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PRI REVIEW



The Androgyny Hoax

By Allan C. Carlson

At the Third Preparatory session for the Fourth World Women's Conference (FWWC) held at the United Nations (April 1995), the definition of the word "gender" became a matter of controversy. The dispute was of particular significance since the reference to "gender" occurs 300 times in the FWWC Draft Document. Dr. Allan C. Carlson's scholarly discussion of androgyny offers insight into gender-related issues as they have arisen in Western societies in the past thirty years.

We are all Androgynes now. Or so the popular media would have us believe.

In the last decade and a half we have witnessed a wave of attention to androgyny, the blending of masculine and feminine traits into a reputedly new human type. Proponents of androgyny deny that there is any meaningful biological base to male and female sex roles. Rather, it is social conditioning that determines human behavior. Each person reflects his or her unique mix of male and female biological traits. Yet androgynes, they quickly add, display the best of masculinity and femininity. They are flexible, open, free, happy, and terribly effective: almost the long-promised "super people."

Many journalists quickly embraced the androgyne as social messiah. *The New York Times* reported that spiritual androgyny delivers to men "a kind of freedom" denied to those locked in the old stereotype. *U.S. News and World Report* argued that the return of the macho during the Reagan era is merely a blip in the long-term trend toward androgyny: Boy George and Michael Jackson better represent our future. *Newsweek* chronicled the hugging, highly "sensitive" activities of the National Organization of Changing Men, who reject the "enslaving macho code of honor." Androgyne represents "the full potential of the sexes...a perfect representation of cosmic unity," reported *Cosmopolitan*. There are not two sexes, but rather "a spectrum of individual proclivities more or less male and more or less female." *Vogue* celebrated the bisexual rocker/actor David Bowie — "a golden blaze lissome gesture, seraphic facial expression, satin hair" — as the androgynous ideal. *Saturday Review* reported that the nation's turn to a service-oriented economic necessitates more androgyny. As one psychologist put it: "We're going to need more deviation from the two-sex role scheme if our culture is to survive." *People* magazine concluded that "these days, androgyny seems almost as American as, well, Dad and apple pie." As the manager of a West Hollywood club explained: "When we first opened only the elite turned out. Now we have the "give me a beer and skip the glass crowd as well."¹ ([#endnote_anchor-1](#))

The drums beat most furiously at *Psychology Today*, which has elevated androgyny to orthodox, normative status. Joseph Pleck complained in the magazine's pages that the old male sex-role identity has damaged men, women, and society as a whole. Male attributes such as rigidity, contempt for weakness, and intolerance of deviance causes fascism, he said. Society is at fault for imposing "unrealistic male-role expectations" on American men. In another piece, executive editor Howard Mason argued that macho test pilots are no longer needed for space exploration. The future of space travel, he maintained, lies with androgynes, men and women able both to meet goals and show emotional warmth. The magazine also concluded that the androgynous soul was the most "well-rounded and flexible lover," probably

the highest compliment that its editors could bestow.² [\(#endnote_anchor-2\)](#)

Such popular enthusiasm did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it reflects changes in the theory of personality dominating the psychology and psychiatry professions. This shift in ideas began during the 1960s and won a kind of dominance during the 1970s. The battles were fought in professional conferences and specialized journals, largely out of public view. Between 1974 and 1985, for example, there was a 500 percent increase in the number of journal articles listed in the standard indexes that dealt with masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. The subject acquired its own publication, *Sex Roles*. Only later did the androgynous vision spread to the general-interest magazines and pop culture.

Curiously, just as its victory seemed secure, the theory of psychological androgyny began to stagger and fall on the intellectual level, the victim of new and honest social, psychological, and medical research. The popular proponents of the androgynous ideal continue to assert that we are entering the age of androgyny. Yet if they are correct, the new evidence suggests that Americans are becoming a very disturbed people.

The rise of the androgyny theory needs to be set in the context of the remarkable restoration of traditional values during the 1945–60 period. Defenders of the family in this era saw feminism as their enemy. Their primary goal was the reassertion of strong male and female sex roles as a guide to normal behavior and mental health.

