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Bias in Mental Health Research

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This paper offers an inside glimpse into the workings of several studies on intimate partner violence and show how the anti-male bias plays out in the research. It reviews Dr. Murray Straus' paper "Processes explaining the Concealment and Distortion of Evidence on Gender Symmetry in Partner Violence." It then examines three intimate partner violence studies and the media coverage each received, to show these processes at work. The first is a study of teen violence from the United Kingdom sponsored by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The second is a study on reproductive coercion in an "impoverished" population of African American and Hispanic females, generalized to the population as a whole in *Newsweek*, *Science News Daily* and the *Los Angeles Times*. The last is the Conforming to Masculine Norms Inventory. This relied on focus groups where women were the majority and white males, 70% of the population, were only 1/3 of the total people involved in these focus groups. All participants were in their 20s; their opinions were taken to represent the norms of men of all ages.

INTRO

Most of us are familiar with the male bashing we see on television. Men are portrayed as buffoons and helpless ne'er do wells who consistently need others (women and sometimes children) to problem solve and do the right thing. Most people are tired of this ridiculous bias yet it continues unabated. What most don't realize is that a very similar male bashing exists in mental health research. The past 40 years has brought us a powerful respect and admiration of women and girls. This is a good thing. The problem is that we seem unable to hold both men and women in the highest esteem. As we hold our women up we seem to tear our men down. It's as if we can only see women as "good" and men as considerably less than good. This binary vision of the sexes gets played out in the male bashing we see on television but it also gets played out in numerous other venues including mental health research.

This collection of articles will offer you an inside glimpse into the workings of several studies and show how the anti-male bias plays out in the research. We have all grown to trust "research" and when we hear that a study shows that "X is correct" we tend to automatically believe that "X" is correct. Research has taken on an almost divine ethos that carries the seal of approval of correctness. If science says it, it must be so. The problem of course is that science, especially social science, is less than concrete and is much more slippery than measuring a distance or the tensile strength of a bar of steel. Mental health research is much more vulnerable to values and ideologies of the researchers. If a scientist believes a certain thing it usually has little impact on his measurements of the tensile strength of the bar of steel. No matter what he believes the measurement will likely be the same. But what about issues in social sciences where researchers come to the table with a large amount of preconceived ideas, allegiances to ideologies that espouse strong opinions about those being studied or have traumatic life histories that bias them against certain groups? Can those sorts of things influence the "findings" of a social science study? You bet they can. Gone is the impartial judge weighing the evidence and sifting through the data to find the truth. In today's world of social science research the opposite is happening: researchers are starting at their preconceived bias's and then designing research to prove that bias. As bizarre as that sounds it is demonstrably true in some social science research. You will see some of that within this paper.

We start off with a short summary of a very important paper by Murray Straus titled "Processes explaining the Concealment and Distortion of Evidence on Gender Symmetry in Partner Violence." Straus leads us through seven ways that feminist researchers hid or distorted the data of their studies in order to insure their results would reflect the pre-

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

conceived ideology of females being the victims of domestic violence and men being the perpetrators. Straus's explanations make very clear how an ideological bias can impact the results of social science research. He describes in detail exactly how they accomplished this. One technique he describes is simply ignoring your own data that contradicts your ideology. Another is to simply not ask questions that might risk obtaining answers that would contradict your thesis. After reading this piece you will have a better understanding of the ways this subterfuge has been accomplished.

The next section describes a 2009 study from Great Britain on teen violence. You will see how the researchers follow Straus's descriptions by ignoring their own data. The original survey showed that boys were about 40% of the victims of violence but by the time the research was done and the recommendations made the ad campaign that followed was designed to help only girls and to teach the boys how to better treat the girls.

The following section features a study on "reproductive coercion." It will show how the omission of the details about the sample of those surveyed had huge repercussions downstream. In a nutshell the study was done on impoverished African American and Hispanic females. This fact was not reported in the research article, nor reported in the press release, and never showed up in any of the national media articles that followed. It is well known that interpersonal violence is about three times as likely in an impoverished population. By omitting that little bit of data, that the sample was largely impoverished women of color, the ramifications of their study changed drastically from one that applied only to a poor population of women of color to a study that applied to the population at large. This shift resulted in millions of people reading about the study in the national media and being led to believe a message that simply wasn't justified by the study itself.

The last section looks at the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI). This inventory claims to measure men's degree of conforming to what it calls "masculine norms." There are multiple problems with this inventory but the most obvious is its choice of very negative descriptions for what masculine norms are in this culture. The norms include such descriptors as "Violence" "Disdain for homosexuality" "power over women" and "playboy." Simply by choosing these words to describe men in this country is misandry. This is male bashing. There's more.

It's important to see the ways these studies try to influence the public and promote their own ideological biases. Each of these studies was done by researchers who appeared to have strong ideas about men and women and their research conveniently harmonized with their pre-conceived notions. With "science" holding so much power and ability to

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

sway opinions it is critical that we watch carefully how the social sciences use their studies to proliferate their own ideological viewpoints.

The spreading of misinformation has a very negative effect on the population at large but there is no place in more danger of this than in the halls of congress. Our legislators are easily influenced by studies such as those described herein and the likelihood of laws being written based on one sided viewpoints becomes alarmingly high. To make matters even worse our legislators are largely unaware of their own unconscious chivalry and combine that with hysterical research that claims damsels in distress need funding and what you see is billions of taxpayers dollars being spent in a very questionable manner. Combine these studies with the media, and then the blogs and you get a system that is fed by erroneous data that accepts it as fact and acts on it. One needs to only notice the fact that great majority of people in the US are convinced that women are the sole victims of domestic violence to understand the power of the media and particularly the media in combination with “studies” that are used more for propaganda than for gaining an understanding of the truth.

STRAUS

There are millions of compassionate and loving people in the United States who have been given erroneous information about domestic violence. Over the years the media and academia have offered a steady stream of information that indicates that women are the only victims of domestic violence and men the only perpetrators. We have all been deceived. What most don't know is that a part of that deception has been intentional and has come from the scientific community. As hard as it is to believe it is indisputable. Most of us had no idea of this deception until recently. More and more is now coming out about the symmetry of victimization in domestic violence between men and women.

One of the breakthroughs that have helped us identify this deception was the journal response of Murray Straus Ph.D. Straus has been an acclaimed researcher of family and interpersonal violence for many years. In his article he unveils the ways that this misinformation has been intentionally spread via "research." He shows the seven ways that the truth has been distorted. It is a fascinating yet sobering article that shows how, without actually lying, the researchers were able to distort things and make it appear that it was something that is was not. We all know that once a research study is published the media will latch on and print the results as gospel truth so the media became the megaphone to spread the misinformation once it was inked in the scientific journal. I would highly recommend your reading the full report by Straus which can be found here: <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2/V70-Gender-symmetry-PV-Chap-11-09.pdf>

Let's go through the seven ways one by one.

1. **Suppress evidence.**

The first type of deceit that Straus describes is suppressing evidence. The researchers would ask questions about both men and women but only report on the answers from women. The half-story would leave readers with the impression that it was only women who were victims even though the researcher had the surveys of male victims on hand they simply didn't report it. The data on male victims was simply buried while the data on female victims was reported. Straus discusses the Status on Women report from Kentucky in the late 1970's that was the first to use this strategy. They collected data on both male and female victims but only the female victims were discussed in the publications. Scientific method is dependent upon creating a hypothesis and testing it. If you get data from your test that is contrary to your original

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

hypothesis this is just as important as getting data that affirms the hypothesis and can be used to adjust your original hypothesis. To ignore one's own data that contradicts the hypothesis is the epitome of disregard to the foundations of scientific inquiry. It leaves the realms of research and enters the realms of propaganda and shaping the outcome to mislead.

2. Avoid Obtaining Data Inconsistent With the Patriarchal Dominance Theory.

The second method described by Straus was that of simply not asking the questions when you didn't want to hear the answers. The surveys would ask the women about their victimhood and ask men about their perpetration but failed to inquire about women's violence or men's victimhood. If you ask questions that address only half the problem you are certain to conclude with only half the answers. Straus highlights a talk he gave in Canada where he evaluated 12 studies on domestic violence. Ten out of the twelve only asked questions about female victims and male perpetrators. If you don't ask the questions you will never get the answers. Publishing half the truth is intentionally misleading.

3. Cite Only Studies That Show Male Perpetration

Straus reveals a number of situations where studies or official documents would cite only other studies that showed female victims and male perpetrators. He uses the Department of Justice press release as just one example where they only cite the "life-time prevalence" data because it showed primarily male perpetration. They omitted referencing the "past-year" data even though it was more accurate since it showed females perpetrated 40% of the partner assaults. Straus shows journal articles and names organizations such as the United Nations, World Health Organization, the US Department of Justice and others who used this tactic to make it appear that women were the primary victims of domestic violence and men the primary perpetrators.

4. Conclude That Results Support Feminist Beliefs When They Do Not

Straus showed an example of a study by Kernsmith (2005) where the author claimed that women's violence was more likely to be in self defense but data to support the claim didn't exist. Apparently he had made the claim even without any supporting evidence. Straus shows that the self defense category was primarily about anger and coercion and not about self-defense at all but this didn't stop the researcher from claiming the erroneous results which of course could be quoted by later studies as

proof that such data does indeed exist.

