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## Scenes from a Sexual Holy War

If it was ever a man's world, it certainly isn't anymore. What previously were male preserves have given way to the integration of the sexes. Indeed, in many areas of society, male preponderance has been replaced by female preponderance. And if it cannot be said that every element of this transformation has been taken as a cause for celebration, certainly there has not been much about it that has led many to be deeply concerned.

A story by Tamar Lewin in *The New York Times* (1998) illustrates an aspect of this. The headline reads: "U.S. Colleges Begin to Ask, 'Where Have the Men Gone?'" More than ten years ago, Lewin reports, women became the majority on college campuses, and their proportion has been increasing ever since. Although, in the U.S. population as a whole, there are slightly more college-age men than women, Department of Education statistics reveal that there were 8.4 million women and only 6.7 million men enrolled in college in 1996, the last year for which statistics are available. The department projects that by 2007, the gap will be even larger, with 9.2 million women and only 6.9 million men. This transformation has taken pace across the full range of institutions of higher education. Women outnumber men in public institutions as well as private, and in religiously affiliated, four-year and two-year schools.

The problem that concerns the education experts is, of course, that given the widening income gap between high school graduates and those with advanced degrees, men's failure to pursue higher education will seriously limit their life choices. And there is a concern that if the balance goes too far, the minority of males may feel uncomfortable. So colleges are doing what they can to give guys a break. At the same time, though, there is a danger in going too far in this direction:

"It used to be that you worried at 55 percent women, but the new wisdom is that anything up to 60 percent is O.K.," he said. "Probably nobody will admit it, but I know that lots of places try to get some gender balance by having easier admissions standards for boys than for girls. Recently, at a school where I was giving a speech, I asked 'How far down the list are you going for boys?' and the answer was 'All the way.' The problem is that if you take men who are not of the same caliber as the women, the highest-performing women leave, because the men aren't as interesting."

But, for the most part, this shift is not much to worry about, the story assures us. It is just a reflection of people's aptitudes, interests, and the choices they make. It isn't entirely clear what men are doing instead of attending college. Nor are the experts sure why, in their view, men are less committed to higher education. But they list a number of factors that may be having an influence, such as girls' greater success in high school and a strong economy that may give boys a sense that they can make their way without higher education, for example in computer work or the military. And at any rate, isn't it a bit

sexist to think that a preponderance of females might be a cause for concern? Did we worry when there was a preponderance of men?

Yet the idea that the absence of men from our colleges is simply a benign facet of our changing times is one that, for a number of reasons, doesn't quite add up. For one thing, the idea that it is normal for a majority of college students to be male, and abnormal for them to be female, is based on the idea that men are the primary breadwinners within the family, while the care of children is primarily the role of the mothers. That may be a social arrangement that has given way to increased equality, but such a shift would move the proportion to 50-50. Any more of a change needs another explanation. The idea that, in the current economy, men are moving into occupations that do not require higher education, such as the military, is also questionable. In fact, the same period that has shown a decline in the number of young men in college has also shown a decline in their enlistment in the military, which dropped from 34 % in 1991 to 27% in 1997 (Department of Defense, 1997, 1998; Wilson, 1998). Nor does it seem to arise from the fact that women are just better suited for higher education, and that in order to get men you have to go "all the way down." The fact is that men's scores on the most recent math SAT were substantially higher than those of women and were even slightly higher on the verbal SAT (Chute, 1999).<sup>1</sup> The SAT is one of the best measures we have for predicting college success, and these results make it difficult to understand how the claim that women are simply better suited for college can be sustained.

In deepest contradiction to the idea that the dearth of men in college is an aspect of a benign transformation is the fact that it takes place alongside other developments that cannot possibly be called benign. Among these are the increase in acts of murderous violence, such as the Littleton massacre, and the enormous rise in the rate of suicide among young males, which has increased threefold since the 1950s (Health and Human Services, 1995) and is six times as high as that of young females<sup>2</sup>.

## **IS THERE A CRISIS OF BOYHOOD?**

The incidents of violence and the suicide statistics point to the possibility that the lack of young men in college is part of a much wider crisis of males in our society. In fact, there is plenty of evidence to support this view, and it has become quite popular.

Much of this evidence is proffered in a spate of contemporary books on the "crisis of boyhood" that are now making their way among us. Among the experts who write these books, the idea that our boys are in a perilous state is widely regarded as an established fact.

But this presents us with what appears to be a puzzle. On the one hand, we have the view that the disappearance of men from college is a perfectly normal aspect of a benign and even beneficial transformation. On the other, we have the view that boys are in state of crisis. These appear to be in contradiction. What is odd is that though both of these views are widely held, they are not brought into juxtaposition in public discussion. The idea that the social processes responsible for the increasing female dominance in our colleges might have had something to do with the painful state of our young males is

simply not an item for discussion. How could anyone fail to make this connection, even if only for the purpose of research? Especially, how could this connection fail to be made by experts on boys? Who are these experts?

I believe we may say without controversy that those who brought us the emergent female domination of college, along with the idea that it is natural and even desirable, were feminists. Certainly the fact that feminists see themselves as advocates for women is no secret, as we see from the self-statement of their division within the American Psychological Association:

**Division 35 - Psychology of Women** promotes feminist research, theories, education, and practice toward understanding and improving the lives of girls and women in all their diversities. Encourages scholarship on the social construction of gender relations across multicultural context, and applies its scholarship to transforming the knowledge base of psychology. Advocates action toward public policies that advance equality and social justice, and seeks to empower women in community, national, and global leadership<sup>3</sup>.

By extension, we might expect that those who are now telling us about the horrors of growing up as a boy, and who would be presumably be expected to advocate for boys, might identify with their sex the way feminists do. They might call themselves "masculinists," or something of the sort. But that is not what happens. On the contrary, they identify with feminists. This is the *Position Statement* of the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity, Division 51 of the American Psychological Association:

The Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity (SPSMM) promotes the critical study of how gender shapes and constricts men's lives, and is committed to an enhancement of men's capacity to experience their full human potential. SPSMM endeavors to erode constraining definitions of masculinity which historically have inhibited men's development, their capacity to form meaningful relationships, and have contributed to the oppression of other people. SPSMM acknowledges its historical debt to feminist-inspired scholarship on gender, and commits itself to the support of groups such as women, gays, lesbians and peoples of color that have been uniquely oppressed by the gender/class/race system. SPSMM vigorously contends that the empowerment of all persons beyond narrow and restrictive gender role definitions leads to the highest level of functioning in individual women and men, to the most healthy interactions between the genders, and to the richest relationships between them<sup>4</sup>.

The debt to feminism, in theme and in ideological orientation is clear enough, and is explicitly acknowledged. The idea that when feminism triumphed, it triumphed over men; that the single-minded pursuit of the exclusive interests of women might negatively affect the well-being of men, is not going to come from this group.

Part of the reason, then, why this possibility is not on the agenda is that the experts who now tell us of the boy crisis also believe that the accession of girls to dominance is normal, natural and legitimate. They see the rise of girls as a reversal of previous domination, and an occasion of moral triumph.

But then what do these experts tell us is the trouble with boys? What explanation can they provide that will acknowledge the boy crisis, and at the same time preserve their allegiance to feminism? Well, to sum the matter up, their answer is that boys are in trouble because they are expected to become men; their problems arise from the fact that they are not allowed to be woman enough.

### **ALL THEY NEED IS LOVE**

Given the importance of feminist thought within the new psychology of boys, it is not surprising that its intellectual core would arise from the work of the feminist thinker Carol Gilligan and indeed as an extension of her thoughts on girls (1996; Norman, 1997). According to Gilligan, girls, as they come into adolescence within a patriarchal world, lose their “voice,” their feelings, and therefore their capacity for authentic relationship. They feel the necessity to buy into an artificial and socially constructed reality. Boys do so as well. The difference is that this loss occurs in early childhood, rather than in adolescence.

This difference has consequences for the ways in which the transition is made and comprehended. Specifically, boys adopt the patriarchal world at the level of “concrete operations ... (the way things are),” while for girls the internalization takes place at the “formal operational level ... as an interpretive framework (the way things are said to be).” (p. 251) The result is that girls and women are better able to see the artificiality of social life. They are therefore conscious of an experience that for boys is likely to be inchoate, and their resistance is closer to the surface.