One of the firmest popular statements in this regard was the 1947 book *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, by Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham, M.D. The authors acknowledged that the rise of modernity, as symbolized by the industrial and French revolutions, has undermined the home and the place of women in it. Yet, the result, Lundberg and Farnham said, was a shell-shocked culture which had unsettled male identity and “converted a large number of women into harpies.”

The authors reserved their sharpest words for feminists. Such activists, they said, sought not justice, but masculinity. “And a female who attempts to achieve masculinity is psychically ill in the same way as a male who attempts to achieve femininity.” Feminists feared and despised children, Lundberg and Farnham reported, and pursued an ideology that was “the very negation of femaleness.” Insofar as feminists achieved their goal, “It spelled only vast individual suffering for men as well as women, and much public disorder.”³ [\(#endnote_anchor-3\)](#)

With less rhetoric, scientists rallied to support the contention that men were men, women were women. Researchers in the 1950s began to explore the effects of hormones on animal behavior, discovering, for example, that the cyclic regulation of menstruation in female rats was mediated through the brain. Such work provided a model for theorizing about human sex differences in areas such as aggressiveness, intelligence, and sexuality. In the field of sociology, Talcott Parsons led his colleagues and students back to a reaffirmation of traditional sex roles, identifying traits which he labeled “instrumental” or action-oriented for men and “expressive” for women. The former personality orientation, he said, aimed at defending and advancing a social system, while the latter sought to resolve the tensions within the group and secure family solidarity. Reflecting on the roots of this distinction in human nature, Parsons asserted that it was the main axis of the differentiation of sex roles in all societies.⁴ [\(#endnote_anchor-4\)](#) Similarly, the dominant figures in Freudian psychoanalysis again trumpeted individual resolution of the Oedipal and Electra complexes, and the shaping of healthy adult male and female personalities, as the sources of proper social adjustment.

Through these constructs, the theory of “natural complement,” shaped most completely in the nineteenth century, again found recognition. It affirmed that there were different traits and capacities in men and women which derived from their distinct biologies. Men were larger, stronger, and more aggressive, and it was natural for them to be breadwinners, produce commodities, and perform military service. Women bore children and had a maternal, nurturing instinct that made them more sensitive and intuitive in their perceptions of human needs. The natural love relationship, accordingly, was a heterosexual union of man and woman. Together they formed a whole being. Love between a man and a woman was the attraction of complements, each being equally powerful in his or her sphere: man in

the world, and woman in the home. Psychologist Ashley Montagu, over the decades something of a philosophical chameleon, reflected this postwar consensus, arguing that “being a good wife, a good mother, in short a good homemaker, is the most important of all the occupations in the world.” Jerome Kagan and Howard Moss argued that there was “a need — perhaps unique to humans — to act and to believe in ways that are congruent with previously established standards.” The desire to be an “ideal male” or “ideal female,” they said, naturally comprised “an essential component” of every personality. They endorsed the efforts of educators to reinforce male and female distinctiveness, the “traditional standards for sex-role characteristics.”⁵ [\(#endnote_anchor-5\)](#)

Yet following the American appearance in the early 1960s of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Betty Freidan’s *Feminine Mystique* the forces of tradition fell onto the defensive. With the emergence of this newly self-confident feminism, the “recognition” of psychological androgyny grew. Its appearance reflected several impulses.

First, androgyny was necessary to fill a large gap in the feminist world view and vision of the future. In 1964, the sociologist Alice Rossi summarized the feminist critique of American society and argued that sex-role behaviors needed to be redefined so that each sex could cultivate positively valued characteristics traditionally linked in the past with the other sex. In a major address five years later, Rossi added that the movement toward sex equality was restricted by the Fact a woman’s “most intimate human relation is the heterosexual one of marriage.” This bond to males served as “a major brake” on the development of gender solidarity among women. Rejecting the “assimilationist model of equality,” which asserted that women should seek an equal place in existing male economic and political institutions, Rossi instead urged development of “a hybrid model.” This approach would banish the machine and consumption orientation of “plastic-Wasp-9-5 America.” In its place would stand “a radical goal which...seeks...a new breed of men and women and a new vision of the future.” This “imaginative leap” to a fresh conception of the good society based on blended sex roles also would represent the “beginning” of a new ideology.”⁶ [\(#endnote_anchor-6\)](#)