5. Create “Evidence” By Citation

The “woozle” effect is described by Straus as when “frequent citation of previous publications that lack evidence mislead us into thinking there is evidence.” He lists the Kernsmaith study and a report from the World Health Organization as examples. Both made claims (without evidence to back it up) that women’s violence was largely in self-defense. The claims were quoted repeatedly and people eventually started to believe that the claims were correct.

6. Obstruct Publication of Articles and Obstruct Funding Research that Might Contradict the Idea that Male Dominance is the Cause of Personal Violence

Straus mentions two incidents that illustrate this claim. One was a call for papers on the topic of partner violence in December of 2005 from the National Institute of Justice where it was stated that “proposals to investigate male victimization would not be eligible.” Another was an objection raised by a reviewer of one of his proposals due to its having said that “violence in relationships was a human problem.” He also stated that the “more frequent pattern is self-censorship by authors fearing that it will happen or that publication of such a study will undermine their reputation, and, in the case of graduate students, the ability to obtain a job.”

7. Harrass, Threaten, and Penalize Researchers who Produce Evidence That Contradicts Feminist Beliefs

Straus provides details of a number of incidents where researchers who found evidence of gender symmetry in domestic violence were harassed or threatened. He described a number of instances such as bomb scares at personal events, being denied tenure and promotions, or “shouts and stomping” meant to drown out an oral presentation. He relates being called a “wife-beater” as a means to denigrate both himself and his previous research findings.

Straus concludes that a “climate of fear has inhibited research and publication on gender symmetry in personal violence.” His words help us to understand the reasons that our public is so convinced that women are the sole victims of domestic violence and men the only perpetrators. It has been years and years of researchers telling only half the story and when we get only half the story and consider it the whole truth we are likely to defend our limited version of the truth and ostracize those who may offer

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

differing explanations. The matter is further complicated due to the media having acted as a megaphone for the half story that has emerged so the “common knowledge” that has emerged from the media for many years has been half the story and due to its not telling both sides of the story, it is basically misinformation.

What this tells us is that we need to stay on our toes when it comes to social science research. Straus’s paper has helped us immensely in seeing how research can be set up to appear to tell the truth but fail miserably in doing so. While the researchers are not technically lying, the end product is similar since it produces only a partial image of the reality of domestic violence and leaves people without the details to fill in the reality of the situation. It is likely a good idea to have a look at the way each study gets its data, the exact nature of the people being used as subjects, and the conclusion drawn and if they are congruous with the data that was gathered. Next we will look at a study that uses Straus’s first example, ignoring ones own data,]

Tom Golden April 21, 2010
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Teen Violence -- When Ideology Trumps Data

The first project we will examine is a study on teen relationship violence from Great Britain. The study consisted of both a written survey and subjective interviews of selected teens. The survey portion of the study was fairly conclusive in finding that teen relationship violence was experienced by both boys and girls. An "ad campaign" was created as a result of this work. Surprisingly, the ad campaign is designed to help only girls who were victims of teen relationship violence while focusing on boys only as perpetrators. This stunning neglect of male victims and female perpetrators is in stark contrast to the numbers of the research survey of this study which showed males to be victims of teen relationship violence and girls to be perpetrators. Let's start at the beginning of the story when this issue first caught my attention.

A friend emailed me a link a couple of months ago to an article from Great Britain about teen violence. The friend was worried that the article was biased against boys. Here's how it started:

Teenage boys were urged not to violently abuse their girlfriends in a new Government campaign launched today.

TV, radio, internet and poster ads will target young males aged 13 to 18 in an attempt to show the consequences of abusive relationships.

It is part of a wider effort by ministers to cut domestic violence against both women and younger girls.

Research published last year by the NSPCC found a quarter of teenage girls said they had been physically abused by their boyfriends.

One in six said they had been pressured into sex and one in three said they had gone further sexually than they had wanted to.

I was a bit taken back by the article considering the recent research on teen violence which has been finding that relationship violence in teens is fairly symmetrical with both boys and girls being perpetrators and victims. This article was offering a very different perspective from the studies I had been seeing. It was clearly assuming that the girls were the primary victims and the boys the primary perpetrators which reflects an archaic and outdated stereotype about domestic violence. It made me wonder exactly what was happening. I read several more articles online about the ad campaign mentioned in the

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

first article and was shocked to see that the focus of the campaign was indeed solely to help girls and to “teach” boys about not abusing their girlfriends.

In each of the articles there was a reference to the research findings that drove the ad campaign. I decided to go back to the source and see what the original research had found.

The original study was sponsored by the **National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children** (NSPCC) of Great Britain and was in two parts. The first part was the “full report” and was a detailed 209 page research report explaining methodology, results, implications and conclusions. The next was the Executive Summary which was a 10 page summation of the findings of the full report. It was a quick read meant to give people the essence of the larger document. I read through the “full report” and then the executive summary. It was striking to me that the data in the full report actually showed that boys were victims of teen violence. The original news article I had read had mentioned that the research had found that 25% of girls said they had been physically abused by their boyfriends. What the news article omitted saying was that the same research had also found that 18% of boys had said that they had been physically abused by their girlfriends. This meant that this research found that almost half of the victims of teen relationship violence were boys! Somehow this important fact had been omitted from the news report.

There were plenty of other headlines that could have been drawn from the data of the full report that showed the boys to have been victims and the girls perpetrators but they were nowhere to be seen in any of the news articles. Here are a couple of examples of headlines that could be written from the data of the full report:

*** 25% of those reporting physically forcing their partners into having sexual intercourse were girls** - Table 15 page 82 full report

*** Nearly three times as many girls reported using SEVERE violence in relationships.** table 11 - page 75 full report

*** Over three times as many girls reported using partner violence in their relationships** table 10 page 74 full report

*** Over 1/3 of those reporting being pressured into kissing, touching or something else were boys.** table 6 page 66 full report--

*** Nearly half (42%) of the victims of teen relationship violence were boys**
Table 3 page 44 full report

*** Nearly one third of the victims of severe violence were boys**
Table 4 page 45 full report

*** Twice as many girls reported physically forcing their partners into "kissing, touching, or something else" more than a few times.** Table 13 page 82 full report

This is just a sampling of the sorts of findings in the full report. It is obvious that their survey clearly indicated that teen relationship violence was not gender based and both the victims and the perpetrators were both boys and girls. However, what I found after reading both the full report and the executive summary was that the full report had data that showed boys to be victims and girls to be perpetrators but the executive summary seemed to have considerably less information about male victims and female perpetrators. In fact the executive summary seemed to focus more on female victims and male perpetrators.

I found myself wondering how this transition could take place. Boys were shown to be victims in the original study, often not in as great a number as the girls but victims all the same. Generally the boys comprised about 25-42% of the victims. Certainly not the majority but also not a small number that could be ignored. But ignore them they did!

The NSPCC introduced this research to the media via a press release. We can see the same tendency of moving away from focusing on boys when looking at the words in the press release. What started in the full report as an apparently egalitarian look into teen relationship violence progressively looked less so in the Executive Summary and now with the press release it looks to have moved one more step towards focusing solely on girls. Here's the opening of the press release. Note the focus on "girls only" in both the headline and the first paragraphs:

Teen girls abused by boyfriends warns NSPCC

Press releases

01 September 2009

A third of teenage girls in a relationship suffer unwanted sexual acts and a quarter physical violence, reveals new research(1) launched today (01 September 2009) by the NSPCC(2) and the University of Bristol(3).

The survey of 13 to 17-year-olds found that nearly nine out of ten girls had been in an intimate relationship. Of these, one in six said they had been pressured into sexual intercourse and 1 in 16 said they had been raped. Others had been pressured or forced to kiss or sexually touch.

A quarter of girls had suffered physical violence such as being slapped, punched, or beaten by their boyfriends.

Girls are highlighted repeatedly in the press release. If one only read the press release you might assume that the boys were incidental and that the girls were clearly the identified victims of teen relationship violence. The boys actually did get mentioned in one paragraph (one out of 18 paragraphs, eleven of which were about girls). Here it is:

Nearly nine out of ten boys also said they had been in a relationship. A smaller number reported pressure or violence from girls. (Only one in seventeen boys in a relationship reported being pressured or forced into sexual activity and almost one in five suffered physical violence in a relationship).

Note how the boys victimization is minimized with words like “a smaller number” and “only one in seventeen.” Keep in mind that the “smaller number” referred to in the second sentence was 18% versus 25% which had been the figure for girls. While 18 is smaller than 25, it is not *that* much smaller. Another important difference is that the girls 25% stat was mentioned in the opening sentence of the document (and indirectly in the headline) while the boys 18% stat was mentioned as an afterthought in parentheses. Yes, the boys percentage was smaller but it seems very obvious that this press release is trying to marginalize the victimization of boys.

Note that the press release mentions that one in 17 girls had been raped. This works out to about 5.8% of the females surveyed. What they don't mention is that the same table in the full report that showed that 5.8% of girls were raped also showed that 3.3% of the boys were also raped. This stat never made it beyond the full report. The press release

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

mentions the rape of girls but is completely silent on the shocking statistic that 3.3% of the boys were raped. The fact is that their data from the full report shows boys comprised over one third of the rape victims. Not a word about this.