Still, it is the similarities that are important. And for both boys and girls, what they experience is that:

...[t]hey are losing connection, they cannot say what they are feeling and thinking, and they are losing relationship and finding themselves psychologically alone. The division between inner and outer worlds creates a psychological instability and heightens the risk of being thrown off balance in times of stress... (p.250)

With specific regard to boys, this means that:

Young boys come under pressure from without and within to give up close relationship and to cover their vulnerability—to separate their inner world, their self, from the outer world of relationships. (p. 250)

...boys are more at risk -- more stuttering, more bed-wetting, more learning problems -- in early childhood, when cultural norms pressure them to separate from their mothers... They feel they have to separate from women. And they are not allowed to feel that separation as a real loss. (1997: p.50)

What we are discovering is how vulnerable boys are. How, under the surface, behind that psychic shield, is a tender creature who's hiding his humanity. I often say about my own three boys,

who are now grown, that I feel that the world muffles the very best qualities in them, meaning their sensitivity. (Norman, 1997)

This separation, this loss of connection and sensitivity creates a “psychological wound or scar” that remains with the boy into manhood where it forms the root of his masculine character:

To be a real boy or man in such cultures means to be able to be hurt without feeling hurt, to separate without feeling sadness or loss, and then to inflict hurt and separation on others. What is at stake is boy's manhood, boys' masculinity, their birthright in a patriarchal social order. But this conception of manhood places boys and men psychologically and often physically at risk, because it impedes their capacity to feel their own and other people's hurt, to know their own and other's sadness. (p.251)

Gilligan thinks this is pretty bad news for everyone:

After a century of unparalleled violence, at a time when violence has become appalling, we appreciate again the fragility of humans. We understand better why closeness and vulnerability create the conditions for psychological growth. And we also know more fully the costs of their violation. (p.258)

That's quite an indictment of masculinity, but before we buy into it, we do well to note Sommers' (2000) observation that Gilligan's assertions concerning the violent consequences of patriarchy and of premature separation from mother are entirely unsupported by empirical evidence. In fact, they appear to be diametrically opposed to the findings of the research that has been done over the last thirty years, and which has found that it is the absence of the father that is associated with the problem. As she puts it:

The boys who are most at risk for juvenile delinquency and violence are boys who are *literally* separated from their fathers...In *Fatherless America*, the sociologist David Blankenhorn notes that “Despite the difficulty of proving causation in social sciences, the wealth of evidence increasingly supports the conclusion that fatherlessness is a primary generator of violence among young men.”

And she quotes William Galston, a former domestic policy adviser to the Clinton administration (now at the University of Maryland), and Elaine Kamarck, a lecturer at Harvard's J. F. Kennedy School of Government in concurrence:

The relationship [between fatherlessness and crime] is so strong that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime. This conclusion shows up time and again in the literature." (pp. 129-130)

We will have a better sense of the reasons for these findings later in our inquiry when we discuss the role of fatherhood, and we will also develop a better sense of where this condemnation of fatherhood comes from, given the fact that it is so much at variance with the evidence. Our present concern, however, is to see the way Gilligan's analysis plays out in the domain of education. The best known example of the extension of Gilligan's theory in that direction is the book *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* by psychologist William Pollack (1998), co-director of the Center for Men at McLean Hospital/Harvard Medical School, and a founding member of the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity. Pollack's analysis may be regarded as an elaboration of Gilligan's view that boys are prematurely separated from their mothers and from their own sensitivity and neediness, and that this separation is part of their socialization into the masculine role.

According to his theory, boys are forced into a narrow and outmoded definition of masculinity, a "gender straightjacket." The rules of this definition are given in what he calls the "Boy Code." Under this code, whose origin Pollack traces to the nineteenth century, boys are not supposed to acknowledge their sensitivity. They learn to feel ashamed of their needs to connect and their feelings of vulnerability. This shame undermines their self-confidence and erodes their fragile self-esteem, which they respond to by hardening themselves. This does not eliminate their needs, however, it simply drives them underground where they exist as permanent, painful wounds.

The gender straightjacket, and the shame that keeps it in place, have several deleterious effects. They are largely responsible for the behavioral problems we associate with boys, ranging from suicide to hyperactivity to violence. In this regard, Pollack follows Gilligan in believing that boys' overly aggressive behavior arises from their wounded vulnerability. With specific regard to their academic potential, boys invest so much energy into hiding their vulnerability that they have little energy left for schoolwork. Moreover, in order to gain acceptance and avoid being shamed by their peers, boys hide their interest in intellectual and creative activities, matters that are regarded as feminine.

Taken together, the various elements of the damage done by the Boy Code have been responsible for the prevalent view in educational circles that boys are inherently dangerous, emotionally dense, and unsocialized; in a word, that they are "toxic." As a consequence, the real differences between boys and girls, such as their higher levels of energy, are not seen as normal, but as expressions of pathology. This has had profound effects on the quality of interaction. Entrenched as it is within many school systems, the myth of boy's toxicity allows teachers and administrators to become openly antagonistic to boys, pushing them toward failure at school, further ramifying the behavioral and emotional problems that Pollack decries. School officials and teachers have come to see boys as little monsters that need to be controlled, rather than as vulnerable children who need to be nurtured and whose distinctive needs require attention. Creative ways of teaching them, ways that would address their specific needs, have not been sought. Rather they have been left to sink or swim in this hostile environment. Not surprisingly, they are sinking.

To sum up, Pollack maintains that the premature separation of boys from their mothers, enforced by the imposition of the gender straightjacket and the regime of shame,

does lasting damage to our boys. Beneath their confident exterior is often a world of pain and need. Their attempts to detach themselves from or assuage their pain are responsible for the antisocial orientation we have come to associate with them. Our responses to this "toxicity" simply make the matter worse, and increase the toxicity. The damage caused by the gender straightjacket, together with this interplay over toxicity, are responsible for boys' academic failure and disengagement.

And yet there is hope, says Pollack. To begin with, we must let boys maintain their connections with their mothers. As boys grow older and their locus of activity shifts to the school, the school itself should take on the maternal role, carefully monitoring the emotional condition of its students and listening to their cries of pain. Schools must also recognize the boys' style of learning. Then they will be able to close the gap. As an illustration of this, Pollack (p. 248-250) cites material from a story in a British newspaper (Redwood, 1998) describing a program undertaken at a school in which the boys had fallen drastically behind the girls<sup>5</sup>:

An extremely creditable 78 per cent of girls at the school gained five or more A-Cs [on a standardized test], but the boys lagged behind with only 56 per cent. The disparity was particularly marked in English: 27 per cent fewer boys than girls gained grades A-C.

Leaving those boys who were already doing well in coed classes, teachers at the school placed the rest in all-male classes and organized them around the boys' style of learning;

"The most vital ingredient in the scheme's success was finding the right teacher for this group," he explains. "So I chose Rob Jeckells - a young head of house who is involved with sport, and someone to whom the boys relate very easily. We consciously planned the teaching methodology. The class is didactic and teacher-fronted. It involves sharp questions and answers and constantly checking understanding. Discipline is clear-cut - if homework isn't presented, it is completed in a detention. There is no discussion."

And Jeckells charged these boys up:

"People think that boys like you won't be able to understand writers such as the Romantic poets. Well, you're going to prove them wrong. Do you understand?"

Evidently they did:

The boys-only group already seems to be successful. Of boys in the same ability band last year, only seven out of 25 gained more than a C in English literature. Following recent mock examinations, Mr Jeckells believes 25 of the 34 in the segregated group will gain a C grade or better....In 1996, the school had a 22 per cent disparity between boys and girls gaining five or more A-C grades; last year there was just a one per cent difference.

## **IS LOVE ALL THEY NEED?**

So hope there is, it appears, if we follow Pollack's prescription. But before we do that, we need to look at the terms on which this hope is offered. Doing that, we see that

there are certain peculiarities with his account. For one thing, the method adopted by the school that he cites is quite at variance with the strategy he appears to recommend. There is no listening here for these boys' pain. On the contrary, there is strict discipline in which no excuses are tolerated. The role is not maternal. It is paternal.