More fuel for the fire came with an influential 1970 article in which a research group led by Inger Broverman reported that clinical psychologists held a “double standard” of mental health. Professionals tended to apply the adult standard of good health only to men, perceiving women as significantly less healthy. The authors of this paper blamed such bias on “the adjustment notion of health” dominating the psychology profession, which assumed that mental health lay with the acceptance of sex-determined behavioral norms. Such “adjustment” violated American values of equal opportunity and freedom of choice, they said.

Male liberation advocate Paul Hoch also turned to androgyny as the way out of the “feminist impasse.” He said that radical feminists such as Kate Millett who cast males as the oppressive, chauvinistic class, offered no real alternative for male/female reconciliation: for them, the war of women against men was inevitable, and eternal. Hoch argued that the women’s movement would only be able to move forward as it began to enlist the support of “male comrades.” The critical task was to destroy “the extremely heavy physical and psychological burdens the present pattern of sex roles imposes on men as well as women.” Only by eliminating gender assignments of any sort could progress toward real humanization occur.⁷ [\(#endnote_anchor-7\)](#)

At a deeper level, though, the theory of androgyny linked up with the push for total social and economic revolution. Shulamith Firestone, who performed a valuable service in 1970 by drawing out the feminist world view to its logical conclusion, was clear on the need for total upheaval. The collapse of the Communist Revolution in Russia, she said, derived from its failure to destroy utterly the family, which was the true source of psychological, economic, and political oppression. Day care and equality in pay and jobs were not enough. Capitalist tokenism was a lie and a sham, she said: “Mom is vital to the American way of life, considerably more than apple pie. She is an institution without which the system really would fall apart.” Hence, “Mom” must be eliminated, to be supplanted by a “feminist socialism” that would end capitalist exploitation.⁸ [\(#endnote_anchor-8\)](#)

In conjunction with this, Firestone stressed the need to free women from reproduction. Hope here lay with the development of bottle-baby and cloning technologies and state nurseries. Women and children must be free to do what they want sexually so that humanity could finally revert to “its natural ‘polymorphously perverse’ sexuality.” In the new era, “relations with children would include as much sex as the child was capable of” and the elimination of the incest taboo. Finally, this true revolution would demand the total destruction of the male/female and the adult/child distinctions. As Firestone concluded:

Revolutionary feminism is the only radical program that immediately cracks through to the emotional strata underlying “serious” politics, thus reintegrating the personal with the public, the subjective with objective, the emotional with the rational — the female principle with the male.

Through androgyny, the revolution would find psychological victory.^{[9 \(#endnote_anchor-9\)](#)}

Anne Ferguson of the University of Massachusetts summarized and updated the “historical materialist” analysis of sexual oppression, one originating among Marxist theorists such as Friedrich Engels and members of the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Horkheimer, Fromm, and Marcuse. Ferguson argued that sex-linked personality traits were socially, not biologically, determined. She acknowledged that in the pre-industrial era, with few materials resources and no means of birth control, the traditional sexual division of labor (women as mothers/nurturers, men as hunters, traders, and warriors) made sense. Yet, in the modern era, technologies allowed women to control births, feed babies with artificial formulas, and combat physical strength with weapons. The sexual division of labor was no longer necessary and needed to be destroyed.

