t pay as well as

neurosurgery.

Gagnon argued that in complex industrialized nations, strength does not justify patriarchal hierarchies as convincingly as it used to. The “cerebral quality” of modern warfare, he imagined, was exemplified Kubrick’s mad cripple, Dr. Strangelove. This was a bit of an overstatement. Modern warfare is still extremely physically demanding. Soldiers often have to carry their powerful automatic weapons over difficult terrain. The “state vs. guerilla insurgent or terrorist” style of current conflicts makes a near future of button-pushing warfare seem unlikely.

In First World “knowledge economies,” it is true overall that the martial virtues (*virtus*, to the early Romans) of our ancestors can handicap a man. Defending your honor will probably land you in prison. Men find themselves doing time for fistfights, let alone duels. Few men make a decent living from physical labor. Even industries like construction are so highly regulated and carefully managed by lawyers and insurance companies that daring applications of strength and agility are discouraged, and the star employees wear back braces and bright orange vests that read “SAFETY FIRST.”

This is the world we live in, though it is also true that wealthy nations rely heavily on the risky, back-breaking work of men who live in poorer countries. Still, we should be careful about confusing “modern” with “better” or “permanent.” Is our contemporary arrangement better? If so, for whom? *Cui bono*? Is it permanent? Will things always be so? Will men never need to be strong or courageous again? If we abandon the manly virtues that have characterized the male sex role for all of human history, who will volunteer to risk his life to protect us from the men who have not abandoned those virtues? While it is human nature for men, or at least a portion of them, to desire conflict and risk, will they take those risks if they are despised for it—if all we offer them is a paycheck? Do men watch television shows about the few men left who do dangerous and dirty jobs out of mere curiosity, or because they secretly hate their own weakness and their child-proofed, predictable lives, and fantasize about doing something where their actions have meaningful and immediate consequences?

The third main argument against the traditional male sex role is that “**masculinity causes unacceptable collateral damage.**” Pro-feminist males, being feminists, are primarily concerned with how females have been hurt, subjugated or inconvenienced by patriarchal social structures. Women, for the most part, gain very little as the result of violent conflicts between men, and have much to lose. Men do gain status, bragging rights and, at least in the old days, various sorts of booty. Women stand to lose their means of support and protection, and, at least in the old days, were at risk of being raped, abducted and impregnated by a new “husband.”

And yet, women have often clamored for war, because there is something to be said for belonging to a group of victorious, high status men. There was, for instance, the “white feather” movement in during World War I. Women in Britain handed out white feathers—symbolizing cowardice—to men who were not in uniform, and this was hardly the first time or last time that women goaded men into war. More recently, many American women demanded vengeance for the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. At the interpersonal level, most men are familiar with the scenario wherein a woman “writes a check that he’ll have to cash.” Some women are known to provoke conflicts between men by casually throwing around fighting words, insults and challenges—precisely because they won’t be the ones expected to do the fighting. Women can usually trash talk with impunity.

Although women sometimes stir up trouble, it is true that women and children have often been the victims of wars and conflicts that they didn’t start or want at all. This is, admittedly, unfair—especially if you believe that the sexes are basically interchangeable and what is good for the goose is good for the gander. If you see males and females as two slightly different kinds of human animals with competing reproductive strategies, then “fairness” and “equality” are impossible goals. Instead of trying to impose an absolute equality of apples and oranges, the question then becomes, “how fair is fair enough?”

It is also frequently argued that men themselves become the collateral damage of their own aggressive status-seeking, but this line of thinking returns us to the argument from failure above.

For all their talk, I doubt that people truly want fairness, equality or “peace.” Strategies said to

put peace and equality within our grasp invariably end up moving the axe of violent coercion from the hands of one group into the hands of another. This—not “equality” —has been the achievement of feminism. For the first time in history, at least on this scale, women wield the axe of the state over men.

The authors of *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* explicitly believed that women would be better suited to rule until men were cured of their masculine ailment and liberated from the penal code of the male sex role. While they and their intellectual heirs positioned themselves as experts exploring a new field of study, theirs was not an expedition in search of truth. They were feminist partisans from the get-go, and their caricatured misrepresentations of masculinity were propaganda designed to defame men, trivialize masculinity and valorize women. Often, their basic assumptions about the flexibility of sex roles and human nature were based on discredited or biased anthropology. Sometimes, their work was clearly intellectual payback for being made to feel inadequate in the world of men. Their primary arguments against traditional models of masculinity are subjective, fallacious and one-sided. Their conclusions are at odds with human nature, the conclusions of evolutionary biologists and a cross-cultural assessment of masculine ideals throughout history.

When and where have the majority of men *not* wanted to be known for strength, daring and success?

When and where have they been completely unconcerned with their status among other men?

When and where have they wanted to be known as “sissies”?

Any answers will inevitably be desperate references to groups of men who are rare, separate and exceptional.

Brannon got some of the basic themes of masculinity right, but they are not “American” themes, and they are not tied to a particular time or place. They can be isolated from the skewed noise of his presentation and universalized.

A man’s status as a man, his masculine identity—his *honor*—has been so critical to his sense of self-worth that throughout human history innumerable men and women have worked to shape the “Form” of masculinity to reflect their interests and values. Manly pride can be a man’s greatest asset and his greatest weakness. People use a man’s sense of himself to manipulate him. Sometimes “man up” simply means “do what I want.”

The likes of Brannon play an interesting game. They know that men are concerned with their reputations as men. They know that men want to be seen as strong, so they taunt them and tell them that it is their desire for strength that makes them weak. The reimaginers tell men to reimagine strength.

Is either abandoning his concern with strength or reimagining strength in a man’s best interest?

It depends on the man and the context. The answer is philosophical, subjective and uncertain. What *is* certain is that by abandoning his concern with strength or by reimagining strength he *will* be serving the interests of those who ask him to change.