It now seems easy to understand how the media articles focused so exclusively on girls and ignored the needs of boys. They likely only read the press release and maybe a part of the executive summary. The press release might very well have been the only document they read about the study and it clearly focused almost exclusively on girls while ignoring the needs of boys. How bad did it get in focusing on just girls? Here is a sampling of typical headlines from actual news articles on this research and ad campaign:

*** Many Girls' Abused by Boyfriends**

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8230844.stm>

*** Third of teenage girls forced into sex, NSPCC survey finds**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/sep/01/teenage-sexual-abuse-nsppcc-report>

*** 1 in 3 Teenage Girls Tell of Sexual Abuse by Their Boyfriends**

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1210375/One-teenage-girls-physically-abused-boyfriend.html>

*** Teen Girls Abused by Boyfriends Warns NSPCC**

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/news/2009/6524.html>

Almost every headline I found focused on girls as victims. I never found one headline that focused on boys. The articles would occasionally mention that boys were vulnerable but the main thrust was surely the girls vulnerability and victimhood.

The ad campaign is the real world response to the findings of this research using TV, radio, internet and poster ads in attempts to change behaviours of teen relationship violence. It is where the theoretical ends and the actual support and tax dollars begin. Inexplicably, the focus of the ad campaign is entirely on girls as victims of relationship violence while boys are seen as the problem and are taught to not abuse their girlfriends. Somehow the original research had shown that both boys and girls were victims of relationship violence and by the time we made our way to the media articles and then to the ad campaign we find that the original data is all but forgotten.

How did this happen?

Boys disappearing act



The Full Report and then boys disappear

The full report offers an abundance of data that shows that boys are victims of teen partner violence but somehow the recommendations of both the full report and the executive summary seem to focus primarily on girls. Here's a quick summary extrapolated from the full report:

According to their survey:

72% girls reported experiencing emotional violence

51% of boys reported emotional violence

BOYS WERE 41% of the victims of emotional violence in teen relationships

25% of girls experienced physical partner violence

18% of the boys experienced physical partner violence

BOYS WERE 42% of the victims of physical partner violence in teen relationships

31% of girls experienced sexual partner violence

16% of boys experienced sexual partner violence

BOYS WERE 34% of the victims of sexual partner violence in teen relationships.

So the boys ranged between 34-42% of the victims as recorded in the survey, The full report states this loud and clear in the data but then with the recommendations of both the full report and the executive summary and then the press release the boys seems to simply disappear. Why could that be? The researchers fail to explain fully the reasons

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

for this but if you read between the lines you can find that they offer two reasons. The first is that the survey responses indicate that girls are more “impacted” by relationship violence than the boys. There is a question on the survey that asks about emotional reactions to the violence and the girls were much more likely to check the boxes that indicated they were scared/upset/humiliated. The boys were more likely to check boxes that said they were angry/annoyed or the box that said there was no effect on them. The researchers seem to have taken this difference and decided that since the girls were more “impacted” from the experience of violence that they should be the ones to get the attention and services. There are a number of places in the full report where this is implied. Here is one:

This research has demonstrated that a fundamental divide exists in relation to how girls and boys are affected by partner violence, and this divide needs to be a central component in the development of professional responses to this issue.

Just what does “professional responses to this issue” mean? They don’t say but we can only assume that they are suggesting that girls receive more attention and services due to their being more impacted by the violence. Considering the recommendations focus on girls and ignore the needs of boys I think the above assumption is a good one. I would be happy to be corrected on this assumption if I am incorrect.

The researchers seem willing to basically ignore their own substantial evidence that boys are victims of violence simply because the girls have a greater emotional reaction. Here’s another quote:

These findings are further elaborated on in the interview data where girls consistently described the harmful impact that the violence had on their welfare, often long term, while boy victims routinely stated they were unaffected or, at the very worst, annoyed. These results provide the wider context in which teenage partner violence needs to be viewed.

Let’s keep in mind that the above quoted interview data, which we will examine later, included only 62 hand-selected girls and 29 similarly selected boys. Importantly, only one of the 29 boys was a victim of non-reciprocal violence so making generalizations based on the interview data is likely unreliable especially considering the survey data was collected from over 1300 teens. Note also that by saying “the wider context in which teenage partner violence needs to be viewed” we can only assume the researchers are again suggesting that girls be given preference in services and aid. What we do know is that the data on violence against boys is ignored in the recommendation sections and also in the ad campaign. The following quote gives us a bit more clarity regarding the views of the researchers:

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

Intervention programmes need to reflect this fundamental difference by ensuring that the significant impact of violence on girls' wellbeing is recognised and responded to, while enabling boys to recognise the implications of partner violence for their partners and themselves.

This statement clearly shows that the researchers believe that the girls should be treated differently and intervention programs need to “reflect” the difference that girls are more impacted by the violence.

But are girls more impacted? I am not so sure. Let's start by looking at the actual question on the survey:

3 *How did it make you feel when force was used against you?*

scared/frightened

angry/annoyed

humiliated

upset/unhappy

loved/protected

thought it was funny

no effect

“If you don't see it, it must not exist.”

The researchers stated that the answers to this question showed a big difference in boys and girls responses about the impact that the violence had on them. They don't give the raw data about the responses and don't offer the numbers each sex chose for each answer but they give us the summary saying that girls were much more “impacted.” There are very good reasons for that. This question is a set up since boys and girls will naturally answer it very differently. The creators of this question seem to fail to understand the hierarchical nature of boys and their strong natural reluctance to show any lack of independence. If the boys had checked “scared/frightened”, “humiliated” or “upset/unhappy” they would be admitting that they were less than independent. This is usually avoided while a choice such as “no effect” or “angry/annoyed” would be much more likely in order to maintain their image. As Warren Farrell would say “The weakness of men is the facade of strength: the strength of women is the facade of weakness.”

The men and boys are much more likely to choose a response that will portray them as strong. If this is correct it is easy to understand how boys' responses might not accurately convey their

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

degree of hurt or upset. It is very possible that the boys who checked the “no effect” box were just as impacted by the violence as their female counterparts. With these sorts of questions it leaves us simply not knowing. To suggest the direction of future services based on the responses to this question would be very risky and likely give very poor results.

I wonder if the researchers would think that a rape victim who claimed there was no impact on her would not need support services? Would clinicians simply ignore her? No, I would bet they wouldn't. If a group of domestic violence victims claimed that the violence had no impact on them would they quickly assume that group did not need support services? No. Then why would they dismiss the trauma of boys simply because they have marked a survey question differently and reported to be less upset? They would realize that people have very unique responses to trauma and that not having an immediate or verbal emotional reaction to a trauma does not in any way indicate that that person should be ignored. That is simply ridiculous.

Having worked with trauma victims for many years I know very well that some people will sometimes not even begin to feel the negative impact of a trauma for months and others for years. Restricting services for victims of trauma due to their response seeming to show less emotional impact is one of the zaniest ideas I have heard for some time. Denying services to a birth group for this reason seems to simply be bigoted.

Are the researchers biased against boys?

There are numerous indications, in addition to what has already been described, that the researchers have an anti-boy bias. There are the obvious dismissals of the survey data that shows boys to be victims of partner violence and the complete focus on girls as victims. But there are a number of more subtle clues in the study that seem to indicate a disdain for boys.

When they did mention boys as victims the report tended to minimize their experience. Here is a quote:

Boys' experiences of violence

Little evidence existed to support the possibility that boys, although they were negatively affected by their partner's violence, felt unable either to voice or to recognise their vulnerability. Boys minimised their own use of violence as “messaging around”. Boys also reported the violence as mutual, although they often used disproportionate force compared to their female partners.

Rather than comment on the experience of the boys to violence the researchers focus on whether they could “give voice” to the negative affects of their partners violence. This seems to be a weak attempt to show that boys could indeed voice their concerns about

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

being victims of violence and since they were able to voice that response they must not be “held back” by traditional masculinity from being able to express their vulnerability. The unspoken assumption seems to be that since they can voice the pain they are not holding back due to traditional masculinity and simply aren’t impacted by the violence. It just doesn’t matter while for the girls it *really does matter*. These seem to be distractions from the reality that the boys have been victimized. Reading the above paragraph will give the reader a sense of how the boys were treated differently in this study. Their pain was minimized and rationalized by claiming they were really not so impacted. The thrust is to say that boys do experience violence from their female partners but they aren’t so negatively impacted! They are able to voice or recognize their vulnerability. It is well known that men and boys will try to minimize any sort of hurt or injury and try to maintain an independent stance. This by no means indicates they are not impacted, it just means that will try to not let you know it. It is for this very reason that we need to take a different approach with boys who may be victimized but this study seems to prefer to simply ignore the pain of boys and focus just on the girls.

Messing Around

The quote above states that “Boys minimised their own use of violence as “messaging around.” The full report affirms that boys label their own violence as "messaging around" 56% of the time. This is given later in the recommendations section as a reason that boys should be taught about being aware of their violence. (see below) But what about the girls? When you see that boys are singled out for this perception of “messaging around” you would think that the girls would not explain their own violence in that manner. Not in the Alice in Wonderland environment of this study. Actually by the researchers own numbers the girls labelled their own violence as “messaging around” 43% of the time. Just 13% points below the boys. You would think that both boys and girls would need to learn about their own violence but somehow the only ones that need to learn are the boys! That is an anti-boy bias.

Here is the quote:

"However, although intervention programmes should ensure that the needs of both girls and boys are recognised, it is important that the wider experiences of girls remain a focus. In addition, boys’ minimisation of their own use of violence – by dismissing it as “messaging around” and justifications based on mutual aggression – needs to be challenged."