In contemporary society, Ferguson concluded, only androgynes could attain their full human potential. These superpersons, freed by an overpopulated world from the need for any children whatsoever, could alone experience pure “bisexual love.” However, capitalist society, based on the nuclear family and women’s reproductive work herein, continued to frustrate emergence of the new era. So long as the social order continued to place value on biological parenthood, most children would develop a debilitating heterosexual identity. Androgyny, Ferguson concluded, would be possible only in socialist society organized on feminist principles. Yet she noted that the transition to the androgynous, socialist order would be surprisingly easy to achieve: “If the sexual division of labor were destroyed, the mechanism that trains boys and girls to develop heterosexual identities would also be destroyed...[and] bisexuality would then be the norm rather the exception.” Put another way, radical socialization of the means of production and collectivized child care would not be necessary as first steps. Rather, all that was needed was to secure women equal social, economic and political power outside the home. In time, everything else would follow.^{[10 \(#endnote_anchor-10\)](#)}

Writing in *Social Forces*, sociologist Edward Tiryakian of Duke University stressed that the changes which had taken place in sexuality and sexual conduct “constitute probably the most dramatic and significant transformations of the social world in the present century.” He noted that adherents to the “old school” of sociology usually saw hedonistic sexuality as a corrosive force within society. Tiryakian suggested, though, that the revolution in sexual standards and the “liberation of women (and men) from ascriptive standards,” while disorienting from a traditionalist perspective, might actually “be conducive to a renovation of the social fabric.” Indeed, he speculated that the human race stood poised “for a major stage of social evolution, one whose creative agents will be women as much or even more than men.” The ideology of androgyny, he insisted, must be viewed as “truly revolutionary,” one directed at overturning not only the sexual division of labor but also “the present prevalent form of the nuclear family which is the source of reproduction of heterosexuality.” Androgyny’s victory seemed imminent. In fact, Tiryakian suggested that merely two developments — the perfection of baby-bottle technologies and a Supreme Court ruling declaring it unconstitutional to teach or reinforce heterosexuality in schools would be sufficient to bring success. This victorious

ideology, he concluded, would actually represent belated triumph for the ancient Christian Gnostic heresy, which had also aimed at creation of the androgynous personality.¹¹ ([#endnote_anchor-11](#))

Some heavyweights in the fields of biology and physiology rallied behind the ideologues, Ruth Bleier, professor of neuro-physiology and women's studies at the University of Wisconsin, dismissed most of the animal research done on hormonal interactions with the brain as irrelevant to human behavior. Similarly, she rejected all studies suggesting biologically innate psychological distinctions between boys and girls: "The enormous differences in socialization factors are more than adequate to explain the almost trivial differences that exist...without speculating about the differential evolution of female and male brains of which nothing is known." Similarly, Harvard's R.C. Lewontin and colleagues, while admitting that only women could bear children and lactate, denied that any conclusions could be drawn from these facts: "Child-care arrangements owe more to culture than to nature." More broadly, they declared: "We cannot predict the inevitability of patriarchy, or capitalism, from the cellular hormones, or the physiology of sexual reproduction." In a series of books, John Money of Johns Hopkins Medical School argued that the biological foundations of gender, while real, were infinitely variable across a wide spectrum. Concerning materialism, for example, he cited an experiment where the injection of hormones into the preoptic area of male rat brains (simulating a natural process among female rats) led to "maternal behavior" such as nest building. Another researcher injected "anti-androgen" into unborn male rats and was able to "feminize" them, even obtaining lactation (although the foster pups died). From this, he concluded that maternalism "should...more accurately be designated parentalism. It is a bisexual trait."¹² ([#endnote_anchor-12](#))

Andrea Dworkin pulled together such science and ideology into an androgynous vision of the future. The former showed, she said, "that 'man' and 'woman' are fictions, caricatures, cultural constructs. As models they are reductive, totalitarian, inappropriate to human becoming. As roles they are static, demeaning to the female dead-ended; for male and female both. Men and women had the same body structure, she continued: "the clitoris is a vestigial penis; the prostate gland is most probably a vestigial womb." Humans, she speculated, were once biologically androgynous, and concluded: "We are, clearly, a multi-sexed species which has the sexuality spread across a vast fluid continuum where the elements called male and female are not discrete." Hence, all forms of sexual interaction must be part of human life. Androgyny demanded "the convention of all conventional role playing, of genital sexuality, of couples." The nuclear family — "the school of values in a sexually repressed society" — must also be crushed. Turning to positive models, Dworkin saw homosexuality as closer to the androgynous vision. Better still was bestiality, where "human and other animal relationships would become more explicitly erotic." The destruction of the incest taboo was also essential to the "free flow of natural androgynous eroticism." Children were "erotic beings, closer to androgyny than the adults that oppress them." The overall goal was cultural transformation, "the development of a new kind of human being and a new kind of human community."¹³ ([#endnote_anchor-13](#))

