

not-masculinity

## where we need to go

[MORE THAN JUST JOHNS]

### MEN WILL BE MEN

In 2005 I was invited to speak on pornography to a conference on college men at St. John's University, an all-male Catholic college in central Minnesota run by a Benedictine monastery. I didn't hesitate to accept, in part because I'm eager to talk to any and all men about these issues, and also because I had worked at that campus 20 years earlier and was glad to have a chance to visit.

When I served there as the news director from 1983–84, the university was at the beginning stages of a transition around gender and sex issues. At that time, it was expanding its cooperative relationship with a nearby all-female school, the College of St. Benedict, run by a Benedictine convent. Reflecting the gender politics of the Catholic church, the men of St. John's assumed that they belonged in a position of dominance, and during my time there it led to more than a few tense moments in joint planning meetings. Although at that time I had yet to read feminist writing or give much thought to questions about gender and power, even as a naive young professional man I could see that my male colleagues, especially the older ones, were not comfortable with any notion that St. John's and St. Ben's were—or ever could be—on equal footing. Some of the monks and lay faculty, male and female, were pushing for such equality, but there also was considerable resistance.

Here's an illustrative example about a relatively small issue: As the two schools produced more joint brochures, the staff at St. Ben's requested that collectively produced material



use the term “first-year students” instead of “freshmen.” In their separate publications, St. Ben’s had made that switch, for the obvious reason that there are no “men” students, “fresh” or otherwise, on that campus. In a meeting with my counterpart at the women’s college, I said I couldn’t see why such a policy for joint publications would be a problem and that I would inform my colleagues of the change. I was wrong. When I got back to St. John’s, I found that, indeed, many of my fellow staff members, all men, saw lots of problems: “Freshman” is the traditional term. And besides, everyone understands it’s gender neutral. And “first-year students” is clumsy. And the St. Ben’s staff members are too sensitive about this kind of thing.

And on it went, with reasons I’ve long since forgotten trotted out to explain why this minor change that would cost nothing was unacceptable. But the real reason was never spoken: Girls don’t get to tell boys what to do. More specifically, the women of St. Ben’s don’t tell the men of St. John’s what to do. The struggle wasn’t over the word, of course; it was about power. Everyone at St. John’s knew that the old days of overt male dominance were over, but that didn’t mean they had accepted a relationship of equality. While the two schools retained distinct identities, with residential facilities and some non-academic activities separate, the academic programs of the two schools had been merged (students from both campuses took the same classes). The schools’ rhetoric was of a cooperative relationship based on equality.

Some of the men of St. John’s grudgingly accepted the rhetoric but couldn’t really come to terms with the notion of equality. Everyone was polite, but the strains were impossible to miss. The result was embarrassingly juvenile arguments about “freshman” in which the men revealed what really annoyed them: The women seemed to really believe the equality rhetoric and sometimes pressed for it.

Fast-forward 20 years, to the Second Annual Conference on the College Male. I was happy to hear that the St. John’s administration had given full support to the conference and its explicitly pro-feminist agenda, and I was curious about what might have changed on campus. Although it wasn’t clear to me what specific problems college men experience (as opposed to the problems they cause) or why a conference on them was necessary, I went into the event open-minded and hopeful that

the organizers were recognizing the importance of feminism to men. I was heartened that they wanted me to speak about pornography, aware of the radical feminist analysis in which my work was based.

The first hint that my politics would be out of place was the self-congratulatory tone of the opening evening, as the men involved seemed to spend most of the time explaining why the conference was so important. The keynote speaker, a man whose work is rooted in feminism, made important points, but his talk had that same tone. Although everyone spoke of the need for men to be critically self-reflective about male power and privilege, the underlying message I took away was “we are the good guys, the men who have transcended sexism.”

In part because of my reaction to that tone, my talk the next day began in blunt terms:

There has been much talk at this conference about the need for men to love each other and be willing to speak openly about that love. That is important; we need to be able to get beyond the all-too-common male tendency to mute or deform our emotions, a tendency that is destructive not only to ourselves but to those around us. Many this weekend have spoken about our need to nurture each other, and that’s important, too. But it’s also crucial to remember that loving one another means challenging ourselves as well.

That’s what I would like to do today, to challenge us—in harsh language—on men’s use of pornography. In an unjust world, those of us with privilege must be harsh on ourselves, out of love.

This challenge is: Can we be more than just johns?