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

Why would the boys need to be challenged about this and the girls not? The boys said their violence was “messaging around” 56% of the time and the girls said their violence was a slightly lower “messaging around” 43% of the time. Clearly a strong bias in favor of girls and anti-boys.

The researchers went a step farther than just recommending that girls victimisation should be the focus. The researchers made the claim that boys lower scores on the impact question actually made them more dangerous to their female partners. Here is a quote:

If boys view the impact of their victimisation as negligible, they may also apply this understanding to their own actions. Thus, they may believe that their partners are also unaffected by their use of violence.

The implication here is that the boys ignorance/insensitivity of the impact of violence against them shows that they would be less than sensitive to their own violence used against a partner. I don't believe that for a second considering almost every boy has had it drilled into their brains that they are never to hit a girl. Let's use the same sort of reasoning but apply it instead to girls. According to the survey the girls suffer a much greater emotional impact from being victims of violence. Yet by the girls report, they use violence three times MORE in relationships than boys even though they know it's negative impact and is hurtful. This would lead us to believe that girls are aware of the power to hurt others with violence and choose to do so far more often than boys. This doesn't put the girls in a particularly good light now does it?

Thus, from these findings it seems conclusive that partner sexual violence represents a problem for girls, while boys report being unaffected.

That pretty much sums it up, doesn't it?

Boys are more violent! When the subjective trumps the objective

The survey was supposed to be the main source of data but in some ways the researchers seem to put much more stock in the subjective information they had obtained via the interviews. While the survey in the full report showed clearly that the girls were three times more likely to report using violence in relationship suddenly the researchers are exclaiming that there was a clear consensus from the girls that boys used physical violence in relationship more often than girls. Here's the quote:

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

“There was a clear consensus within girls’ accounts that boys used physical violence in relationships more often than girls. This common understanding regarding the gendered nature of physical violence was reported by almost all girls, whether they themselves had experienced violence or not.”

This is from page 94 of the full report and shows the researchers evaluations of the girls interviews. The most glaring part of this is that the survey portion of the study showed clearly that girls were 3-6 times *more likely* to report being violent in relationships and yet the subjective data drawn from the interviews claims that there was a “common understanding regarding the gendered nature of physical violence” for “almost all girls” that “*boys used physical violence in relationships more often than girls.*” This is a huge discrepancy when one half of the study shows girls to report being much more inclined to be violent than the boys and the other half claiming that “boys used physical violence in relationship more often than girls.” This demands an explanation but there was little to be found. The closest the researchers come is to use the hackneyed claim that girls high rates of violence in relationships is due to their using violence as self defense. But if you look at the numbers this claim falls flat on its face. The facts are that 25% of the girls reported being violent in relationship compared to 8% of the boys. When you subtract the percentages of violence claimed to be in self defense from both boys (30%) and girls (44%) you find that 14% of girls were violent in relationship and 5.6% of the boys for reasons other than self defense. That’s nearly three times more girls than boys. (-30% of 8%= 5.6% and -44% of 25%= 14%) Not making this an important point in this research is very suspect. This difference is huge. Girls reported almost three times as often that they perpetrated violence in their relationships and yet there is a claim that almost all girls believed boys used “physical violence in relationship more often” and this leads us to the idea that girls are in need of services and boys in need of changing their behaviors? Baffling. Clearly misandry.

One partial explanation of this is shown in the following quote:

Only 6 per cent of boys, compared to a third of girls, claimed that they were negatively affected by the emotional violence they experienced. This gendered impact disparity upholds Stark’s (2007) contention that coercive control, which many of our components of emotional violence reflect, is made meaningful only when placed within a gendered power understanding of intimate violence. Thus, although girls had used emotional violence, without it being underpinned by other forms of inequality and power, their attempts were rendered largely ineffectual.

Incredibly, this section seems to be giving girls a pass for their emotional violence. The pattern continues: When girls are perpetrators they are given excuses, when boys are victims they are ignored and minimized.

Reporting oddities

When you look closely at the section about girls reporting more frequent perpetration of violence in relationship you notice something very odd. Look at the following paragraph and note the researchers choice of words. Note that girls "report" and boys "admit" (emphasis mine):

Page 74 More girls **reported** using physical violence against their partner than did boys; this represented a significant difference ($\chi^2(1) = 60.804, p < .001$). A quarter ($n=148$) of girls compared to 8 per cent ($n=44$) of boys stated that they had used some form of physical violence against their partner. Looking first at less severe physical violence (see table 10), the vast majority of girls (89 per cent) **reporting** the use of physical violence had used it once or a few times. Only a few (11 per cent) used it more frequently. Similarly, the small proportion of boys who **admitted** using physical violence also generally used it infrequently (83 per cent).

Perhaps the words "report" and "admit" have different meanings in Great Britain but here in the US they aren't usually the same. Report generally means to make a statement or announcement. The word admit however has a different spin. Often it has more to do with conceding or confessing. One assumption from the wording the researchers have chosen would be to think that they simply didn't believe what the boys reported. In other words they would only concede or admit to a certain amount of violence. Basically, implying that they are not telling the entire story. This is of course conjecture on my part but it simply seems like more anti-boy bias.

The Interview Section

As was previously explained the research had both a quantitative section and qualitative section. The qualitative section consisted of semi-structured interviews which included the utilization of five vignettes. The vignettes were stories that were told to the participant and then the stories relevance was discussed as a part of the interview. The stated goals of the researchers was to use the quantitative survey to gain data and use the interviews to enhance their understanding.

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

The researchers claimed that they had problems in getting participants for the interviews in the manner they had originally planned so they switched mid-stream to a different approach described below:

"We therefore moved to a system whereby researchers observed which young people seemed to be engaging with the survey. They then asked those young people if they would like to take part in the interview stage."

So they hand picked the interview participants based on their own subjective impression of whether the young person was "engaging with the survey." This sounds to me to be a direct invitation to a very biased sample. Then you find out that the choices they made of those who were "engaging in the survey" were 62 girls but only 29 boys. You also find that of the 29 boys only one had experienced being a victim of non reciprocal violence in relationship! Makes you wonder about their ideas of "engaging in the survey." Needless to say the boys section describing the interviews was only 22 pages long while the section about the girls was over 60 pages. Even with such a short section for the boys most of the writing was about boys violence not their reaction to being victims of violence. Girls victimization was highlighted as was boys violence. Even in the section on boys as victims.

The Vignettes

When I first started looking at the issue of this survey I emailed the folks at NSPCC and asked for a copy of the original questionnaire and copies of the vignettes. They were kind enough to email me both. I had suspected that the vignettes would be slanted towards the girls and so I was not surprised to see that the stories were mostly about boys possessiveness, shouting, name calling, violence, and sexual pressuring. Only one story of the five portrayed the female as the perpetrator and in that story the perpetrated act was very mild. The girl (and her cronies) stole the boys cell phone, made unkind comments the next day and then apologized. In the other vignettes we see boys being violent or pushing girls into sexual behaviors that they don't want. In one we see the girls using violence, but in self defense. To the researchers credit the first three vignettes have questions following the story which ask if this sort of behavior might also exist in the opposite sex. Inexplicably they omit that important question on the final two vignettes which focus on sexual demands. This is highly suspect and leads one to guess that their ideological bias may have disallowed them to see boys as sexual victims and/or the girls as perpetrators. Interestingly their data from the full report shows that girls freely admit

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

to sexually pressuring their male boyfriends so this again leaves us wondering why they would avoid the question in the interview section.

Would the researchers tolerate a set of vignettes that showed 80% of the perpetrators to be female and the only male perpetrator was portrayed as having stolen a cell phone and then apologized? I would bet we would hear loud rants about inclusiveness and marginalization and they would be correct! It seems to me that these vignettes seriously marginalized the boys in this survey and likely left them feeling misunderstood and left out since their situations were simply not portrayed, acknowledged or included.

I was thinking that an alternative to these five stories could have easily been to keep the five stories as is but for the girls tell the story with female victims and male perpetrators and for the boys use the same stories but do the opposite and tell it from the boys perspective. It would take a little bit of editing but I think it would have been much more effective and would have left both boys and girls with a sense that their side of the story was heard and understood to exist. Victims are much more likely to come forward when they see that their plight is acknowledged. Maybe a possibility would have been to use neutral names for all parties in the stories and therefore not even know the sex of the offender or victim! Another option might have been to have six stories with three being male perpetrators and three being female perpetrators. One story each for the three categories of violence. I think any of the above would have been an improvement over what they used.

The fact that girls were portrayed in four of five vignettes more as victims and boys more as perpetrators and that any suggestion about girls perpetration of sexual pressuring was absent seems to be more evidence that the project has been impacted by an ideology that prefers to see women/girls as victims and men/boys as perpetrators. If we allow this sort of bias to continue in our midst we are failing both our boys and our girls. If we allow it to continue in social science research literature then we are surely in trouble.

Recommendation Section

Here's a brief look at the recommendations section of the executive summary. There is only one paragraph in the recommendation section that mentions boys. Here it is:

Impact of teenage partner violence – the gender divide

The impact of partner violence is indisputably differentiated by gender; girl victims report much higher levels of negative impact than do boys. This is not to imply that boys' experiences of victimisation should be ignored. It may be that boys minimise the impact of the violence due

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

to the need to portray a certain form of masculinity. *However, although intervention programmes should ensure that the needs of both girls and boys are recognised, it is important that the wider experiences of girls remain a focus.* In addition, boys' minimisation of their own use of violence – by dismissing it as “messaging around” and justifications based on mutual aggression – needs to be challenged.