Looking specifically to their discipline, social psychologists were eager to prove that psychological androgyny was also best. Among them, Sandra Bem took the lead. From the beginning she was fully candid about the premises behind her work:

My major purpose has always been a feminist one: to help free the human personality from the restricting prison of sex role stereotyping and to develop a conception of mental health which is free from culturally imposed definitions of masculinity and femininity.

From, this statement, Bem argued that persons freed from the desire to show sex-appropriate behavior would be more adaptive, better adjusted, and psychologically healthier. They could build up a repertoire of masculine and feminine behaviors, and call on them as situations or problems arose.

In order to test these assertions, Bem developed the Bem Sex-role inventory (BSRI), a questionnaire designed to distinguish androgynous individuals from those

with more sex-typed self-concepts. In essence, it asked individuals to rate themselves against a list of behaviors, some “masculine” (e.g., aggressive, ambitious, analytical, assertive, athletic, makes decisions easily, willing to take risks) and some “feminine” (e.g., affectionate, compassionate, loves children, loyal, sensitive, tender, understanding). Bem then used a series of experiments to test the predictive capacity of the BSRI and to assess how well androgynous individuals performed. One experiment showed, for example, that androgynous men were quite responsive to a kitten, while feminine women were less so. Another study found that feminine and androgynous men were very responsive to a five-month-old baby, while masculine men were not. Overall, Bem concluded that the androgynous male “performs spectacularly,” shunning no behavior just because the culture labeled it female. “Clearly, he is a liberated companion for the most feminine among us.” Bem also pointed to the near-total failure in her experiments of the feminine woman, who reported discomfort when required to perform cross-sex behavior, yielded to pressures for conformity, and even failed to show greater nurturance of a small baby.”¹⁴ ([#endnote_anchor-14](#))

Other psychiatrists followed Bem’s lead. J.T. Spence and R. Helmreich developed an alternative to the BSRI, called the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, which they used to infer the degree to which a person had masculine, “instrumental” traits or feminine, “expressive” ones. They generated considerable attention in the 1970s, reporting findings that androgynous parents were superior to sex-typed mothers and fathers.¹⁵ ([#endnote_anchor-15](#)) Additional researchers described a multiplicative model of androgyny where “increments of psychological femininity would yield larger increments of creativity among high-masculine individuals.” Others described a process of sex-role transcendence, the reputed highest stage of human development, where gender becomes irrelevant in selecting behavior, and persons move toward “a fluid, integrated wholeness.” Still others speculated about cognitive schema, where androgynes succeeded in clearing their minds of any sex-related connotations.¹⁶ ([#endnote_anchor-16](#))

More evidence, of a sort, followed. A group from the University of Cincinnati reported that androgynous college students were more skillful at “interpersonal relationships” than sex-typed students. Another team from Emory University found that androgynous women performed better at college academic work than sex-typed women (although, curiously, androgyny did not appear to help men at all). A researcher at Macquarie University in Australia reported that androgynous fathers were more nurturant and performed more direct child care than masculine fathers (even though his finding was, in some respects, little more than a self-evident tautology). After defining a “simple” cognitive system as one which uses categorical thinking, defends existing standards, and defers to prevailing moral authority and a “complex” system as one that is relativistic, free of inherited moral and cultural restraints, and devoid of categorical thinking, two New Jersey researchers reached the unremarkable conclusion that sex-typed persons were “intolerant,” while androgynous persons were more “complex.”¹⁷ ([#endnote_anchor-17](#)) Capping this turn, Alexandra Kaplan argued that androgyny should be the new model of mental health. Therapy should aim at reinforcing androgynous traits in women and men. Pathology or mental illness would be defined by overly masculine men and overly feminine women. These sex-typed persons would be the ones herded into psychotherapy where they could be “resocialized” or stripped “of the stereotypic standards our culture has imposed.”¹⁸ ([#endnote_anchor-18](#))