The jocular mood of the conference evaporated quickly. I critiqued the idea that one could be for gender justice and use pornography, buy women in prostitution, or go to strip bars. Such talk in groups of men (even pro-feminist men) is always uncomfortable, for the obvious reason that many of the men in the room continue to patronize the sexual-exploitation in-



dustries and don't want to be confronted. And for those who had stopped those practices, I suggested our work, personal and collective, wasn't over:

The way out of being a john is political. The way out is feminism. I don't mean feminism as a superficial exercise in identifying a few "women's issues" that men can help with. I mean feminism as an avenue into what Karl Marx called "the ruthless criticism of the existing order, ruthless in that it will shrink neither from its own discoveries, nor from conflict with the powers that be."

We need to engage in some ruthless criticism. Let's start not just with pornography, but with sex more generally. One of those discoveries, I think, is not only that men often are johns, but that the way in which johns use women sexually is a window into other aspects of our sexual and intimate lives as well. For many men, sex is often a place where we both display and reinforce our power over women. By that, I don't mean that all men at all times use sex that way, but that a pattern of such relationships is readily visible in this society. Women deal with it every day, and at some level most men understand it.

We can see that pornography not only raises issues about the buying and selling of women, but—if we can remain ruthless and not shrink from our own discoveries—about sex in general, about the way in which men and women in this culture are commonly trained to be sexual. It's not just about pimps and johns and the women prostituted. It's about men and women, and sex and power. If throughout this discussion you have been thinking, "Well, that's not me—I never pay for it," don't be so sure. It's not just about who pays for it and who doesn't. It's about the fundamental nature of the relation-

ship between men and women, and how that plays out in sex and intimacy.

Clunk.

My words dropped like a stone in water. Typically after talks on this subject, there are many people who want to engage me, either to express agreement or to explain why they think I'm crazy. The subject tends to spark lively debate, but not after this talk. The man who had invited me politely thanked me for coming, and one man from the audience came up to say he thought the challenge was important. The rest of the audience hit the doors quickly. Only two or three men approached me over the next day that I remained at the conference.

The lack of engagement could be because I'm an unpleasant person. But even if that's true, any lack of interpersonal skills on my part hasn't stopped people from haranguing me in the past. Instead, I think the explanation is more likely that I had ruined their party. They had planned a conference on the college male from this "new" paradigm of a reconstituted masculinity. I suggested that we men—all of us, me and them—had a lot more work to do before we started celebrating anything, and that the work required that we leave masculinity behind, not reconstruct it. My final words to them were:

We live in a time of sexual crisis. That makes life difficult, but it also creates a space for invention and creativity. That is what drew me to feminism, to the possibility of a different way of understanding the world and myself, the possibility of escaping the masculinity trap set for me, that chance to become something more than a man, more than just a john—to become a human being.

We need to puzzle through what that might mean, for men to become human beings.

#### SEX: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

After a one-hour radio debate with me and a review of some of my writing, the editor of *Hustler* magazine offered this diagnosis: "I'd submit that Jensen is a deeply disturbed individual at war with his own masculinity."<sup>1</sup>



Whether or not I'm disturbed, deeply or otherwise, I will leave to the judgment of others, but editor Bruce David was wrong to suggest I'm at war with *my* masculinity. If I'm at war, it's with the culture's conception of masculinity and, beyond that, with the notion of masculinity itself. But David was right in asserting that I am:

not only against pornography; he is against masculinity as well. He believes the very attributes of maleness need to be redefined. He doesn't want you to watch football or play it either. He thinks it makes men too aggressive. He thinks porn and sports are at least partly responsible for child and spousal abuse.

That's a little muddled, but he gets some things right. I don't think sports are responsible for child and spousal abuse, but I do think that the dominant conception of masculinity that plays out so often in sports is rooted in the same conception of masculinity that leads to abuse. I think our task is to face the difficult truths about men's behavior and the notions of masculinity that underlie that behavior, to engage in some ruthless criticism, willing to face the implications—personal and societal—of what we learn.

There is a growing awareness throughout the culture that such criticism is necessary, that the traits commonly associated with masculinity—competition, aggression, domination, and repression of emotion—are not only linked to men's violence against others but are toxic for men themselves. One strategy is to redefine masculinity based on other values. While successful in producing behavior change in some situations with some men, it is a dangerous move because it reinforces notions that the physical differences between men and women translate into social differences. Our goal should be not to redefine masculinity, but to abolish it. Attempts to identify and valorize alternative masculine traits add to, rather than detract from, men's capacity to move away from a position of domination. Any short-term efforts to redefine masculinity to lower levels of violence must go forward with a consciousness about the inherent danger of the category itself.