This paragraph is baffling. Let's break it down. Here is the first section:

The impact of partner violence is indisputably differentiated by gender; girl victims report much higher levels of negative impact than do boys. This is not to imply that boys' experiences of victimisation should be ignored.

It first makes a claim that partner violence is differentiated by gender and that girls are experience more negative impact, implying that boys should be ignored. Then they deny that they mean to ignore boys.

It may be that boys minimise the impact of the violence due to the need to portray a certain form of masculinity.

They offer a possibility for an explanation.

However, although intervention programmes should ensure that the needs of both girls and boys are recognised, it is important that the wider experiences of girls remain a focus

Then they ignore their own explanation and aver that the “wider experiences of girls” (whatever that means) should take precedence.

In addition, boys' minimisation of their own use of violence – by dismissing it as “messaging around” and justifications based on mutual aggression – needs to be challenged.

Then they finalize things by saying that the emphasis on boys should be their violence and especially their minimization of their own violence as has been previously discussed.

I find this paragraph to be very vague and unclear. I am guessing this is intentional since what they really want to say is likely *girls are worthy victims and boys are not* is hard for them to put into words since it would clearly leave them looking bigoted. Being vague and obfuscating is a much safer strategy and it still gets the job done! One thing is clear after reading it: The reader is sure that for whatever reasons, girls need to get the lions share of services and help and boys need to shape up!

Is the ideology of the researchers driving their focus on girls?

If you look at this from purely a marketing standpoint these researchers have accomplished a remarkable feat. They have been able to create a document that has been labelled a “study” which has found objective data and then made conclusions and recommendations that ignore their own data. They took it a step farther and got the conclusions and recommendations printed in a vast number of media articles which established to millions of viewers, listeners and readers that their “half-stories” were actually facts. Truly amazing when you think about it.

One can only assume that the researchers are aging feminists who are addicted to the outdated and disproven idea that domestic violence is simply dominated by males who batter and women who are victims. We have seen from the Straus article how grossly inaccurate that ideology has been and the extent to which its adherents would go to propagate such mis-information.

I have always thought that science was designed to gather data and then use that data to adjust your theory and ideology based on the new discoveries and information. It seems to me in this case that rather than science being used to shift ones ideology it is the ideology that is governing science and determining which data should come forward and which not. This is very dangerous ground for humanitarians and those who want the best for all victims.

In the case of this study it seems likely that the researchers had a pre-conceived idea that girls were victims and boys the perpetrators. When their own data didn't affirm such stereotypical assumptions they strained to find a way to convert their data into a message that was harmonious with their pre-conceived ideas about violence (girls are worthy victims and boys are perpetrators). This was done by making the repeated claims that girls are more impacted by the violence and because of this the girls needed to be the focus of attention and services. This claim is hollow and anemic. Most any thinking person can look at that idea and see that because one group gets more upset by a problem that in itself should not negate some victims from getting services and attention.

There were so many parts of this study that seemed misandrist to me that I literally could have written another twenty or thirty pages. I will spare the reader such a burden and leave it to others to have a detailed look and make their own comments. Leave it to say that this study is a shining example of the evils of letting an ideology steer research and

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

the resulting public services and the manner in which the general public is brainwashed by hearing only half the story.

I think that this study also shows the dangers involved in allowing ideological zealots a platform to intentionally mold public opinion to their own version of what is real. We need to use caution when accepting studies as being “scientific” and have a much finer net to discover which studies may be biased due to the ideological underpinnings of its authors. Frankly, any high school science student should be able to read this study and explain clearly how it is lacking. Our media and our governments are sorely failing to do just that.

Reproductive Coercion

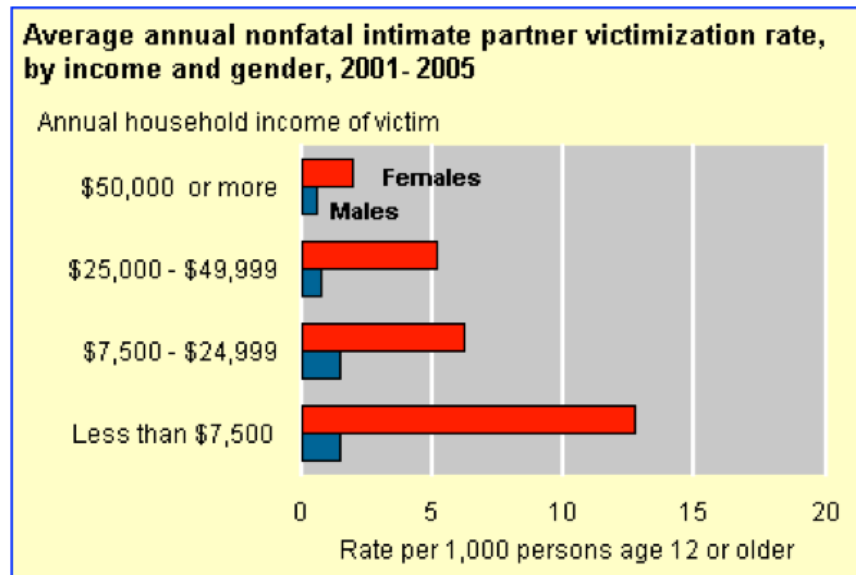
I was browsing on the web and happened to read an article about a study on “Reproductive Coercion.” As I read it I was amazed at the sorts of statistics that the study was quoting. One article said that 53% of women surveyed had experienced violence in her relationships. “Wow” I thought, that’s over half of the respondents. That’s quite a few. I read on and other stats were quoted that were equally shocking. I began to wonder about how they got such alarming statistics.

My interest was stimulated and I started searching for articles on this research. There were plenty. One from Newsweek, one from Science News Daily, one from Medical News Today, one from EScience News, one from the LA Times and others. They all made similar claims about this study and often used the same quotes and the same statistics. I kept looking for more articles thinking that with statistics as strong as these that there must be something unusual here. I wondered if their sample was biased in some way or perhaps the way they had defined their terms had inflated the numbers. About the tenth article I found was one from the college newspaper of the lead researcher in the study. The publication was called “The Aggie” and was the student paper for the University of California, Davis. That article included something that the others had omitted. The Aggie article said that the survey was done on an “impoverished” population of African American and Hispanic females. It went on to say that the study should not be generalized:

“The five clinics surveyed were in impoverished neighborhoods with Latinas and African Americans comprising two-thirds of the respondents.

The results are expected to be applicable to reproductive health clinics in demographically poor areas. Researchers cannot estimate if surveys at private gynecologists would produce similar results.”

Suddenly the results started to make more sense. We know that lower socio-economic levels tend to show much higher levels of interpersonal violence (IPV). One DOJ report shows that women with lower income levels are almost three times more likely to experience relationship violence than those with higher incomes. We know that women in rental housing are also three times more likely to experience IPV than those in homes that they own. By studying a sample that was impoverished it dramatically increased the likelihood of finding higher rates of IPV.



Then I started to wonder. How was it that all of the national media articles which had obviously been seen by millions of people had missed the sample being of impoverished African American and Hispanic females? I started to think that the media was simply not doing their homework and that their readers were getting fed misinformation as a result.

I decided at that point to obtain a copy of the study. I went to the online site for the Journal Contraception which had published the original article and purchased a copy. I read it. By the end I was shocked. There was no mention in the journal article of the socio-economic status of the sample that had been surveyed. No mention of whether they were rich or poor. I had to catch myself because I had earlier assumed that it was the media not doing their homework and simply not reading the journal article. But now it was a completely different situation. The information had been omitted from the journal article. How could that be? This was an article that had 7 researchers named as co-authors. It had to have been read and edited over and over again. How could it be that something so basic would have been left out?

I decided to write to the lead researcher Dr Elizabeth Miller. I sent her an email and asked about the sample. I told her that I had read the article in the Aggie that had mentioned that the sample was "impoverished" African American and Hispanic females and I was interested to know if this was correct or if the Aggie had made a mistake. She wrote me back a very pleasant email in several days apologizing for taking so long to

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

get back to me and saying that yes, the Aggie was correct that the sample was largely disadvantaged African American and Hispanic females. I wrote her back very quickly and asked why that information had not been mentioned in the journal article. I also asked if she was concerned about the national media articles that never mentioned the fact that the sample was impoverished and seemed to be erroneously implying that the study could generalize to the population at large. She wrote me back once but has never offered any answers to those questions.

At that point I contacted Gabrielle Grow, the author of the Aggie article and congratulated her on a job well done. I asked her how she had found out about the sample being "impoverished." She told me that it was just one of the questions that she had asked the researchers in the interview. I wrote her back and congratulated her again and explained to her that all of the national articles including Newsweek, LA Times, Science News Daily, EScience News, Medical News Today and others had all missed that important bit of information. Ms Grow was the only reporter that asked the important question.

