

Men, Misogyny and Misandry

In our society's concern for the rights of women, we've created another silent class of victims: men

Last week's mass-media blitz over the cyber-bullying of blogger Kathy Sierra has reinforced the common belief that women as a class are victims and men as a class victimizers. How else can we explain pervasive misogyny?

As usual, most people accept the threats against Ms. Sierra as yet another exposure of the misogyny that contaminates boys and men. Those who react in that way demand more policing of the internet, along with even more feminist "re-education" and "zero-tolerance" policies. Deplorable as this incident is, the proposed solutions are counter-productive and even the diagnosis is inadequate.

We've tried the proposed solutions for decades, in fact, and have not succeeded in eliminating hostility toward women, on the contrary, such hostility might be increasing among young men. Isn't it time to consider that the problem might be much more complex than most people have imagined so far?

That brings us to the diagnosis, which makes much of the fact that women are victims of cyber-bullying (and other forms of bullying) but ignores the fact that boys and men are as well. Men are much less likely than women to complain about it, of course, because the most "unmanly" thing that they can imagine is admitting their own vulnerability. And when they do complain, people are very unlikely to take them seriously, due to the assumption that men can take care of themselves. (Researchers have already begun to explore these problems in connection with male victims of domestic violence, sexual harassment - and yes, even rape.)

A more adequate diagnosis, therefore, would be the prevalence of hatred in our society not only toward women and minorities, but also toward every available target, including men.

Movies routinely present adult men who act like children, whether sweetly or destructively - often as eternal frat boys. Commercials routinely present them as idiots. In a recent one for Kinko's the male office worker slops coffee all over himself due to the prospect of staying up at night making copies. His smirking female counterpart, having contacted Kinko's, knows better. The reverse, of course, would be inconceivable. Ridiculing men, but not women, is politically correct.

The elite culture of academia, moreover, routinely relies directly or indirectly on the belief that every major problem is due ultimately to "patriarchy" (and therefore to men as a class). Many social scientists try to make this point by indulging in what we call "statistics abuse": manipulating or even inventing statistics to show that women are either victims of men or in constant danger of becoming victims.

As a result, both judges and legislators have either allowed or mandated discrimination against men. This can be overt (establishing affirmative action programs for many groups except men) or covert and therefore systemic (interpreting and applying apparently gender-neutral laws in ways that nonetheless work against men).

Because of discrimination (but also political correctness), the courts, schools and other institutions now care almost exclusively about the needs and problems of women.

This world view relies on the morally despicable notion of “collective guilt” and the axiom that a good end can justify evil means - in this case, the equality that institutionalized inequality is supposed to create.

But these are the symptoms of an even deeper problem, a hidden one called misandry. This word, which most people don't even know, refers to the direct or indirect teaching of contempt for men as such.

Like misogyny, misandry is a form of hatred. And hatred isn't an emotion, unlike anger, but a culturally propagated and institutionalized world view. Therefore, misandry is a form of sexism or even racism (given that maleness is a biological classification).

Men still earn more money than women, some argue, so what's their problem? This is true at the moment, but skewed statistics don't tell the whole story. For one thing, older women often have less education and therefore less lucrative jobs than young women in this transitional age. Women in general often lack the experience to negotiate for entrance salaries and promotions; avoiding high-risk, high-mobility and therefore high - paying jobs; decide to stay at home with young children; and so on.

Nonetheless, no group has ever improved its economic status more quickly than women already have without resorting to political revolution. Given new “equality” programs, in fact, and given the downward mobility of men in connection with both education and income, women will soon overtake men.

Most politicians are men, others argue, so men don't need any protection. But men aren't the only ones who vote them into office. More important, women have acquired a great deal of power by establishing lobby groups and even government agencies such as Status of Women Canada, acquiring government grants for research on women, implementing their policies indirectly (through bureaucratic fiat behind closed doors instead of public discussion in legislative assemblies), and so forth. Although the women's movement has not produced utopia, it has greatly improved the lives of women.

There can be no such thing as discrimination against men, allegedly, because legislators always use egalitarian language. And yet women have effectively had laws reinterpreted in their favour by appealing to Charter law, The Court Challenges program, and human-rights commissions. Because the courts have excluded men from the list of the groups that have suffered historically from discrimination, here or elsewhere, (even though governments have routinely conscripted

only men for military or labour service), the perspective of men is seldom even heard in the public square.

Men have caused every problem that women face, supposedly, and therefore deserve no protection for themselves. Most Canadians wouldn't make this argument, at least not explicitly, but some do. And they're wrong for several reasons.

For one thing, they rely on what we call the "conspiracy theory of history." But the world, even the patriarchal world, doesn't revolve around women. Men haven't spent the past 10,000 years thinking about nothing other than how to afflict women.

Moreover, men (and boys) clearly do have problems that would evoke concern in any society worth living in. Besides, revenge has nothing to do with morality. In other words, two wrongs don't make a right.

Despite the few alpha males, we need to examine these assumptions in view of some very obvious indicators that men as a class are in trouble. Think, for instance, of education. According to the Canadian Council on Learning, 12 percent of boys but only seven percent of girls drop out of high school. Male students are already a minority in Canadian universities, and yet how many have established affirmative-action programs for men? If this trend continues, the inevitable result will be an undereducated and impoverished male underclass.

Most men, as we say, are still reluctant to admit that they can be vulnerable and therefore need to defend themselves as a class. But those who do speak out in public - politicians, journalists, academics, and so on - know that challenging any feminist idea can amount to political or professional suicide; being denounced as misogynists.

As for those in the business world - entertainment, say, or advertising - they know that misandry sells, just as misogyny once did. In fact, it's the one form of prejudice that remains respectable.

Only by acknowledging misandry as yet another form of hatred, facing the growth of male underclass, and taking seriously the full humanity of all people will we begin to solve the larger and deeper problem of hatred itself.

At the moment, many people deplore hatred toward some people but not others. Moral consistency does not allow that, and human psychology doesn't tolerate it for long.

It's time to wake up.

This article was submitted to the Ottawa Citizen by Katherine Young (a professor at McGill University) and Paul Nathanson (a senior researcher there). They are the authors of Spreading Misandry: the Teaching of Contempt for Men in Popular Culture (2001) and Legalizing Misandry: from Public Shame to Systemic Discrimination against Men (2006), both published by McGill-Queen's University Press.