To make the case against masculinity, a comparison to racial categories is helpful. Unlike sex categories, racial categories

are arbitrary. While based on observable physical differences (that is, my European American/white skin is noticeably lighter than the skin of someone in the racial category of African American/black),<sup>2</sup> the division of people into racial categories is not required for human survival or flourishing, nor is it based on any philosophical principle or biological law. That is, we could easily imagine living with no concept of racial distinctions among humans. The observable physical differences would remain, but skin color would be no more relevant for creating categories than the size of one's ears, for example. People have different-sized ears, and we could arbitrarily divide the world into the large-eared vs. small-eared, but we don't. Whatever small genetic differences between humans it turns out there might be that are rooted in the region of origin of one's ancestors (and, hence, have some connection to what we call "race"), those aren't the basis for a meaningful biological concept of race. Race, then, is a social construct, based on real physical differences, but differences that have meaning only because of a social process.

Sex categories are different. To reproduce, humans must take note of the physical difference between males and females. If men were to think they had an equal chance of producing a child through sexual intercourse with another man or a woman, the species would be in trouble. This is not an argument that sexuality has no function other than reproduction, a position that often leads to heterosexist assumptions and anti-lesbian/gay politics, but rather a simple observation about material realities. For humans to mark reproductive differences—to see male and female as distinctively different—is inevitable; the process is not arbitrary.

So, we can imagine a world with no race categories, but it would be impossible—outside of science fiction—to construct a world without sex categories. Our eventual goal, then, should be to eliminate the concept of race, though of course in the short term we must retain the categories to deal with the pernicious effects of the social/political realities of white supremacy and racism.

To argue that we should reject masculinity is not to argue that we can eliminate the category of sex. Such an argument does not require us to ignore the obvious physical differences between males and females—e.g., average body size, hormones,



reproductive organs. Given those relatively easy-to-identify physical differences, it's likely there are other differences rooted in our biology that we don't yet understand. So, the fact that men and women have different plumbing and wiring is uncontroversial, but making claims about deeper intellectual and/or emotional and/or spiritual differences between males and females based on those physical differences—let alone claims about what we should or shouldn't do in response to such differences—should be quite controversial.

I approach this issue from a cautious position in intellectual terms, one that not only acknowledges the extremely limited amount of knowledge we have at the moment but also recognizes that we humans do not have the intellectual ability to allow us to say much of anything in the near future. At our current level of understanding, with the tools we have available to us, it's unlikely we'll know much more anytime soon about these questions concerning potential intellectual/emotional/spiritual differences. In other words, this is one of the many questions about a complex world in which we are fundamentally ignorant—what we don't know overwhelms what we do know. The latest discoveries from neuroscience, as impressive as they are, simply add a few more drops to the bucket of human knowledge that is a long way from filled.

We know that males and females are more alike in biological terms than different. We don't know how much of a difference those differences make in terms of the intellectual/emotional/spiritual processes, nor do we know much about how malleable any differences that do exist might be. Certainly the existence of patriarchy indicates the differences are there; systems rooted in men's oppression of women obviously wouldn't have arisen without some biological differences that made a difference. But that fact says nothing about our ability to construct a society that mitigates the effects of such differences; it's certainly plausible that we have the capacity to overcome whatever physical differences led to patriarchal societies.

Simply put: In any human population, there is considerable individual variation. While there's no doubt that a large part of our behavior is rooted in our DNA, there's also no doubt that how our genetic endowment plays out in the world is highly influenced by culture. Beyond that, it's difficult to say much with any certainty. It's true that only women can bear children and

breastfeed. Not all women do that, of course, but only women can. That fact likely has some bearing on aspects of men's and women's personalities. But we don't know much about what the effect is, and it's not likely we ever will know much.

At the moment, the culture seems obsessed with gender differences, in the context of a recurring intellectual fad (called “evolutionary psychology” this time around, and “sociobiology” in a previous incarnation) that wants to explain all complex behaviors as simple evolutionary adaptations—if a pattern of human behavior exists, it must be because it's an adaptation in some ways. In the long run, that's true. But in the short term—the arena in which we have to evaluate and analyze—it's hardly a convincing argument to say, “Look at how men and women behave differently; it must be because men and women are fundamentally different” when a system of power (patriarchy) has been creating social differences between men and women for centuries. It may be that in the long run, patriarchy is not a successful adaptation in evolutionary terms and will lead to the extinction of the species. As we look around the world at the threats to sustainable life rooted in patriarchal societies, that's not only plausible but increasingly hard to deny. That suggests a rejection of patriarchy, which makes possible long-term human survival, may well be a successful adaptation in evolutionary terms.