But why did the national news media not ask the same question? This is an important question and we really don't know the answer at this point. What we do know is the study issued a press release about the research findings and never mentioned the sample being largely a poor population. They also made no mention of the fact which is referenced in their study that this sort of population has higher reports of IPV thus creating inflated responses when compared to the general population. It made no mention that the study should be applicable only to other poor neighborhoods. Reading the press release one might easily assume that the study applied to everyone. Here are just a few of the points the press release made:

- * 1. Men use coercion and birth control sabotage to cause their partners to become pregnant against their wills.
- * 2. Young women and teenage girls often face efforts by male partners to sabotage their birth control or coerce or pressure them to become pregnant - including by damaging condoms and destroying contraceptives.
- * 3. Fifty-three percent of respondents said they had experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner.
- * 4. Male partners actively attempt to promote pregnancy against the will of their female partners.

With no mention in the press release that the study's sample was largely indigent African American and Hispanic females one could get the impression from reading it that the study might apply to the general population. Even though the researchers when asked by Ms Grow, admitted that the study should only be applied to the poor. One can only assume that the researchers failed not only to mention this important information in the press release but also didn't offer this to the media in any of the interviews. Actually there was very little information offered that might have discouraged the media from playing this as a study about men and women in general.

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

This is obvious when you look at the headlines and quotes from various news articles. Here is a sampling:

*NEWSWEEK

"What we're seeing is that, in the larger scheme of violence against women and girls, it is another way to maintain control," says Miller."

"The man is taking away a woman's power to decide she's not going to have a child."

*LA Times

"Reproductive coercion is a factor in unintended pregnancies"

"Young women even report that their boyfriends sabotage birth control to get them pregnant."

*ScienceDaily

"Over half the respondents -- 53 percent -- said they had experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner."

"The study also highlights the importance of working with young men to prevent both violence against female partners and coercion around pregnancy."

*Physorg

"Approximately one in five young women said they experienced pregnancy coercion"

*ESCIENCE NEWS

"Young women and teenage girls often face efforts by male partners to sabotage birth control or coerce pregnancy — including damaging condoms and destroying contraceptives"

*INSCIENCES

"This study highlights an under-recognized phenomenon where male partners actively attempt to promote pregnancy against the will of their female partners," said lead study author [Elizabeth Miller](#), a

*Medical News Today

Headline - Physical or Sexual Violence Often Accompanies Reproductive Coercion

* End Abuse . org

"It finds that young women and teenage girls often face efforts by male partners to sabotage their birth control or coerce or pressure them to become pregnant — including by damaging condoms and destroying contraceptives."

What do these quotes and headlines have in common? They all sound as if the study in question applies to the general population of men and women, boys and girls. The circulation of Newsweek is 2.7 million so just from that source alone a great many people have been given the impression that men in general will tend to coerce women in general to get pregnant.

The first level is the research paper itself. The Contraception Journal was obviously read by many, especially other researchers. Then the next level is the national media that wrote stories about the study. We saw above some of the sorts of misrepresentations that were common from the national media articles. But things go even further. Once the journal article is published and then the media articles follow there is a third wave that hits: the blogs. When end users hear this sort of thing they take it a step farther. Here are just a few examples of what happens:

Here's a headline from a blog:

Crazy, Condom-Puncturing Control Freaks Are Often Men

So we have gone from omitting the nature of the sample to the printing of articles in the national media that implicate men in general and once this happens the end users at the blogs take that information and exaggerate it much farther. Here's another example:

There is a new study which discusses a horribly prevalent but rarely discussed form of intimate partner violence: reproductive coercion.

So we have gone from low income Black and Hispanic females claiming to be coerced to making global pronouncements about reproductive coercion being "horribly prevalent." Right. Those crazy condom puncturing control freaks are part of a horribly prevalent pattern.

It doesn't take much imagination to see the next step of a dinner table discussion of this issue. The daughter announces at the table that it is men who puncture condoms and force women into pregnancy. Mom tells her that that couldn't be and the daughter pulls up a link to the blog and then to the Newsweek article. Dad is still unimpressed until she pulls up a link to the study which partially verifies her false claim. All at the table are convinced now it is the men in general who are coercing women into pregnancy.

This is the way memes get started. A "research" article tells half the story and the partial data is misinterpreted unknowingly by the media who then pass on the half story as truth to unwitting millions who hear the medias version and their claim that it is research driven and the public is sold. *It must be true!* This is of course what happened with domestic violence. Early feminist researchers only told half the story, that women were victims of domestic violence and men were perpetrators. The media simply

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

passed on the story to millions and the rest is history. We have a general public who is convinced that it is only women who are victims of domestic violence.

The scientific method is very clear. You create a hypothesis and find a way to test it. You then carefully sift through the test data and account for the data that affirms your hypothesis and importantly account for the data that conflicts with your hypothesis. What has happened over and over from feminist researchers is simply ignoring the data that conflicts with your hypothesis (male victims) and focusing solely on that data that confirms your ideology (female victims). Interestingly in this study the researchers failed to ask the subjects if they had also coerced their male partners. They only asked the questions that would provide them with the “acceptable” answers.

In the study examined in this article the researchers seem to have “forgotten” to remind the media of the limitations of their sample. In a similar fashion to the first study, the press release seems to have been used to steer the data. One could assume that leaving out the nature of the sample was an honest mistake. If so, I would have expected Dr Miller to respond to my email asking about the omission of the nature of the sample. But she did not. This leaves us not knowing if the mistake was or was not intentional.

Perhaps we will never know. I know what my guess is.

What's yours?

CMNI

Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory

I was flipping through a journal on Masculinity and noticed that many of the titles seemed less than flattering towards men. It made me wonder if any of the women's journals might have similarly slanted titles. I had a look at some Professional Journals on men's and women's issues to get a quick sense of whether such a bias might exist. The Women's Studies Quarterly had article after article where the title seemed "woman friendly" and portrayed the feminine in a most positive light. This of course, is fine and is a good thing. The Journal of Men and Masculinities however had numerous articles where the title portrayed the masculine as negative. This is quite a contrast from the women's journal titles. The female articles portrayed women as having been victims of oppression for many years and now deserving to be set free from this bondage. The masculine articles portrayed men as oppressors who needed to learn to be more like women!

Obviously not all of the titles were good examples of the man=oppressor woman =oppressed man=bad woman=good dichotomy but it seemed hard to find a women's journal title to be negative toward women or to find a men's journal article that was positive towards men. Just to give you a sense of the differences in the two I will list some of the article titles I found that may serve as examples. Here are a few titles from the Women's Journal:

1) Dignity Overdue: Women's Rights Activism in Support of Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore, 2) The Power of Pottery: Hopi Women Shaping the World, 3) Female Agency and Oppression in Caribbean Bacchanalian Culture: Soca, Carnival, and Dancehall, 4) For Love and Justice: Ovidia's Story, 5) A Planet of Women (poem)
6) 25 Years to Freedom: An Interview with Betty Tyson

And here are a few from the Men and Masculinities Journal:

1) Gender (and) Imperialism: Structures of Masculinity in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North, 2) The Stain of White: Liaisons, Memories, and White Men as Relatives, 3) Masculinities and Power in New Historical Research 4) School Violence, Peer Discipline, and the (Re)Production of Hegemonic Masculinity, 5) Beyond Machismos: Recent Examinations of Masculinities in Latin America 6) Narrative Therapy as a Counter-Hegemonic Practice (and inspiring men to perform alternative narratives of self that have preferred real effects and counter the practices of hegemonic masculinity.)

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

The difference between these two groups of titles is noticeable. It seems from the titles that we want femininity to blossom and masculinity to be countered! One is more affirming while the other is more condemning. One is more a blessing and one is more questioning at best. One is uplifting and the other is shaming. We can't make any large conclusions from a selected group of titles but it does give us a sense of how the sexes are seen in very different ways even in our professional journals. It looked so far that the stereotyping we all too often see in the media is stretching into the mental health journals. The underlying assumption seems to say that women are worthy and men are in need of change.

As a therapist I have been taught to be very suspicious of situations where people are seeing complexity in black and white terms. This seems to be one of those scenarios. Women are being seen as needing greater opportunity after having been oppressed. The men/masculinity are seen as the evil doers who have caused this oppression and as morally inferior and needing to become more like the women. "The men need to be more like the women, then things would be better." Any time you view a group as being globally "negative" stereotypes are close at hand.

Looking at titles will only get us so far and is shaky ground at best. Perhaps looking specifically more at a Journal's content rather than just the titles might tell us see more clearly. I was reminded of an inventory I ran across a while back called the CMNI (Conformity to Masculinity Norms Inventory). This is an inventory that claims to show how men either conform to or reject our culture's masculine norms. Since the inventory claims to focus on masculine norms it seemed like a good place to examine to see if there might be some anti-male bias. Additionally the existence of a CFNI (Conformity to Femininity Norms Inventory) created by the same researcher seemed to offer a valuable method for comparison. What I found was a shock. The masculine inventory listed numerous characteristics that it claimed were our culture's masculine norms⁷. Some of them seemed accurate but a good number of them seemed very negative and judgmental. I will list the "norms" here as presented in the journal article so you can get an idea of my experience:

- Violence
- Winning
- Power Over Women
- Emotional Control
- Risk-Taking
- Dominance
- Playboy
- Self-Reliance
- Primacy of Work
- Disdain for Homosexuals
- Pursuit of Status

This inventory seemed to be trying to say that violence, power over women, disdain for homosexuals and being a playboy are all masculine norms for our culture. This was a

surprise for me. I thought that the masculine norms centered around providing and protecting. The Journal article states:

"Gender role norms, or those rules and standards that guide and constrain our behavior as men and women, are special types of social norms. Similar to how general social norms influence people to engage in specific social behavior, gender norms also operate when we observe what most men or women do in social situations, are told what is approved or disapproved behavior for men or women, and observe how popular or admired men or women act (Mahalik, 2000)."