We will have occasion to reflect upon this further on. For the present, it is more important to note a problem with his view that is perhaps less obvious. It is that the deterioration in the condition of boys that he addresses is recent, while the features he uses to provide an explanation are venerable. Even if we subscribe to his view that the Boy Code issues from the nineteenth century, it is difficult to see how the effects he ascribes to it should not have been as much in evidence then as they are now. But it appears that they were not.

This is nowhere more clear than in the image of hope that he offered us: an image of boys disproving the gender stereotype and learning Romantic poetry. This is absurd. The simple fact is that Romantic poetry, the incomprehension of which was taken to be the very symbol of male insensitivity and disconnection from feeling, was as male-dominated a field as any one can imagine. England, for example, the very home of the "stiff upper lip" that one would have thought would have been the very paradigm of the Boy Code, gave us, among others, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Tennyson, and Keats. Take Elizabeth Barrett Browning out of the mix and there isn't a woman who has a strong claim to inclusion.

Nor is the situation different in any of the arts. Take the nineteenth century, which according to Pollack gave us the Boy Code, and recollect the names of its artists, its composers, its writers. Their names are predominately male: Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gaughin, Charles Dickens, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Felix Mendelsson, Ludwig van Beethoven, Fyodor Dostoevski, Giuseppe Verdi, Frederic Chopin. It is not necessary to go on.

Were there women involved in the arts during that period? Of course there were: Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, Emily Dickinson, Clara Schumann, and many others. Yet there can be no doubt that most of the predominant figures were men. Would there have been more women if sex roles had been different? It is impossible to know, of course, but perhaps there would have been.

Yet to hypothesize that women would have comprised a higher proportion of artistic figures in the nineteenth century if the culture been more conducive, misses the important point. That point is that men of the nineteenth century, the century that, according to Pollack, gave us the gender straightjacket, created a magnificent efflorescence of art, whatever the standard of comparison. Their record of creativity simply cannot be reconciled with the image of men as rigid, insensitive, and emotionally barren.

The simple, unavoidable fact is that the "gender straightjacket," if one wants to call it that, has never been a very tight fit. Far from holding before all boys only a monolithic model of insensitive machismo, society has always revered its great artists. If it has never celebrated the fact that almost all of them were men, it didn't have to, at least until now. What Russian child does not know that Pushkin was a man? And what German child does not know this about Schiller? And if the great male artists were not taken as ideals by all boys, they didn't have to be. The homage that society has always paid to its great

artists would have established the worth of the artist in the eyes of boys inclined to emulate them, whether the other boys would have chosen to be artists or not.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Pollack, and in this he certainly follows Gilligan's lead, has taken the most vulgar stereotype of men and pronounced it to be a universal and inviolable cultural norm. The idea that the workings of the gender straightjacket, by separating men from their emotions, is responsible for their academic failure is based on this act of stereotyping.

Similar considerations apply to Pollack's account of the workings of shame, which according to Pollack, underlies the whole gender straightjacket. Certainly shame has a negative impact on self-esteem. And, indeed, it is hard to disagree, intuitively, that a deep sense of shame can cause failure.

But the dynamics of self-esteem are far more complex than Pollack acknowledges (Adelson, 1996). Part of this complexity is due to the fact that, from a dynamic standpoint, shame and self-esteem exist only in tension with one other, they define each another (e.g. Piers and Singer, 1953). For example, the possibilities of low self-esteem and shame are what drive us to create the achievements that we then use to anchor our self-esteem. And anchoring our sense of self-esteem means that we are able to protect ourselves from the shame of failure, which represents the lack of achievement. Shame has its effect because it is the obverse of our ideals. "Be ashamed to die until you have won some great victory for mankind," said a plaque at my *alma mater*. No shame, no victory.

But, again, there is nothing new about this. The interplay of shame and accomplishment has been the subject matter of human self-understanding at least since the time of Homer. One may wish to question the cost involved in creating the psychological underpinning for accomplishment, but such questioning should certainly invoke quantitative considerations. How much accomplishment justifies how much suffering, one would need to consider. But, interestingly, this is not the way Pollack has approached the matter. For him, it appears, any degree of suffering is catastrophic, and no positive account of accomplishment is mentioned. It is almost as if Pollack does not believe that accomplishment exists, and that suffering defines psychological reality.

His evident assumption is that the "genuine self" is the wounded, vulnerable self<sup>6</sup>, rather than the self we create through our efforts, or even, for that matter, the self that is the interaction between these two elements. This is a matter to which we will return in due course. For the time being, the point to be made is that it can hardly be the possibility of being shamed that is responsible for this recent downturn in the academic fortunes of boys, nor for the threefold increase in their rate of suicide.<sup>7</sup> Obviously, if we are to explain boys' current failure, we need to explain why boys would be failing *now*, as opposed to previous times. We need some phenomenon that is contemporaneous with it.

Of the issues raised by Pollack, one stands out for being uniquely characteristic of our own time<sup>8</sup>. It is the idea of boys' "toxicity," together with the dynamics it generates. The idea of boys toxicity is surely of recent vintage, and its manifestations, even as Pollack describes them, could easily account for the associations between failure and shame. Within our own analysis, however, the direction of causality is reversed. Rather

than the attribution of toxicity arising from the consequences of shame, shame would represent a feeling of the toxicity of one's male identity.

Thus, while shame arising from failure to match up to a masculine ideal could not represent viable causes of boys' failure, shame arising from an attack on one's identity as a male easily could. Moreover, it would serve to explain why shame, which is often the motivation behind achievement, leads only to failure in this case. It is that the ideal in this case is to be female, which is exactly what is excluded by one's identity as a male. Thus, the undeniable core of truth in Pollack's association of shame and failure could in this way be preserved.

But Pollack attributes the view of boys' "toxicity" to the dynamics of shame, and these, as we have seen, cannot be said to characterize boys of our time any more than any other. How can they account for the further dynamics that generate the view of boys' "toxicity" and its attendant abuse? Obviously, by themselves, they cannot. But if shame cannot account for the idea of boys' "toxicity," how can we account for it and maintain its explanatory power?

The answer to this will be obvious to any observer of our times. The idea of boys' toxicity did not arise from boys' characteristics by themselves. Pollack signals what is really going on when he refers to the intensification of teacher's negative feelings toward boys as they reach adolescence, when "[a]ll the teacher's personal feelings about men and masculinity ... come into play." (p. 241) The point is that it arose in the context of the general idea of male toxicity,<sup>9</sup> and may be said to represent only a specification of the general idea. Boys are held to be toxic because males are held to be toxic. Since they have certain characteristics as young males, those are said to constitute the qualities of boys' toxicity. As they become older, the manifestation of their toxicity simply reverts to type<sup>10</sup>.

Nor would it make good sense to suppose that increased dependence on their mothers would cure their malaise. For who, after all, holds the view of male toxicity? It is not likely that men, on their own, would have taken this view about men. The main influence here must have been from women: many of them the mothers of boys themselves. Pollack's view is that boys' problems are due to premature separation from their mothers. But our analysis has led us into a startlingly different possibility. If the boy crisis has been caused by the female view that men are toxic, our analysis raises the possibility that boys have not been separated from their mothers enough.

## **THE STORY OF TOXIC MAN AGAINST MADONNA-AND-CHILD: IMAGES FROM THE SEXUAL HOLY WAR**

But now we can only register the horror of what we have said. On one hand, it is hard to imagine that the widespread female contempt for men to which Pollack bears witness would not have a devastating effect on their male children. Yet the very image of mothers being toxic to their sons is almost impossible for us to contemplate. It fills us with terror and immediately leads us to find a way to deny it.

"No, no, no," we want to say, women couldn't do that, mothers couldn't that. And in this moment, as if to give us what we need in order to object to this despicable thought, as if to rescue us from this vile idea, an image of the mother rushes into our mind. It is the image of the female as warm, nurturing, self-sacrificing, devoted, and loving. And she is not simply warm and nurturing in the abstract, she has someone with her, connected to her; she is loving to her child.

Consider this image. Without any attempt at originality, I will call it the image of Madonna-and-child. And I will note that this image of the benevolent and loving woman -- the Madonna with her child -- is the counterpart to the image of the toxic man that has become a staple of contemporary culture. They go, in a sense, hand in hand. They are part of the same story.