No matter what the future holds, we should be skeptical of grand claims made about the meaning of those perceived differences between men and women, given the pernicious effects of patriarchy and its relentless devaluing of things female. In the ongoing cultural conversation, these issues often reduce to claims that some aspect of human behavior is “natural.” At one level, this is a true, but empty, statement. If human beings can do something, by definition it means that the behavior is within our nature to do and is, therefore, in some sense natural. We all have within us, as part of our nature, the ability to engage in a range of behaviors. We have the capacity to be kind and loving to friends and family, and then turn around and torture them. We have the capacity to love our children and to beat them to death. All of these activities are natural in this basic sense, and they happen frequently enough that they cannot be written off as the aberrant behavior of a limited part of the population that is sociopathic.



But most of the time, when people assert that a behavior is “natural,” they are making a much more extensive claim; they are asserting or implying that the behavior is either morally desirable or, if not desirable, extremely difficult to change. Some argue that such changes are so difficult that the individual and/or social “costs” of trying outweigh any likely benefit, though such claims are usually being made by just those people whose privilege is being threatened. Is it surprising that such people are quick to assert the status quo is natural?

Men’s control of women is seen by many as natural. It is natural, of course, at the level of the tautology I just described—“if it exists, it’s natural.” But is it morally desirable? Or, if not, is it simply a fact of life that can’t be changed? I would answer “no” to both. At this point, we have to leave discussions of what is clearly biological and talk about how societies make sense of male and female.

#### REDEFINING OR ELIMINATING MASCULINITY?

How a society understands the differences and similarities between males and females, and then goes on to impose those understandings on people, is a social and political question. The process by which those questions are answered is collective and reflects the distribution of power in society. We have choices, and the choices we have made in the past have to change if we are to make good on the principles of justice that most of us claim to hold. For those committed to gender justice, that means we have a choice between working to redefine masculinity away from the dominant conception that leads to negative consequences such as sexual assault, or working to eliminate the concept of masculinity altogether. After many years of struggling with the former, I have in recent years shifted to the latter project.

A large part of the reason for that shift is, ironically, watching feminist men play out the same old King of the Hill games while trying to contribute to gender justice. For example, for several years I observed two well-known pro-feminist writers jockey for dominance in various forums. Their disagreements were substantive, and such disagreements are important to air, but the style in which their debate emerged was a slightly more polite version of what is sometimes called “dick waving,” ritual behavior aimed at establishing dominance. Watching that play

out was a painful reminder that I am prone to similar behavior; it’s easy for a man to claim to resist the dominant conception of masculinity, to be successful at that resistance in various ways, and yet still revert to the pursuit of dominance in more subtle ways. I have also watched a pro-feminist man who does excellent anti-violence work in public speak in private in the same arrogant language of dominance with which I was so familiar from the locker room and other all-male spaces. That was another cautionary lesson for me, about how easy it is to fall into the masculinity trap. More often than I would like to admit, I catch myself—or am caught by others—speaking in similar fashion.

These observations, and my own continuing struggles, forced me to ask: Should the goal simply be to reconstruct a kinder-and-gentler masculinity? If so, how do we keep ourselves from backsliding into the dominant conception of masculinity that surrounds us in a patriarchal world? Does that desire to find some new way to “be a man” and hold on to masculinity reveal a deep attachment to a position of dominance? Is that backsliding inevitable so long as we hold on to the idea of masculinity? Obviously the act of renouncing masculinity doesn’t magically change behavior. But the fact that most men react with reflexive hostility to the idea indicates to me that it’s a good place to start the conversation; if men are that afraid of moving beyond masculinity, there’s something there to investigate further.

The first step is simply to ask why men feel such a deep investment in the notion of masculinity, no matter how the term is defined. What are we afraid of losing? I think the answer is simple enough. Masculinity—any notion of masculinity—provides men with a way to be assured that they are not, and never will be, a woman. Masculinity guarantees a man that no matter what happens to him in the world, he is not-woman. In any culture that hates women, such a guarantee is bound to feel good, even for pro-feminist men who wouldn’t ever dare say such a thing out loud. That guarantee is also bound to keep us from fully confronting that woman-hating and experiencing our full humanity.