Launched off this theoretical and empirical base, the theory of psychological androgyny had already had sweeping consequences in America. Within the mental health profession, for example, the dominant measure of health has shifted sharply since the late 1960s. As of 1980, 72 percent of mental health professionals — the persons responsible for counseling adults and children regarding proper adjustment — described a “healthy, mature, socially competent adult” as androgynous. Only 2 percent labeled a feminine woman as healthy, mature, and competent. Psychologist Jeanne Marecek saw androgyny as the means of psychologically institutionalizing the joint revolutions in sexuality and lifestyles, replacing masculinity and femininity as the norm for men’s and women’s behavior.¹⁹ ([#endnote_anchor-19](#))

The androgyny revolution has carried over to school textbooks. In a recent analysis of over 100 such books in current use, Paul C. Vitz of New York University reported

that “by far the most noticeable ideological position in the readers was a feminist one.” Not a single story or theme celebrated marriage or motherhood as a positive experience. Sex-role reversals and the mockery of masculine men were common. (“For example, there is a story of a princess who sets out to slay the dragon in her kingdom; she invents the first gun and with it shoots and kills the dragon. The slain dragon turns into a prince who asks the princess to marry him.”) The obvious goal is to eliminate any lingering sex roles in children, in order to pave the way for the androgynous order.²⁰ ([#endnote_anchor-20](#))

Feminists active in the mainline Protestant churches have also succeeded in placing the androgyny concept near the apex of those churches theologies. Such theologians identify, in particular, with the old Gnostic heresy, the belief that God is both male and female, and that “Holy Wisdom,” the female persona of God, mediates the “fall” of humans into bodiliness and also the escape from Creation into spiritual life. Men and women, they say, can rise above their carnal sex roles and gain spiritual androgyny. Some of this ilk take a different angle, denying the “androgyny” label for its implicit assumption that maleness and femaleness once existed. As Rosemary Reuther of Garret Theological Seminary puts it, “We need to affirm not the confusing concept of androgyny but rather that all humans possess a full and equivalent human nature.”²¹ ([#endnote_anchor-21](#))

Among corporations, androgyny has also been the rage. In her book *The Androgynous Manager*, (published by the American Management Association), Alice Sargent argues that “an androgynous blending of behaviors is the most effective management style in the 1980s.” Existing low morale and poor productivity in the workplace, she says, are due to overly masculine managers. Instead, the modern executive needs to be compassionate, collaborative, nurturing, intuitive, spontaneous, and expressive of emotions²² ([#endnote_anchor-22](#))

Finally, even the military services appear to be succumbing to the allure of androgyny. A favorite theme of the critics of the Vietnam War was its relationship to America’s crisis of masculinity. Writing in *Transaction*, Charles Levy pointed to the heavy psychosexual content of Marine basic training, particularly the emphasis on the cult of masculinity and fear of homosexuality. Another writer blamed military failure on the brutal, inept training found in boot camp. The linkage of a soldier’s aggressive masculinity to success, he continued, backfired in the passive, confused, female environment of Vietnam. In a history of American malehood, Joe Dubbert identified Vietnam as the Waterloo of the “masculine mystique.” Marc Feigen Fasteau pursued the same theme in *The Mate Machine*, where he delighted in identifying the phallic symbolism that marked official Washington (e.g., the Kennedy clan’s belief that “relaxation of tensions could come only after they had proved their toughness,” or the President’s belief that a “pullout” from Vietnam would show him to be “soft on communism”).