Take, for example, Pollack's book. There is nothing in it -- not a single word -- that expresses even the mildest demurrer about the virtues of women. It is all adulation -- one might even say worship. He tells, us for example, that women know instinctively that they should not allow their sons to go off into the world too early. It is "society" that tells them they should, the Boy Code, and so on. Left to themselves, what women would do would be exactly right.

Men are pretty awful, Pollack affirms, though he thinks there are reasons, but women are morally perfect. What is more, men and women are not simply good and bad in isolation, but with regard to each other. Men's badness expresses itself as badness against women. And under the circumstances, women's goodness cannot help but take the form of a fight against male badness -- an emanation that that has dominated the world, and whose removal will bring in the reign of women, which will make life perfect.

And so our story is fleshed out. We can now see it as the story of a struggle between men and women, seen as moral forces, engaged in what I will call the Sexual Holy War. Having said that, we can see that this story of the counterposition of bad man/good woman in Sexual Holy War is ubiquitous. One simply cannot have contact with western society in our time and not encounter it with great frequency. I am writing this, for example, at 8:30 P.M. on February 22, 1999. Two hours ago, on *NBC Nightly News*, I learned that women suffer more than they need to from cervical cancer because they are so busy taking care of others and take no time to care for their own health. And I also learned that they suffer more than they need to from breast cancer because they cannot take time off for examination, since they are concerned about appearing vulnerable in the "male dominated" organizations in which they work. So there you have it. Women suffer unnecessarily from one form of cancer because they are so good; they suffer from another form because men are so bad.

And if this were so, it would provide an important slant on the facts with which we began -- the demographics of the transformation of our colleges from male institutions to female ones. It might suggest that those who are feeling good about themselves are taking the elite places to which they feel entitled, while those that are feeling bad and unworthy are drifting away. But it will certainly tell us why this change causes as little consternation and concern as it does. The fact that women are coming into dominance and surpassing men is a good thing, one would have to conclude from the story. Men were able to have their day because of their oppressiveness. They kept women down, but

now women are coming up. This is a massive social change, and if some men have to suffer, that's not so bad. They have it coming. At any rate, it's certainly nothing to be greatly concerned about. And, under the influence of the story, no one is.

## **THE SEXUAL HOLY WAR AND THE DISTORTION OF TRUTH**

But this is just a story that is told. And one with a rather thin cast of characters, if one may say. They are stick figures. The story is powerful and compelling, but simple and stereotypic. Without nuance or subtlety, without a feeling for deeper motivation, it is fit for the comic books, for the mind of a child. It is hard to see that it can accurately represent the complexity of human life.

But is the story true? Are men so bad and women so good? Examination of the facts reveals that the story is not true, and in making this point, one hardly knows where to start. But it doesn't matter. One will traverse the whole range of issues surrounding the relationship between the sexes and find the same pattern.

For example, as we shall see, despite commonly held view to the contrary, most fathers are not deadbeat dads who leave their wives and children for more nubile companions (Braver, 1998) they batter their wives at no greater rate than their wives batter them (Gelles and Straus, 1990).

Nor are women perfect. It is actually they that file the vast majority of divorce suits, and they do so on such grounds as "not having their emotional needs met" (Braver, 1998). There is no question that men commit the majority of violent crime, but some women have also shown themselves capable of committing terrible violence, including serial murder (Pearson, 1997). Moreover, difficult as it is to admit, mothers commit the majority of child murders,<sup>11</sup> and a recent British study has shown them capable of attempting to murder their own children while they lay helpless in hospital beds (Southall, *et. al*, 1997), apparently for the purpose of calling attention to themselves<sup>12</sup>.

Nor can it be said that moral delinquency is a feature only of women who are identified with and in the thrall of men. A study by U.C. Berkeley sociologist Kathleen Blee (1992) shows that feminist women were a powerful, and even dominant, force in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century incarnation of the Ku Klux Klan. In truth, the objective facts suggest that morally, and irrespective of ideology, there is little to choose between men and women.

But my purpose here is not simply to set the record straight. Sommers (1995, 2000) and others (e.g. Farrell, 1993, 1999; Denfeld, 1995; Young, 1999) are increasingly doing a good job of that. My focus here is not so much upon the facts as upon the story, and on why the story came to prevail despite the facts. My purpose here, in other words, is to ask the question of how the record got so distorted.

The way the story of the sexual holy war came to prominence despite the facts is one of the most fascinating and important phenomena of our time. The images of toxic man and Madonna-and-child did not come to be believed because they explained the objective facts as they independently appeared. Rather, the images were primary, and led to a

distorted view of the objective world, which then came to be believed because it supported the image. Indeed, the objective situation itself became the object of attack.

To show this, it will be helpful to look at distortion in a specific sphere of reality. Which sphere we choose is largely immaterial, since the distortion is similar no matter where one looks. At the present time it seems that the primary focus of what may be called the Sexual Holy War is in the sphere of domestic violence. We will focus here in our search for distortion.

I have no doubt that, some day, the distortion of the truth by the radical feminists of our time will be seen to have been the greatest intellectual crime of the second half of the twentieth century. At the present time, however, we still live under the aegis of that crime, and calling attention to it is an act of great moral courage. Of those who have stood up and told the story, none has done so more elegantly and effectively than Christina Hoff Sommers, whose book *Who Stole Feminism?* (1995) will certainly be seen, one day, as a classic of our time. My account of feminist distortion in the sphere of domestic violence will rely heavily on her work. As good a place to start as any is with the Super Bowl Hoax of 1993.

### **SUNDAY, BLOODY SUNDAY**

"A day of dread" for American women, Dan Rather called it on the day before the big game. As such, he was repeating what had become received wisdom about Super Bowl Sunday by that time. The story had begun the previous Thursday when a coalition of women's groups held a news conference in Pasadena, California, the site of the game, to announce that Super Bowl Sunday is "the biggest day of the year for violence against women." Forty percent more women would be battered on that day, said Sheila Kuehl of the California Women's Law Center, basing her claim on a study done at Old Dominion University three years before. A media watchdog group, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting had bolstered the credibility of the claim, and had sent out a massive mailing warning "Don't remain at home with him during the game." (ibid. p. 189)

The next day, psychologist Lenore Walker, author of the influential book *The Battered Woman*, and, remarkably, head of the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Violence and the American Family was interviewed on *Good Morning America*. She said that she had put together a ten-year record showing that violent incidents against women increased sharply on Super Bowl Sundays. On the day after that, a story by Lynda Gorov in the *Boston Globe* maintained that women's shelters and hotlines are "flooded with more calls from victims [on Super Bowl Sunday] than on any other day of the year." Her specific reference here was "one study of women's shelters out West" that "showed a 40 percent climb in calls, a pattern advocates said is repeated nationwide, including in Massachusetts." (ibid. p. 189) And she quoted experts who would enlighten us on the causes of this. For example, Nancy Isaacs, a specialist on domestic violence at the Harvard School of Public Health, said that:

It's a day for men to revel in their maleness and unfortunately, for a lot of men that includes being violent toward women if they want to be.

Specifically,

It's "I'm supposed to be king of my castle, it's supposed to be my day, and if you don't have dinner ready on time, you're going to get it." (ibid. p.190)

The story was picked up not only by CBS News, but by NBC, who issued a pre-game public service announcement reminding men that domestic violence is a serious crime, *The New York Times*, and just about every other authoritative source. The only problem with the story was that it was not true.

This was revealed in a January 31 *Washington Post* story by staff writer Ken Ringle, the only reporter who bothered to check the story out, who found out that none of the claims held up:

Despite their dramatic claims, none of the activists appears to have any evidence that a link actually exists between football and wife-beating.

For example, interviewing sociologist Janet Katz, one of the principal authors of the Old Dominion study cited at the original press conference, Ringle asked about the study's reported linkage between violence and football games. She said: "That's not what we found at all." In fact, to the contrary, an increase in emergency room admissions "was not associated with the occurrence of football games in general."

Checking with Lynda Gorov, Ringle was led on a wild-goose chase. To begin, he found out that she had never seen the study documenting the 40 percent increase, but got it from FAIR. FAIR, in turn, claimed to have gotten the figure from Lenore Walker, who then referred Ringle to a Denver psychologist and authority on battered women named Michael Lindsay. Lindsay:

Admitted he could find no basis for the report. "I haven't been any more successful than you in tracking down any of this," he said. "You think maybe we have one of these myth things here?" (p. 191)

A myth indeed, and the Super Bowl hoax was not the only instance of it.