So, I cannot escape a simple conclusion: If men are going to be full human beings, we first have to stop being men.<sup>3</sup>

Proposing a strategy of abolishing masculinity doesn’t generate controversy in the United States today—for the simple



reason that to most people the idea is unintelligible. In a society in which biological sex differences are believed to lead to significant and immutable psychological gender differences, the project of eliminating masculinity literally doesn't make sense to many people. But it is a rather simple and elegant argument.

Let's set the idea in a concrete situation. After 9/11, one of the participants on a pro-feminist e-mail list suggested that the actions of men on that tragic day could help us rethink masculinity. The writer suggested that the fact that male firefighters raced into burning buildings, risking and sometimes sacrificing their lives to save others, could remind us that masculinity can encompass a kind of strength that is rooted in caring and sacrifice instead of power and dominance. Could this not be a space in which we could redefine masculinity?

My response was simple: Of course men often exhibit such strength, just as do women. So, what might make these distinctly masculine characteristics? Are they not simply human characteristics? Is there any characteristic we might label "masculine" that is present in men to some significantly greater degree that makes it clearly more intrinsic to male humans than female humans and, therefore, deserves to be called masculine? I cannot identify any, nor can anyone else. Again, there are biological differences between men and women, but can we with any confidence link biology to any set of psychological or moral traits?

It is important to talk about different patterns of men's and women's behavior. We identify men's tendencies toward competition, domination, and violence because we see these distinct patterns of behavior; men are more prone to such behaviors in our culture. Whatever the biological roots of such behaviors might be (and, again, we don't have the tools to answer that question with any certainty), we easily can observe and analyze the ways in which men are socialized to behave in those ways, and we can set a goal of changing those destructive behaviors by changing the socialization.

That kind of analysis is very different than arguing that admirable human qualities present in both men and women should be identified in any way as primarily the domain of one gender. To assign them to a gender is misguided, and demeaning to the gender that is then assumed not to possess them to the same degree. Asserting that "strength and courage are

masculine traits"—even if we acknowledge that women can be strong and courageous, too—can only lead to the conclusion that women are not as strong or courageous. Otherwise, would we not just identify them as human traits? To say "strength and courage are masculine traits," then, implicitly supports sexist assumptions.

The only argument I can imagine for this attempt to redefine masculinity is a strategic one—that as an interim strategy we should try to give men new ways to think about masculinity that can lead them away from the toxic and dangerous dominant conception. I certainly understand the appeal, but I am always wary of strategies that involve an underlying premise that is illogical.

### "REAL" MEN AND THEIR STRENGTH

This abolitionist approach is a minority position not only in the wider culture but in the anti-violence movement itself. Many activists working to reduce—and, we hope, eventually eliminate—rape, battery, and child sexual assault endorse and employ the strategy of redefining masculinity. One common slogan is "real men don't rape."<sup>24</sup> The idea that one can be a man and not engage in such violence is clear and easy to communicate, yet it entrenches a commitment to masculinity by invoking the idea that there is a way to be a real man, that there is something about men, in psychological or moral terms, that is distinctive from women. No matter what one is claiming that real men do—whether it is not eating quiche<sup>5</sup> or not beating women—the claim depends on accepting the idea that there is a set of actions or ways of being, flowing from a set of traits, that defines men. Such a claim is based on a claim that masculinity is a biological, rather than a social, reality.

Another public-education campaign shows men asserting that "my strength is not for hurting."<sup>26</sup> Again, the strategy of giving men a way to think of themselves as powerful in a fashion that does not have to lead to violence is a reasonable short-term strategy. But it also represents a commitment to masculinity-as-dominance, overtly linking masculinity and strength. There is no explicit statement that women are not strong, but a clear suggestion that men are stronger. Men are, on average, bigger than women, and one notion of strength is correlated with size. But this image and slogan carries with it far more than an ob-



servation about comparative muscle mass. It buys into a notion of gender that identifies men not only as strong but as naturally in control as a result of that strength.

Whatever the goals of those who created these messages, such attempts to reformulate masculinity do not challenge men's sense of themselves as dominant. They do not disrupt men's belief in their natural role as being in charge. If we could know that such campaigns are effective at reducing men's violence, their use could be defended. But we should recognize that these tactics make the long-term goal of eliminating masculinity more difficult.

In Shared Hope International's "The Defenders" campaign, launched in 2006 to end men's patronage of the sexual-exploitation industries that target children, we see another potential problem in these strategies. Although the religious language is muted, the campaign is rooted in a conservative Christian perspective that implicitly rejects feminism's critique of male dominance. From this perspective, male dominance is a positive force, but one that must be used to protect rather than exploit children.