Violence

I was shocked that this inventory seemed to be listing violence as a norm for masculine behavior. Is violence "approved behavior" for men? Is it normative? I simply don't see how it can be thought of in that light. Violence is not a norm for men, rather, violence occurs when the norm for men *breaks down*. It is also not a common behavior of the majority of men in our culture. Yes, some men are violent, but no, violence is not a descriptor of men in general and to imply that violence is a norm for men goes beyond being anti-male and moves into being a hateful attitude towards men and masculinity.

Lumping all members of a birth group into a negative category is never wise and is clearly the domain of stereotyping. Just imagine that we are creating a scale of norms for women. We know it is a fact that women murder their children twice as often as men⁸. We also know that women commit the majority of child abuse and that women initiate violence in intimate relationships more often than men⁴. Knowing this should we put in our norm scale that women are child murderers or child and spouse abusers? Or maybe just that women are violent? Of course not, and anyone who tried to do this would be laughed at. Although women are the majority of parental child murderers, child abusers and initiate violence more often in intimate relationship the percentage of women who act this way is a tiny fraction of women in general. It is absurd to try and imply anything about women based on the behavior of such a tiny subset. So why is it that when this is done with men it is not laughed at, not criticized, not even a blink from mental health professionals? This seems to be a good example of misandry.

Disdain for Homosexuals

Some men and some women surely have disdain for gay people but is this even close to being a defining characteristic of masculinity? Again, if this were about women, the offenders would be pined. The idea that most men have disdain for homosexuals is simply nutty. Implying or outright claiming that this sort of characteristic is representative of a birth group is again misandrous.

Power over Women

Can someone explain to me how this is a masculine norm? Where is the data showing that the majority of men have a tendency to want power over women? I emailed Dr Mahalik, the inventory's creator, and asked about these "norms." He wrote back that he had found the norms in the literature and offered me an article that he said showed the sources. When I read the article it was clear that there was very little evidence supporting these four categories as being masculine norms in our culture. The "power over women" category offered a cite of a paper that was over 25 years old. Maybe I missed it but I couldn't find any statistical evidence that supported using these categories as norms for men. While I am sure that some men want power over women I think these investigators would be hard pressed to show that most men in the US seek power over women. Again this is a very negative accusation and is irresponsible to try to accuse a birth group of having such a negative trait. If the same sort of implication were to be made against any other birth group (such as a race of people, just imagine the reaction to a claim that blacks want control over whites) there would be great incredulous consternation and accusations of racism.

Playboy

In the paper which Mahalik sent there was a reference to the "Playboy" category. I tracked down the specific book, which was published over 10 years ago which had made the reference. "Playboy" was one of four roles the books author had listed of mens ways of loving. The other three were Breadwinner, Faithful Husband, and Nurturer. The book stated that the playboy role in their questionnaire data had only gotten 1% of the votes from the men describing their most dominant role. The data from the book seemed to be gathered from a survey and from interviews. Hardly indicators of global norms for men. This left me wondering why a researcher would choose such a negative characteristic for such a large group. Out of the four possible choices of breadwinner, nurturer, faithful husband and playboy, why would he choose playboy only and bypass the others?

These four categories of violence, playboy, disdain for homosexuals, and power over women are decidedly negative and make a clear statement that the researchers feel that masculinity itself is negative. I realized also that they were encouraging negative stereotypes. By trying to link masculinity to such negative and pathological characteristics the inventory was actually attempting to bolster a stereotype of men as oppressors. In some ways the TV male bashing that used repeated stereotypes was being repeated here but on an academic level. Now the academes were foisting their own stereotypes just as a sitcom might do. Clearly a bias against men and masculinity but this time promoted by what are supposed to be our best and brightest.

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

I was truly shocked at this point to realize that this inventory was willing to pass judgement onto men and boys so easily. It made me wonder if maybe I was over-reacting and that this sort of thing had been done before? To get a sense of whether this was new or was a continuation of previous research practice we can look at examples of masculine norms that have been used by researchers over the last 40 years. The chart below offers examples of the terms researchers have used to describe masculine norms. The first column shows the norms used in 1970, the second 1978, then 1984 and 1986 and finally the norms used in this Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory. Notice the shift in the terms over the years:

1970 (Turner)	1978 (Cicone and Ruble)	1984 (Brannon)	1986(Pleck)	2003 (Mahalik)
1) Independent style of achievement	1)active	1) proscriptive norm against anything feminine	1) Independent	Violence
competency	dominant in relationships	achieving status	Assertive	Power over Women
incompetency in feminine activities	achievement oriented	independence	Strong personality	Disdain for Homosexuals
suppressing emotion	level headed	self-confidence	Forceful	Risk-Taking
	self-contained	aggressiveness	Has leader abilities	Pursuit of Status
			Willing to take risks	Emotional Control
			Willing to take a stand	Dominance
			Aggressive	Playboy
				Self-Reliance
				Primacy of Work
				Winning

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

Notice that in the above examples prior to 2003 the focus is on characteristics and almost none of them seems negative or insulting. Then look at the 2003 CMNI variables and note the difference. Suddenly masculinity has been cast into a negative light. What could have happened between 1970 and 2003 to bring about such a drastic change? Suddenly there is an implication that there is something wrong with masculinity. Violent, Power over women, Disdain for homosexuals, and Playboy are all descriptors that are obviously negative and condemning.

My shock at the harsh judgements and apparently ill-suited variables in this inventory left me wondering just how this researcher came up with these categories? There seems to be a large jump from the relatively neutral examples of the 1970's and later and then the more male bashing examples of the CMNI. Were the variables such as Playboy and Violence pulled out of thin air or was there some research behind these choices? Was there an attempt made to choose norms that fit with men of all ages across the US? The Journal article states that the researcher first did a review of the literature for masculine norms and then started two focus groups to discuss and refine the masculine norms. It is stated that:

“The construct was chosen because Mahalik (the researcher) posited the gender role norms from the most dominant or powerful group in a society affect the experiences of persons in that group, as well as persons in all other groups. Thus, the expectations of masculinity as constructed by Caucasian, middle- and upper-class heterosexuals should affect members of that group and every other male in U.S. society who is held up to those standards and experiences acceptance or rejection from the majority, in part, based on adherence to the powerful group's masculinity norms.”

This clearly states that they sought the gender norms of white middle to upper class males and believes that these norms impact not just the white males but all people in the society since this group is the most “dominant.” The purpose of the inventory seems to be somewhat different from simply noting when men conform or don't conform to our culture's masculine norms. The purpose according to this quote seems to be to label middle and upper class white males as having norms that “affect the experiences of persons in that group *as well as persons in all other groups.*” That the norms of “white males” are portrayed so negatively we can only assume that the author believes that the actions of white males are at the root of our cultures problems with masculinity.

We begin to see that the negative stereotyping is less about men in general or men of color and is specifically about white males. Even the search for “masculine” norms was specifically focused on white men. This too is a shock. How could anyone title an inventory with the global term “Masculine” but intend it to be about a sub-set of that group. We also see that the norms the researcher seeks and portrays as masculine are

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

not about all men, not even all white men, they are about middle and upper class white men. This parallels the media male-bashing patterns of primarily making fun of white men and very rarely bashing men of color.

Let's be clear. White people comprise about 70% of the U.S. population. Of that 70% upper class men are about 10% while middle class is difficult to assess but for our purposes we can assume that another 50% below the top 10% might be considered "middle class." When we crunch those numbers we find that even with these very conservative numbers that leaves us with a male population of 42% of the total. Clearly a minority. So what we have in this inventory is a scale that tries to identify the norms of a minority of the men in the US and gauges how other men conform to that? This is a very different message and intent than the title "Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory" seems to claim.

The stated goal was to map out the norms of middle and upper class white males. To do this the investigators created two focus groups to refine the norms the researcher had identified in his literature search. The groups met for 90 minutes each week for 8 months with the researcher. The curious part of this is that of the nine people that comprised these two focus groups only 3 of the 9 are white males! Five of the nine are females. Here is the composition of the focus groups:

Group 1: 1 Asian American man, 1 European American man, 2 European American women;

Group 2: 2 European American men, 2 European American women, 1 Haitian Canadian woman

Notice that men are in the minority and that white men make up only 1/3 of the total persons in the focus groups. Importantly, they are also in the minority in both focus groups. This seems odd considering the overt claimed objective was to develop norms of European American males. Why include so many women? Why have the group you are seeking to understand be the minority? I started to wonder if the researcher had some pre-conceived ideas that he wanted to propagate and having too many men, especially too many white men, might foil his attempt to plant the seeds of his favored ideology.

It's also important to note that the focus groups for the masculine inventory were populated solely by grad students in counseling psychology. According to the email from the researcher these groups were comprised of young people in their mid-20's. In a nutshell, the groups lacked diversity in age. Hardly the sort of group one would want to make decisions about the norms of such a large birth group encompassing the entire lifespan for men.

What we seem to have with the CMNI inventory is a group of young men and women making judgements about masculine norms which would be used in the inventory to

apply to middle aged and older males as well as adolescents. I am beginning to think that a better name for this inventory would be the Conformity to Adolescent Masculine Norms Inventory. It is built and geared for that population and some of the conclusions it draws make a great deal more sense when applied to an immature and adolescent masculinity. Perhaps the authors are simply unaware of and have little experience with the mature masculine? We simply don't know that at this point but it is clear to me that this inventory is anti-male and misandrous.