## LYNDON AND ASHTON

Writing in the *Sunday Times of London* during the O.J. Simpson trial, Neil Lyndon and Paul Ashton (1995) noted the climate of our era.

Campaigners have already been filmed outside the court claiming that: "All women are at risk: all women are unprotected."

Adding:

The existence of domestic violence on a large scale has become an unquestionable fact of our age. As Rosalind Miles has written, in an exemplary passage of feminist reasoning: "The patriarch at bay usually has to look no further than the ends of his arms ... beating the wife, `teaching her a lesson' or `just giving her a reminder' becomes `what your right hand is for'."

But they note that evidence for the existence of domestic violence as a broad phenomenon has never been very solid. Before 1993, for example, records were not routinely kept by British police forces of complaints about or recorded incidents of domestic violence. Under the circumstances, therefore:

The true extent of "wife battering" was, therefore, an open field for speculation, guesswork and statistical jiggery-pokery.

Looking at the figures that had been advanced, they concluded: "How they jiggery-pokered. How they speculated and guessed."

The story of this jiggery-pokery is a fascinating one. To begin, they note, with perhaps a bit of hyperbole, that over the past 25 years, "as many figures for domestic violence have been published as there are numbers in the national lottery." Yet, without hyperbole, they observe that none of the figures was small, and that all appeared to confirm the existence of a vast and menacing problem.

Taking figures for London as a general example, they tell us that in 1990, a spokesman on domestic violence for the Metropolitan police told them that it received "about 25,000 calls a year" reporting incidents of domestic violence, a figure that was "an extrapolation for London as a whole drawn from research in specific areas". Lyndon and Ashton calculated that it would represent 1.44% of all women in London living with a partner. That would mean that one woman in every 70 living with a man in London would have been reporting domestic violence to the police.

Yet high as that number was, it appeared to represent an understatement. It turns out that the research upon which it depended was conducted by a feminist criminologist, Dr Susan SM Edwards, and the figure she had actually given was more than double the number supplied by the Metropolitan police:

"The number of women who officially reported violence to the police in the Metropolitan police district alone in one year was estimated at 58,000." That figure would have represented 3.35% of women living with a partner, or one woman in every 30.

Yet even that figure was not high enough, according to Sandra Horley, director of the Chiswick Family Refuge and, according to Lyndon and Ashton, one of Britain's leading experts on domestic violence. According to her, even that terrible number was too low:

In a letter to *The Independent* in 1990, she wrote: "The Metropolitan police receives approximately 100,000 calls a year from women who are trying to escape male violence."

This would represent 5.8% of women living with partners in London, or one woman in 17: an appalling number, representing a sickening general incidence of violence.

But Sarah Miles took Horley's figure even farther. In her book, *The Rites of Man*, published in 1991 and, according to Lyndon and Ashton, respectfully reviewed, she wrote that: "In the London area alone, more than 100,000 women a year need hospital treatment after violence in the home."

They note that this, truly, is a terrifying statement. If one woman in every 17 living with a man in London needs hospital treatment for injuries inflicted by her man, they observe, the true figure for incidents of domestic violence, including those unreported to the police and untreated by hospitals, must be colossal. It would follow that the feminists and the violence lobbyists must be right about the degree of horror.

But:

We know now that all of the figures given above are ludicrous and baseless exaggerations...

It turns out that when, in 1989, the police forces in England and Wales first got around to publishing their own numbers, the figures were considerably smaller. For example, the number of domestic violence incidents recorded by the Metropolitan police in 1993 was 11,420:

That figure is equal to 0.66% of all women living with partners in the capital, and less than half the figure of 25,000 reported incidents previously given to us by the Met. It is less than a quarter of the figure given by Edwards, whose work has been sympathetically received by the Metropolitan police. It is less than one eighth of the figure given by Horley, whose Chiswick Family Refuge has been supported by public funds.

As for the 100,000 figure given by Miles for women receiving treatment in London hospitals after domestic violence, we can now see plainly that her figure is clearly a fiction.

A fiction. A myth, perhaps. And note again what happens when scrutiny is applied to the basis of the claim:

When we telephoned [Miles] to ask where she had got the figure from, she said at first that she could not remember; and when she was asked to comment on the discrepancy between her figure and the Home Office's, she terminated the interview because "there is someone at the door".

Next day, she remembered "reading it" (the figure of 100,000) in the *Evening Standard* the year before the book was published"; but she could give no date, author, context or origin for this item of scholarly research.

Explaining the discrepancy between its previous estimate and the published facts, a spokesman for the Metropolitan police said: "I can't explain that at all, but 25,000 is a wrong figure."

Defending her figure of 58,000, Edwards told us: "You should not regard my higher figure as representative of the number of cases of domestic violence which should be regarded as crimes."

Eh? Come again? Why would 58,000 London women a year be calling the police if not to report criminal violence? "Many women," she said, "report incidents of violence which do not actually constitute a crime." In that case, one might ask, why should anybody think of them as being battered women?

Horley was not available to be challenged on her figure of 100,000.

As we can see, just as with the Super Bowl Hoax, the figures seem simply to arise in the imagination, and then are asserted as if they are objective facts.

In addition, responding to the anticipated defense that violence against women is greater than that reported, since women do not report many incidents, they add another wrinkle that may be of interest to us:

If, however, anybody wants to argue about the hidden extent of our domestic violence, the figures which have just been published put them and their case even deeper in trouble.

Of the 11,420 domestic violence incidents in the Metropolitan police area in 1993, how many would you guess involved the same individuals more than once? How many complaints were of the threat, rather than the reality, of violence? How many of those incidents were reported by men who were living with men? How many incidents of domestic violence were reported by men living with women?

They add:

You would have to guess the answers to these questions because the facts are hard to find. For instance, Scotland Yard acknowledges that: "Every district has its share of repeat or persistent callers but the number are unquantifiable."

We cannot know, therefore, how many reported or recorded incidents of violence involve the same individuals more than once. Similarly, Scotland Yard cannot say how many callers are complaining about the threat rather than the reality of an act of violence; but that 68% of reported cases of domestic violence constituted "mental cruelty" or "threats of force".

But, more interesting to us is that:

Of those incidents, a proportion are not women reporting that they have been bashed but men reporting that a woman, or another man, is bashing or threatening to bash them. If, as we have repeatedly been told for 25 years, women are reluctant to tell the police about violence in the home, we can be certain that men will be even less eager to report such shameful incidents.

According to one estimate recently published in the Los Angeles Times, American men are nine times less likely than women to seek the protection of the police from a violent partner at home.

Our analysis of Britain's figures confirms this picture. Women are eight times more likely than men to report an incident of domestic violence to the police, yet it now appears certain that the most likely victims of domestic violence are not women but men.

A Mori survey recently commissioned and published by the BBC programme, Here and Now, showed that 5% of women living with men had experienced an incident of violence from that man; but 11% of men living with women said that they had experienced an incident of violence from their woman.

It therefore follows from this survey that men are more than twice as likely to be the victims of attack in the home, though they are eight times less likely to report it.

## **PARITY IN BATTERING**

Men assaulted by women? Now there's an image that does not fit well into the neat bifurcation of toxic man/Madonna-and-child. Yet there is good evidence for it, and much of it comes from the Western side of the Atlantic

Claims such as the following will be familiar to many readers<sup>13</sup>:

“In the United States, a man beats a woman every twelve seconds.” (French, 1992)

An American woman is beaten by her husband or boyfriend every 15 seconds. (*New York Times*, April 23, 1993)

Every twelve seconds, a woman in the United States is beaten by her husband or lover. (*Mirabella*, November, 1993)

Most people not familiar with the social sciences, will not realize what must go into such statistics, if they have any basis at all. They cannot be based on official U.S. Government statistics, because the government keeps track of crimes, not domestic violence as such. Instead, they must be based on large scale, extra-governmental empirical research. This is extremely expensive and must be carried out by highly-trained professionals, of whom there are few. Furthermore, there are few sources of funding available, outside of the U.S. government, which makes no secret of what it is funding. The result is that it is usually not difficult to say where the results come from, if they have any basis at all.