At first glance it may seem hard to argue with this, no matter what one's political grounding. If one wants to reduce men's violence against children, having men publicly state their opposition to "the sexual exploitation of children, using pornography, and buying sex" is to be celebrated. But the underlying conception of masculinity is troubling. Why should men do this? Because such behavior "is not something real men will tolerate." Why not? Because "real men" are defenders, "men who take seriously our role to be protectors and providers."

Men provide. Men protect. Men defend. The campaign speaks only of men protecting children, which raises obvious questions: Where are the adult women in all of this? Shouldn't they be protecting children, too? Can they be defenders? Or do they need protection as well?

Another obvious question: Who put men in charge?

Whether one believes it was God or nature that made men the natural protectors, the result is the same: Patriarchy. And inevitably in patriarchy, women and children suffer. If men are to protect women and children, men must have the power to protect. As one defender of this conception of masculinity put it in a widely discussed book, "How can I protect you properly

if I can't tell you what to do?"<sup>7</sup> Real men protect, which means real men must have the power to protect, which means real men must have the right to tell women what to do.

All this talk is a cover for a simple, ugly fact: Women and children don't need to be protected *by* men—they need to be protected *from* men. This talk of protection should be seen for what it is: A protection racket. One man or group of men promises to protect women and children from other men. And to do that, these good men must have the power to protect, which means the power to control.<sup>8</sup>

If men, real or otherwise, truly wanted to help end violence and exploitation, there is an obvious path: Join with women in women-led campaigns to end the abuses perpetrated by men. If men are the ones committing the vast majority of violence against women and children, perhaps it is best if we give women a shot at leadership in campaigns to end the violence.

There's a name for that: Feminism. Men can find their place in a feminist movement to end men's violence; there are plenty of organizations eager to welcome men into the struggle. But there's one problem: In a feminist organization, there is no King of the Hill. Feminist organizations sometimes struggle with women vying to be Queen of the Hill, though the groups with which I have been involved have been largely successful at avoiding that dynamic. The goal of feminism, as I was taught it and have tried to practice it, is not the power-over that real men seek, but power-with—power that is created and expanded by collaborative efforts, not seized and controlled by leadership. Those are lofty goals that are, sadly, often not met. But it is crucial that the goal is there, that the path to another understanding of oneself and one's role in the world is available to male humans.

## FEMININITY

So far I have purposefully said nothing about femininity, the corresponding belief that there is something in the nature of female humans that allows us to identify traits that are specific to them as a result of biology. I have not critiqued the way in which female humans become, in social terms, women.

As a man, I understand my obligation to be first to focus on the unjust exercise of power by men that flows from a particular conception of masculinity, and the idea of masculinity



more generally. Logically, an end to masculinity would also mean an end to femininity, to treating certain states of mind, emotions, and behaviors as intrinsic to female humans. Many of my radical feminist female friends and allies agree with that goal. Not all women concur. Here I will attempt neither to describe nor to evaluate femininity, but simply to observe that in a world without conceptions of masculinity rooted in biology (or theological imperatives), it's difficult to imagine how conceptions of femininity could exist; losing one half of a binary usually means the other half will fade as well. Again, to argue this is not to ignore the material differences between male and female humans, but instead to offer proposals on how to understand those differences.

#### WHAT WOULD BE LEFT?

The most interesting aspect of this issue is the question people often ask when presented with the abolitionist idea: Well, if males aren't men, what would they be? The simple answer—that they would be human beings—seems to puzzle many people. When I speak of these ideas, men often assume I want to eliminate all behaviors that traditionally are associated with masculinity, that I want to create a world in which no man ever plays football. That is not the case. Eliminating the concept of masculinity would not destroy the activity of throwing and running with a ball under a set of rules. If we left behind the concept of masculinity, undoubtedly the way people play football would change; I suspect it would be a much less violent game, for example, and I would count that as a good thing.

The concern for how we male humans could understand ourselves in a world without masculinity, without a series of assumptions we could make about what it means to be a man, is rooted in a fear of the unknown. Even though many men find the demands of masculinity stressful, even debilitating at times, the masculinity rituals are familiar and can be reassuring, even when they are the source of pain. The call to go beyond masculinity to a new humanity asks people to imagine something for which we have no model. It is frightening, but like most things that spark fear it also opens up the possibility of finding something deeper, richer, and more satisfying. It demands of us imagination and an acceptance of walking into

unknown territory. Such a journey indeed is frightening, but exhilarating at the same time.

One place to start that journey is the core of sex and gender: Sexuality.