CFNI Female Conformity to Norms Inventory

When I first saw this inventory I was shocked at the anti-male content but wondered if maybe this was simply a shift with the turn of the century to have a more willing look at the shadow side of things and bring those more unconscious aspects of life out in the open. That thought was dashed when I saw the companion inventory for this the CFNI (Conformity to Femininity Norms Inventory) created by the same researcher. I wondered if maybe this other version for women would contain similarly negative and judgmental "norms" for women. I thought maybe gossip or the queen bee passive aggression sorts of things might be listed or possibly some form of characteristic about gold-digging. What I found was that the norms for the feminine side were almost completely positive/sweet and nice. Here is a list of them:

- Nice in Relationships
- Thinness
- Modesty
- Domestic
- Care for Children
- Romantic Relationship
- Sexual Fidelity
- Invest in Appearance

All of these "norms" are either flattering or neutral. There is not a hint of judgement towards the feminine norms. All of them could be manifested robustly without causing harsh judgments. A woman could invest greatly in her appearance and be very concerned about her sexual fidelity or children or her modesty and she would be considered fine and dandy by our cultures standards. Contrast this with the men's "norms" such as violence where even a little of that "norm" is a horrible thing that deserves scorn and harsh judgement.

To me the feminine norms seemed pollyanna and overly flattering as if the researchers were reluctant to make any negative claims about the nature of feminine norms. It was readily apparent to note the contrast between the masculine and the feminine. One is harsh and judging and the other is sweet and nice. This reminded me of the titles in the two journals. Women = Good Men = Bad

Even more interesting was the manner that these norms in the CFNI were constructed. The author created focus groups, not unlike for the masculine, *but the women's focus groups were only women. No men.* Also the age of the participants was considerably older. The mean age was 32 with a standard deviation of 10 years. This means that most of the group members were likely between 18-46 years of age. Indeed the women were placed into one of five different focus groups. Several of the groups were largely young women and two of the groups were adult women from the community. Unlike the masculine groups this seems to have represented more than just the adolescent population.

Comparing the CMNI and CFNI

Let's take a minute to contrast the two inventories. Both used focus groups to refine the norms that would be used. In the masculine version (CMNI) the focus groups were predominantly women while in the feminine (CFNI) the groups were comprised *only of women*. One would think that if you wanted to get a clear idea of the norms of a group you would want members of the group being studied to make those assessments. To intentionally create a group with the majority of members outside the group being studied defies explanation. I emailed the researcher asking about this and the reasons for this and he didn't respond directly to the question.

Another factor that is worth noting is the age of the focus group participants. The groups for the female CFNI had a greater range likely between 18-46 with a mean of 32 years old and a standard deviation of 10 years. This gave these groups a much broader range of ages than the focus groups for the masculine CMNI which were exclusively young people in their mid 20's. It is easy to assume that the older group of women would have a markedly different view on life and on the feminine norms. The younger group in their mid-20's doing the masculine norms would be much more likely to have a view closer to that of an adolescent.

The two inventories contained remarkably different "norms" with the male norms including some that were quite negative and judgmental while the female list seemed much more neutral and complimentary. It is an interesting question to wonder why the female norms didn't include any negative stereotypes similar to those included in the masculine inventory. We do get a hint about the reasons behind this from a section of the Journal article about the CFNI where the author states:

"In addition, because the CFNI is intended to measure conformity to traditional norms of femininity in the U.S., we thought it should also relate to women's development of a feminist identity. In describing women's feminist identity development, Downing and Roush (1985) proposed a five-stage model in which

Male Bashing in Mental Health Research

the first stage, passive acceptance, reflects acceptance of traditional European American, North American, gender roles, beliefs that men are superior to women, and that these roles are advantageous. The second stage, revelation, is in response to a crisis or crises that lead women to question traditional gender roles and to have concomitant feelings of anger toward men. Sometimes women in this stage also feel guilty because of how they may have contributed to their own and other women's oppression in the past. The third stage, embeddedness- emanation, reflects feelings of connection to other women, cautious interactions with men, and development of a more relativistic frame of life. The fourth stage, synthesis, is when women develop a positive feminist identity and are able to transcend traditional gender roles."

This quote is very different from the earlier quote regarding the culpability of white males. The women are seen as developing a "feminiist identity" and learning that they have been living in a world that oppresses them. Men are the ones who have been holding them back with ideas that women were inferior. It is clear that the researchers frame women as "good" and in need of space to grow while at the same time framing men as "not good" and needing to change. This sort of thinking is the same thing we see with the application of negative stereotypes to men, it is a huge generalization that sorely lacking in evidence. It is exactly what we see in male bashing stereotypes in the media. Sadly these two inventories boil down to women=good man=bad. Cartoons have successfully made their way into academia.

If women were seen as so inferior to men why would the majority of men on the titanic give their lives for them? Does a slave owner consider himself superior to his slaves? Yes. Would a slave owner give his life for his slaves? No. Men gave their lives because they held women in high esteem! America, mom and apple pie doesn't describe someone who is seen as inferior. It describes someone who is cherished. Women and men were both under the rule of rigid sex roles which limited both in their choices. It did not pronounce that one was superior and the other a lackey. Saying such as that is propagating a bigoted mythology that only makes things worse.

Conclusion

It seems clear from our observations of this inventory that male-bashing is alive and well in the mental health professional journals. I simply can't see any other explanation for the willingness to lump an entire birth group into such negative categories. If this sort of thing was done with any other group there would be a revolution on our hands. How can we blame our television and media for their male-bashing if our research scientists have the same tendencies? The sad fact is that male-bashing resides in most areas of our lives and most of us are not even slightly aware. Police, the judicial system, our politicians and of course entertainment and academia. All of these are areas where stereotypes of men are held as truth. How can we start to root out this sort of hatred? We need to move to a point where we can see both men and women, masculine and

feminine as having positive and negative qualities and learn to value each individual. We have a long way to go. You can help things along by speaking out.

1. Nathanson, Paul & Young, Katherine R. (2001), *Spreading Misandry: The Teaching of Contempt for Men in Popular Culture*, Harper Paperbacks, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, ISBN 9780773530997
2. Nathanson, Paul & Young, Katherine R. (2006), *Legalizing Misandry: From Public Shame to Systemic Discrimination against Men*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, ISBN 9780773528628
3. Fiebert Bibliography which contains abstracts of over 150 studies many of which show that women initiate domestic violence at a greater rate than men
<http://www.csulb.edu/~mfiebert/assault.htm>
4. August 3, 2007 American Psychiatric Association article pointing out that among violent couples women were more often the aggressors than men.
<http://pn.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/42/15/31-a>
5. Archer, J. (2000). Sex differences in aggression between heterosexual partners: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 651-680. (Meta-analyses of sex differences in physical aggression indicate that women were more likely than men to "use one or more acts of physical aggression and to use such acts more frequently." In terms of injuries, women were somewhat more likely to be injured, and analyses reveal that 62% of those injured were women.)
6. This page is a Montgomery County sponsored page which falsely claims that men are over 95% of the perpetrators of domestic violence
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhstmpl.asp?url=/content/hhs/bhcs/mfadv.asp>
7. Mahalik, J.R., Locke, B., Ludlow, L., Diemer, M., Scott, R.P.J., Gottfreid, M., Freitas, G. (2003). Development of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 4, 3-25.
8. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services statistics on child murder,
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm05/figure4_2.htm
9. Harris, Ian. *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities (Gender, Change and Society)* Taylor and Francis, 1995.

Conclusion

The three research articles discussed have one thing in common. They each seem to have an ideological assumption that the research appears to attempt to bolster and confirm and in the process they ignore the needs of men and boys or show disdain for men, boys, or masculinity. In the first study we see that even though the questionnaires offered convincing data that boys were victims this was ignored in favor of the preferred ideology that girls were the primary victims of violence and deserved more services. In the second study the researchers also seemed to have the ideological belief that women are victims and men perpetrators and their study showed just that, but showed it in an impoverished population which in no way generalizes to the population at large. Even though the researchers were aware of this limitation the press release and media attention ignored this limitation and treated the study as if it applied to all. This was of course a huge boon for the researchers to be able to “spread the word” of their chosen ideology even though it wasn’t exactly right. I can hear them saying, “Well, it was not exactly portrayed correctly but, you know, it was for a good cause.” Then the third article on the CMNI showed how male bashing is alive and well in psychological research. The researcher seems to have had an ideology that masculinity is to blame for our problems and the CMNI became another way to spread the word about this ideology.

The problem is that science is being stood on its head. The science that we know and love and trust is performed by astute and unbiased observers who are eager to find the truth, even if it means they will have to adjust their original hypothesis due to new data. They feel successful if they can change their version of the truth slightly based on new information. This stands in stark contrast to the ideologically based studies we have seen here that rather than using science to seek the truth are using science as a means to spread the word of their chosen ideology. This is very dangerous and is going over the heads of most people due to people trusting scientists to tell the truth.

The trust has been broken. We need to be vigilant and not allow such ideologues to promote their version of the truth and call it science. Our media needs to wake up as do our academes. Perhaps most important, we the people need to wake up and disallow this sort of thing and demand integrity be brought back to science and academia.