Significantly, though, Fasteau took heart that the 1970–75 period had witnessed substantial numbers of women and men breaking away from traditional sex roles. These new androgynes “have the self-confidence to achieve positions of responsibility and power without feeling a personal need to respond to every challenge. Female or male, this kind of human being might well have kept us out of Vietnam.” Two sociologists concluded in 1978 that military training remained perhaps the most powerful single institution for adult socialization in America. While the psychology of military training was still locked into attitudes of male virility, women as sex objects, and recruit as symbolic martyr for his family, change was rapidly coming. The influx of women into most military occupations made it doubtful that the military model of masculinity would survive. Fossils such as Marine General Robert Barrow remained, persons who argued that:

War is a man’s work. Biological convergence on the battlefield... would be an enormous psychological distraction for the male, who wants to think that he is fighting for that woman that he left somewhere behind, not up there in the same foxhole with him... When you get right down to it, you have to protect the manliness of war.

Yet, such sex role stereotypes ran against Pentagon policy, usually bringing a reprimand. Androgyny seemed to be the more likely military future.^{[23](#)} (#endnote_anchor-23)

The awful truth of the androgyny revolution, though, is that it is theoretically and scientifically unsound. Honest research over the last decade has shown conclusively that psychological androgyny is a hoax.

The theoretical failings are numerous. A research team from the University of Minnesota noted that some variations of psychological androgyny theory are logically incoherent. Given an “additive structure,” for example, where androgynes are identified by their sums of masculine and feminine qualities, the androgynous label becomes redundant. “Given this predictive redundancy,” they conclude, “androgyny would also appear to be conceptually redundant.” Androgyny can stand as a concept only if the interaction of masculine and feminine traits produces synergistic effects where the whole is better than the sum of its parts. The researchers then tested Bem’s BSRI scale against this criterion and found that it produced “no interactions vindicating androgyny.” Indeed, they warned against the appropriateness of using psychotherapy to change masculine and feminine types into androgynes, and rejected androgyny as a new model of mental health.^{[24](#)} (#endnote_anchor-24)

In a complex study, Diana Baumrind of the University of California/Berkeley showed that androgyny’s constructs are not embedded in a principled, coherent working theory. In addition, the concept’s crucial assumption — that sex-typed behavior detracts from psychological health — has little cogent data to support it. Existing evidence, in fact suggested that masculinity and femininity are not complementary; rather, they tend to be negatively correlated (e.g., a person cannot be both “aggressive” and “passive” at will, unless already mentally unhinged). She noted, furthermore, that androgyny classifications are themselves culturally determined. As an example, the Spence-Helmreich PAQ test was administered to a sample of Brazilian males. Twenty-nine percent of them turned out to be feminine, and a mere 12 percent masculine. Such tests, Baumrind affirmed, do not become a measure of gender just because scores on their component scales can, in some cultures, discriminate on the basis of sex.^{[25](#)} (#endnote_anchor-25)

In her comprehensive study of psychology androgyny, Ellen Cook pointed to a basic flaw in the concept: measures of androgyny deal only with positive characteristics: they have not taken into account the negative. While research in this direction is limited, she noted several clinical studies showing androgynous persons to be dysfunctional: “Unable to integrate their masculine and feminine characteristics well, the persons were vulnerable, inhibited, and unable to direct their behavior effectively.”^{[26](#)} (#endnote_anchor-26) Cook also reported that some androgyny theorists were already in full intellectual retreat. Spence, for instance, recently labeled her PAQ scale as no more than “a conventional personality test.” The labels “masculinity,” “femininity,” and “androgyny,” she added, were “murky, unanalyzed concepts.”