In fact, much of this material comes from the work of Richard J. Gelles, of the University of Rhode Island, Murray A. Straus, of the University of New Hampshire, and their coworkers. Their National Family Violence Survey, funded by the National Institutes of Mental Health, has now run in three waves. It constitutes the most extensive data base in the field, and it is often possible to tell how statistics such as those offered above are derived from it. Generally, this is achieved by ignoring two features of Gelles and Straus's research. First, Gelles and Straus clearly differentiate between degrees of severity, and statistics like those above typically are achieved by ignoring that distinction -- lumping insults together with knifings. More interestingly, they achieve their shock value by ignoring the fact that, according to this research, violence is just as likely to be perpetrated by women against men as by men against women.

This latter finding came as a great surprise to Gelles and Straus, but it made itself known through their research. For example, the means by which the figure of a woman being beaten every 15 seconds equally supports a claim that a husband is beaten every 14 seconds. To be sure, Gelles and Strauss note that women are more likely to be injured in such exchanges<sup>14</sup>, but their finding that women are as likely to be violent, and indeed to initiate such violence, has since become one of the best replicated findings in all of social science<sup>15</sup>

Most recently, as of this writing, the U.S. Department of Justice (Moffit and Caspi, 1999) published findings from a long-term longitudinal study of men and women in Dunedin, New Zealand, which found that women (37%) were even more likely to have perpetrated domestic violence than men (22%)<sup>16</sup>. Among the other interesting aspects of this study were that:

Risk factors in childhood and adolescence for male perpetrators included poverty and low academic achievement. Female perpetrators showed risk factors of harsh family discipline and parental strife [but not poverty or low academic achievement]. Both male and female perpetrators also had histories of aggressive behavior.

The strongest risk factor for both male and female perpetrators and victims was a record of physically aggressive delinquent offending before age 15. More than half the males convicted of a violent crime also physically abused their partners.

Domestic violence is most prevalent among cohabitating [rather than married] couples.

Sixty-five percent of females who suffered serious physical abuse and 88 percent of male perpetrators had one or more mental disorders (as defined by the American Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association ["DSM-III-R"]). (Moffit and Caspi, 1999)

The idea that the male perpetrators of domestic violence are uneducated, mentally disturbed people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have a record of violent crime outside of their domestic relationships, which tend not to be based on marriage, obviously does not accord very well with the idea that violence toward women is a normal aspect of masculinity in our society. Nor does it support the idea that the middle-class women who are the target of this propaganda are deeply at risk.

Yet for our purposes, what is equally of interest is that findings of parity in domestic violence were often known to those who broadcast findings concerning male-to-female violence, and were deliberately kept from the public. This is a fact that emerged with particular clarity in a recent issue of Canada's best selling newspaper, the *National Post* (Evenson and Milstone, 1999). The article begins:

Women are just as violent to their spouses as men, and women are almost three times more likely to initiate violence in a relationship, according to a new Canadian study that deals a blow to the image of the male as the traditional domestic aggressor.

But, Evenson and Milstone note, the most surprising aspect of the study is the source of the data, a survey of 705 Alberta men and women conducted in 1987. It turns out that, although the original researchers asked men and women the same questions, they published only the responses of the women. The responses of the men have only now been reported.

Thus, it was originally reported that roughly 10.8% of men in the survey pushed, grabbed or threw objects at their spouses in the previous year, while 2.5% committed more severe acts, such as choking, kicking or using a weapon. Yet, as we now know, 12.4% of women in the same survey committed acts of minor violence and 4.7%

committed severe violence. In fact, the symmetry here was contained within the data of the survey:

The violence is seldom one-sided. Of those surveyed, 52% of women and 62% of men reported that both partners were violent.

When questioned about who initiated the most severe conflicts, 67% of women believed they had started it; only 26% believed it was their male spouse...

But the symmetry was unreported and that had its effect:

When the original Alberta study was published in the Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science in 1989, it was taken up by feminist groups as evidence of the epidemic of violence against women...the one-sided Kennedy-Dutton study was cited extensively in a 1990 House of Commons committee report *The War Against Women*, which ultimately led Brian Mulroney, the former prime minister, to call a two-year, \$10-million national inquiry into violence against women. The inquiry's 460-page report made 494 recommendations aimed at changing attitudes in governments, police departments, courts, hospitals and churches. It also led to a torrent of lurid news features about battered women.

Evenson and Milstone observe:

Publication of the "other side" of the violence study provides a sharp illustration of how social science is manipulated to fit a particular agenda.

"It happens all the time. People only tell one half of the story," says Eugen Lupri, a University of Calgary sociologist whose research shows similar patterns of violence against men.

"Feminists themselves use our studies, but they only publish what they like. "As some feminists say, it's counter-intuitive. We would not expect that to be true; and if things are not expected to be true, for some people they are not true."

And they add:

Even the federal government appears to turn a blind eye. In 1993, Statistics Canada began to keep track of assaults by men on women in its Violence Against Women survey. But it does not measure the female-to-male violence. "At the time, it was decided that since violence against women was more prevalent, we would only keep track of that," explains spokesperson Shelley Crego.

Ms.Crego said this decision was based on police reports, noting women complain more frequently of assault by men than vice versa.

But:

In her article, Dr. Kwong implies this creates an incorrect picture. "It is important to keep in mind that, within the criminal justice system, any of the physical acts endorsed by these respondents would constitute assault," she writes.

Explaining the selectivity of their focus, the original researchers said they were "primarily interested in male-to-female violence at the time." Yet allowing such "interests" to distort their report of their findings raises serious questions about whether,

under color of doing science, they were in fact doing political advocacy. It must be seen to represent flagrant and willful disregard of the facts<sup>17</sup>, and a stunning violation of scientific procedure<sup>18</sup>. The withholding of evidence concerning parity in battering has distorted public discussion and has had a dramatic impact on what people believe. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that that was precisely its intent.

## DEMONIZING THE MESSENGER

For our purposes, however, of equal interest to the disregard for objective is the response from feminists when such revelations have been brought into the open.

For example, returning to the Super Bowl hoax, Ringle's story was followed up in a February 2 report by the *Boston Globe's* Bob Hohler, who fully supported his conclusions and got some reactions to it from some of the figures involved. Interestingly, while they generally they backed off from the story, they did so in a way that enabled them to maintain the image in general. Thus:

One expert, Joan Stiles, public education coordinator for the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women's Service Groups, told the *Globe* that the Super Bowl story "sensationalized and trivialized" the battering problem, and damaged the cause's credibility. Lundy Bancroft, a training director for a Cambridge-based counseling program for men who batter, said, "I disbelieved the 40 percent thing from the moment I heard it." Bancroft also suggested that the campaign to pressure NBC to air the domestic-violence spot "unfairly stigmatized" football fans. "There is no stereotypical batterer," he said. (Sommers, 1995: 191)

Yet, as we have seen, the general framework of belief about domestic violence rests on material that is no more substantial than the Super Bowl hoax.

Most interesting of all, however, was this response from Lenore Walker:

Lenore Walker was furious with Ken Ringle for criticizing her research. She attributed his unfriendly stance to male pique at not being able to get through to her on the phone the day he was writing his story. As she explained to the *Boston Globe's* Bob Hohler: "He [Ringle] felt as if he was entitled to talk to me; because he did not get what he was entitled to he got angry and decided to use his pen as a sword as a batterer does with his fist when he does not get what he thinks he is entitled to." (Ibid. p. 192)

Walker's response here may be taken as paradigmatic. The fact is that the attempt to destroy the validity of objective disagreement by demonizing its proponents, and indeed to subsume it under the category of violence against women itself, is standard practice here. This is from Sommers' account of the way Gelles and Strauss' research was received:

Battery and rape research is the very stuff of gender feminist advocacy. Researchers who try to pursue their investigations in a nonpolitical way are often subject to attack by the advocates. Murray Straus reports that he and some of his co-workers "became the object of bitter scholarly and personal attacks, including

threats and attempts at intimidation." In the late seventies and early eighties his scholarly presentations were sometimes obstructed by booing, shouting, or picketing. When he was considered for offices in scientific societies, he was labeled an antifeminist.... In 1992 a rumor was circulated that Murray Straus had beaten his wife and sexually harassed his students. Straus fought back as best he could and in one instance was able to elicit a written apology from a domestic violence activist.

Richard Gelles claims that whenever male researchers question exaggerated findings on domestic battery, it is never long before rumors begin circulating that he is himself a batterer. For female skeptics, however, the situation appears to be equally intimidating. When Suzanne K. Steinmetz, a co-investigator in the First National Family Violence Survey, was being considered for promotion, the feminists launched a letter-writing campaign urging that it be denied. She also received calls threatening her and her family, and there was a bomb threat at a conference where she spoke. (ibid. p. 200)

One need not stop here. The attempt to suppress the message of the equivalence of violence in relationships through the demonization of those who bring the message is abundantly evident. As a final example, consider this article by Scott Sleaf in a recent issue of the APA [American Psychological Association] *Monitor*:

For years, Irene Frieze, PhD, wanted to keep rather quiet about her unexpected findings on dating violence. She was worried about how the mainstream media might spin her results, and how they might be interpreted by the feminist groups that had long lauded her work.

Why the hesitancy? Frieze, a psychology professor at the University of Pittsburgh, and her colleagues had found in surveys of 300 college students that women appeared more likely than men to start physical altercations with a dating partner, usually in the form of slapping, shoving or pushing.

Frieze certainly wasn't the first person to make such a discovery about women's role in relationship violence. In fact, many psychologists, including noted feminist researchers, have collected similar results with far larger sample sizes.

But:

When a Pitt public relations officer learned of the data last October and decided to issue a press release on it, Frieze's reservations proved accurate. The National Organization for Women denounced the research as fraudulent, while a radio station exaggerated her results as showing that women "cause most domestic violence."

## **SCAPEGOATING THE "DEADBEAT DAD"**

A similar story may be told with regard to the image of the "deadbeat dad," the irresponsible father who abandons his family and refuses to pay child support. This image

is so familiar to us that we do not even think to question it. Like so many of the other aspects of the contemporary denigration of men, it turns out to be a fantasy, and unsupported by the facts. An extensive recent federally funded<sup>19</sup> study by Sanford Braver (1989) makes this plain.

Men, it turns out, have not caused family breakdown by divorcing their wives. On the contrary, a substantial preponderance of divorces, from 63 to 67 percent (p. 133), are initiated by women. Nor is it the case that men are evicted from their families by women tired of their violence and abuse. In fact, the most important reasons given by females, and the only ones ranked as "very important" by more than half, were "Gradual growing apart, losing a sense of closeness," and "Serious differences in lifestyle and/or values." "Violence between you and your spouse" ranks only 16<sup>th</sup> on the list, mentioned as very important by only 20 percent (p. 139) of divorced women.

What is more, the idea that men refuse to pay child support also turns out to be a myth. Until Braver's study, the idea came from research that lumped married men together with men who had never been married, and only questioned women. But men who had not married had obviously not undertaken a commitment to support their children, because that is what marriage is. And asking only women whether their ex-husbands have paid introduces an obvious bias. In fact, when Braver asked men about their payment of child support, he found that they claimed to be scrupulous in their payments. Wisely suggesting that the truth lies somewhere in between, Braver went on to ask what percentage of their support payments were made, and found that, even by the mothers' account, they were paid 68 to 69 percent of what they were owed, a figure far less alarming than is typically supposed<sup>20</sup>. Again, looking at the reasons that men did not pay, he found that it was almost entirely due to unemployment. The wives of men who were fully employed during the year said they paid 80 percent of what they owed, while the men reported that they paid 100 percent. (p.33).

Here again, what we find is that the myth of the "deadbeat dad" is a variant on the fantasy of "toxic man." And here again, we find the same pattern of abuse directed at those who question the myth. Thus, Braver, who began his research as much convinced of the "deadbeat dad" idea as anyone else, reports:

... once I began to uncover and point out evidence that tended to exonerate fathers, some researchers were mistakenly led to infer that I myself must somehow be antifemale, antifeminist or antimother.

But,

The truth is the direct opposite: I have long identified with the goals of the women's movement to increase opportunities for women (and men as well), to treat the genders equally, and to end male domination in families. But somehow even to speak in defense of fathers is taken by some as the equivalent of bashing mothers. (pp. 13-14)

Along these lines, Braver tells the story of an academic conference he attended at Arizona State University in 1988. He was in the audience during a panel discussion, which was moderated by one of the country's most respected demographers. One of the members of the panel spoke about her research on child support and during the question-

and-answer period another member of the audience raised a question about Arizona's supposedly poor record in child-support collection. Braver recalls that this gave him what he thought was a good opportunity to share his findings about the problems that arise from trusting official records. He continued:

I raised my hand and was given the opportunity to address the audience member's question. I explained how the official database statistics can be misleading and how I had taken the trouble to interview both mothers and fathers. I then repeated [the results partially reported above].

At this point, the moderator stood up and said, "You know, I've heard about your findings. Our panel was discussing this very issue, of differences between mothers' and fathers' answers, over lunch. And what we concluded was if the mother tells you one things and the father tells you something else, then the father is a God damned liar."

Braver adds:

I was so flabbergasted, I could think of no response and sat down.

I have yet to see any data that fathers either don't remember events as accurately as mothers or simply lie more. In the absence of convincing data that supports this view, those holding it are merely expressing their own prejudices, biases it would not be acceptable to express toward any other group. I can't imagine this man standing in a public setting and proclaiming that any racial, ethnic, or religious group -- or even mothers, for that matter -- were a bunch of "God damned liars." (p. 35)

## **THE ELEVATION OF THE SUBJECTIVE**

So what is one to make of this? What we have, clearly enough, is a case in which a set of assertions is promulgated, widely and loudly, as empirical facts in support of a vision of the world as a war between the sexes. But the assertions turn out to be distortions: myths, fictions, perhaps even fantasies. Moreover, as we have seen, the attempt to correct the distortions is not allowed to have its own impact, but is itself defended against in the name of the good side. It is subsumed under the war between the sexes itself, and is seen as simply a movement by the "bad" side. And this strategy has been largely successful.

One must conclude from this that the order of understanding has been reversed in this case. These subjective views are not, for those who promulgate them, ways of interpreting the facts. Rather, the subjective views come first, and then the facts are given weight in accordance with whether they support these views. The subjective, thus, has been raised over the objective.

Now one may object that this is an old story, and tells us nothing but that human beings can be biased. In a sense, this is true, but it does not give sufficient recognition to the peculiarities of this case. Of course we know that people have biases. Yet, for that very reason, we have fashioned means to limit the damage they can cause. The whole

institutional structure of criticism, from freedom of speech to peer review, has the intention of safeguarding us from our limitations in this regard. What we see in this case is that this institutional framework has broken down. A set of subjective views has emerged as sacrosanct, beyond criticism. It has been hermetically sealed off from the world. The result is that a vicious bias has triumphed over fact.

But if the images of toxic man, of Madonna-and-child, of the sexual holy war, are views that are not based on facts, then what can they be based on? If they are not the best we can do to give meaning to the facts, what can they mean? Where do they come from and how do they claim their authority? From where do they get the power to override and even banish the facts? And how do they gain this power even among people like Pollack, who see themselves, with perfect sincerity, as the passionate defenders of the most innocent objects of this vilification? These are the questions that will be of interest to us in the chapters ahead.

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	Math	Verbal
Men	532	495
Women	509	502

Part of this difference is certainly due to the fact that more women took the test than men. Still, these data do not support the view that colleges are getting their male students from “all the way down.”

<sup>2</sup> In 1995 4,132 males in the age range 15-24 killed themselves, versus 652 females in the same age range. (Anderson, Kochanek, and Murphy, 1997)

<sup>3</sup> Available on their web site <http://www.apa.org/about/division/div35.html>

<sup>4</sup> Available on their web site: <http://web.indstate.edu/spsmm/posstat.html>

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<sup>5</sup> Pollack, for some reason, does not provide a reference to the article. It is also cited by Sommers (2000), who does. Quotations presented here are from the original, and are not significantly different from those given by Pollack.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, his usage on page 5.

<sup>7</sup> The demand that men be more sensitive is arguably a feature of our time. And if Pollack is correct, this demand is in conflict with the demands of the Boy Code that require that boys deny their sensitivity. Could the boys' failure be due to their state of confusion? This is not a claim Pollack makes explicitly, but it may be useful to consider how it would fit with the rest of his case. The answer is that it would be a hard case for Pollack to make. According to Pollack, the requirement that boys be sensitive is unqualifiedly positive. Moreover, increased sensitivity, on the part of society as a whole, is much of the answer to boys' problems, according to Pollack. What we can see, on that level, is that the demand for sensitivity is at the same time permission and encouragement to be more sensitive. But the two work against each other, says Pollack. That would mean that, in Pollack's view, increased sensitivity would undermine the Boy Code and its deleterious effects. It is hard to see how the salutary effects of this increased sensitivity would not easily outweigh the confusion of responding to it in the context of the Boy Code. Confusion, then, cannot be held to be the cause of boys' failure.

<sup>8</sup> Another contemporaneous issue that certainly deserves consideration in this regard, though it is not mentioned by Pollack, is the rise of fatherlessness. Of course, girls grow up in the same fatherless families that boys do, but it certainly makes sense that

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fatherlessness might impact boys more than it does girls, at least in certain ways. My point here is that the rise of fatherlessness has not taken place in a vacuum, but has been largely the result of a cultural configuration that regards fathers as, at best, unnecessary and, at worst, malevolent. It is the analysis of this cultural configuration toward which our inquiry is directed. For recent examples of this configuration see “Deconstructing the Essential Father” (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999). This is the lead article in an issue of the American Psychological Association’s presumably scientific journal *The American Psychologist*, despite being stunningly selective in its reading of the research literature and overtly political in its intent. The various web sites connected with the National Organization for Women continue to be a treasure-trove in this regard. Witness, for example, their recent attack upon Congress for passing a resolution in favor of Father’s Day, even despite the fact that our lawmakers thought it necessary to rename the holiday “Responsible Fathers’ Day.” (Jensen, 2000)

<sup>9</sup> For anyone unfamiliar with this genre, it may be useful to provide a few examples. The imagery of male toxicity varies in the subtlety of its presentation. On the subtle side, for example, we have Gilligan (1982), who, while observing the form of equivalence, identifies men with their dark side and women with their ideal side, and sees male motivation as dominated by aggression and selfishness; women's motivation, by contrast, is seen as arising from a sense of connection, and is organized around caring, nurturance and the creation and maintenance of relationships.

Moving away from subtlety, we get this from Andrea Dworkin (1993: 214):

In everything men make, they hollow out a central place for death, let its rancid smell contaminate every dimension of whatever still survives. Men especially

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love murder. In art they celebrate it, and in life they commit it. They embrace murder as if life without it would be devoid of passion meaning, and action, as if murder were solace, still their sobs as they mourn the emptiness and alienation of their lives,

This from Robin Morgan, former editor of *Ms. Magazine* (1989:138-9)

The phallic malady is epidemic and systemic... each individual male in the patriarchy is aware of his relative power in the scheme of things.... He knows that his actions are supported by the twin pillars of the State of man - the brotherhood ritual of political exigency and the brotherhood ritual of a sexual thrill in dominance. As a devotee of Thanatos, he is one with the practitioner of sado-masochistic "play" between "consenting adults," as he is one with the rapist.

This from Gloria Steinem, founder of *Ms. Magazine* (1993: 259-261):

Patriarchy requires violence or the subliminal threat of violence in order to maintain itself... The most dangerous situation for a woman is not an unknown man in the street, or even the enemy in wartime, but a husband or lover in the isolation of their home.

And this from Marilyn French (1993: 182)

As long as some men use physical force to subjugate females, *all* men need not. The knowledge that some men do suffices to threaten all women. Beyond that, it is not necessary to beat up a woman to beat her down. A man can simply refuse to hire women in well-paid jobs, extract as much or more work from women than men but pay them less, or treat women disrespectfully at work or at home. He can fail to support a child he has engendered, demand the woman he lives with wait

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on him like a servant. He can beat or kill the woman he claims to love; he can rape women, whether mate, acquaintance or stranger; he can rape or sexually molest his daughters, nieces, stepchildren, or the woman he claims to love. The vast majority of men in the world do one or more of the above. (emphasis in original)

Obviously, if these insults were directed at the membership of any other group, whether ethnic, religious, national, or anything else, they would immediately be labeled "hate speech," and all right-thinking people would condemn their very utterance. That they are not, but are instead regarded in mainstream quarters as informed and respectable opinion, is a fact that is near the focal point of our inquiry.

<sup>10</sup> Christina Sommers' recent book *The War Against Boys* (2000) provides a wealth of material illustrating the way the denigration of males has become a dominant theme of education in our time. Summarizing, she says:

More and more schoolboys inhabit a milieu of disapproval. Routinely regarded as protosexists, potential harassers, and perpetrators of gender inequity, boys live under a cloud of censure, in a permanent state of culpability. Martin Spafford, a high school teacher in London, has made observations about British boys that apply to American boys as well.... 'Boys feel continually attacked for who they are. We have created a sense in school that masculinity is something bad. Boys feel blamed for history, and a school culture has grown up which is suspicious and frightened of boys. (p. 57)

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This often reaches the level of the ludicrous:

In 1997, Nan Stein [a director of the influential Wellesley College Center for Research on Women] did a national survey of domestic violence/sexual assault experts who present programs in public schools. She asked them what they liked least about the educational materials they had to work with (guides, handouts, videos, and so on). Stein reported that among the most common complaints were that males are never positively portrayed" and "males are never shown in a positive light." However, she did not see this as a reason to change the message: when boys object, it only shows the "need for materials to defuse male resistance." She seemed not to notice that the instructors, not the boys, were the ones objecting to the materials. (p.58)

<sup>11</sup> In July 1994 the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice released a Special Report called *Murder in Families* detailing the results of a survey of family homicides in 33 urban U.S. counties. The report covered only convictions. It said, in part: " In murders of their offspring, women predominated, accounting for 55 percent of killers."

<sup>12</sup> This is the so-called "Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy." The Southall research group remotely videotaped the interactions of parents with 39 children who had been brought to the hospital due to the suspicion that they were being seriously abused. In 33 of these cases, a parent was observed attempting to kill the child, primarily by suffocation. The

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research paper, along with subsequent news accounts, uses the neutral term "parent," but a perusal of the case descriptions suggests that the bulk of them were female. A colleague reported that in an interview on New Zealand National Public Radio, Southall acknowledged that in all but one of these cases, the perpetrator was female -- either the mother or, in one case, the grandmother. Looking for a better source for this, I wrote to Southall. He did not answer the precise question, but said, in a letter dated February 16, 1999: "In the setting of Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy it is our experience that the vast majority of perpetrators of abuse are women."

<sup>13</sup> Cited by Sommers (1995: 193)

<sup>14</sup> If this is true, the greater strength of men would largely explain it. On the other hand, the finding could be due to an increased tendency for women to report injury (Cook, 1997). In any case, it is a matter of public record that in the worst cases of domestic violence, those resulting in death, typically about 40% of the victims in the U.S. are men (Department of Justice, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Fiebert, (1998) documents 95 studies, 79 of them empirical and 16 reviews and/or analyses) and recently by the British Home Office (1998) in a study based on the British Crime Survey of 1996.

<sup>16</sup> These attributions were reported by the respondents about themselves, and there was a high level of correspondence (70-80%) between individual's self-reports and the reports of their partners.

<sup>17</sup> As of this writing there has not, to my knowledge, been a hint in the major U.S. media of the research showing the parity of domestic violence. This is true even in the context

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of "Violence Against Women" legislation, whose supporters have used, and continue to use, bogus information. The suppression of this information continues apace, and it continues to have a powerful effect.

<sup>18</sup> Compare the lack of response in this case to the treatment of an incident in which an ideologically driven researcher, attempting to show that high voltage power lines can cause cancer, withheld contrary data. Robert P. Liburdy, a cell biologist at the laboratory, an arm of the Energy Department, was found to have published two papers with misleading data. Investigators said Liburdy eliminated data that did not support his conclusions. After the investigation, he resigned quietly from the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory in March and has agreed to withdraw his research findings.

That story was reported in an article on Page One of the *New York Times* (Broad, 1999). It takes nothing away from the importance of fraud in cancer research to say that fraud in research into family violence is also important.

<sup>19</sup> Braver says that the research was funded by more than \$10 million in grants, primarily from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute of Mental Health.

<sup>20</sup> Fathers report paying 84 to 92 percent of what they owe. Again, the truth is likely to lie somewhere in between.