More evidence has appeared showing the androgyne claim to superiority to be incorrect. John Ray and F.H. Lovejoy of the University of New South Wales noted that all research on androgyny with positive results was conducted among college students. They suggested that the ratified atmosphere of a campus might not be exactly normal, so they tested a random sample of voters. They found high scores on androgyny to be closely related to unassertiveness, neurotic behavior, and low self-esteem. These results, they concluded, were “uniformly unfavorable to the feminist hypotheses as enunciated by Bem and her successors.”^{[27](#)} (#endnote_anchor-27) Sociologists Joan Hemmer and Douglas Kleiber sought to show that the children labeled “tomboys” and “sissies” were, in fact, little androgynes. However, they discovered that such children were actually anti-social, unable to interact effectively with their peers.^{[28](#)} (#endnote_anchor-28) Two California psychologists discovered that when androgynous people scored high on creative tests (keyed, of course, to masculine attributes), it was due solely to the strength of their masculine characteristics. Androgyny was irrelevant.^{[29](#)} (#endnote_anchor-29) Researchers at the University of Miami found that in measuring the ability of the persons to act in a crisis, androgynes revealed no special competence. Indeed, masculinity proved to be “the most important dimension for effective performance.”^{[30](#)} (#endnote_anchor-30) Evelyn Basoff and Gene Glass of the University of Colorado/Boulder, using “meta analysis” of 26 other

studies, tested the proposition that androgynes are better adapted than their sex-typed counterparts. They uncovered, though, "a strong, positive association between masculinity and mental health." While androgynes did show higher levels of mental health than feminine types, "it was the masculine component of androgyny, rather than the integration of femininity and masculinity, that accounts for this."³¹ [\(#endnote_anchor-31\)](#)

Cook outlined a series of studies that undermined the androgyny theory. A 1979 paper reported that while "high feminine" and "high masculine" women tended to make different life choices, neither group was less "adjusted." Other researchers discovered significant correlations between masculinity and anxiety among women feminist group members and between high androgyny scores and anxiety among working women. Cook cited numerous studies strongly showing that masculinity, not androgyny was the strongest predictor of mental health. Among psychopaths, serious mental illness among males proved to be associated with low masculinity and elevated femininity scores.³² [\(#endnote_anchor-32\)](#)

Diana Baumrind was more sweeping in her rejection of androgyny. Using sophisticated measures of personal and parental effectiveness recorded over a series of years, she showed that sex-typed parents performed the best [the capitalized phrases refer to qualities measured in her survey]:

Feminine mothers are the warmest parents. They are the most Responsive and Loving/Supportive and the least irascible, that is they Express Anger less and use less Negative and somewhat less Coercive Reinforcement than other parents...While less firm than other parents, Feminine mothers are more directive of their children's daily activities. Masculine fathers compared to other fathers use more Positive Reinforcement...Compares with other parents of both sexes, they are more Firm and Require Household Help more, but are less Directive of their children's daily activities.

In contrast to these sex-typed parents, androgynes perform dismally. Androgynes father were responsive, but not firm, while androgynous mothers showed no special parenting traits at all "except for their tendency to use guilt induction."

Similarly, Baumrind found that the daughters of sex-typed parents were more mentally and operationally competent than daughters from all other homes. The sons of sex-typed fathers were more Socially Assertive. In contrast, she discovered that the children of androgynous fathers or mothers "are invariably less competent than those of sex-typed parents: Sons of Androgynous mothers are the Least Socially Responsibledaughters of Androgynous fathers are less Cognitively Competent than those of sex-typed fathers." Moreover, she reported clear correlations between feminine fathers and cognitive incompetence in girls, and between masculine mothers and social irresponsibility in boys. In sum, Baumrind concluded that traditional sex-typing was healthy for society and children. Androgyny, as a positive concept, was a complete and utter failure.³³ [\(#endnote_anchor-33\)](#)

The reason for androgyny's illogic and failure has also become clear: the concept violates the natural order. While social and environmental factors have clear influences, sex-typed behavior does have a foundation in human biology.

In 1973, a paper by G. Raisman and P.M. Field showed for the first time that male and female brains (in rats) differed structurally. The difference appeared, moreover, in a region concerned with the brain's regulation of the gonadal, or sex-typed hormones. Most impressive of all, the researchers found that such hormones, circulating at birth, could change the brain.³⁴ [\(#endnote_anchor-34\)](#) As one commentator concluded, this finding "gave real credence to the possibility that the frequently observed preadolescent gender differences in aggressiveness were as biological in origin as the more easily comprehensible post-adolescent ones."³⁵ [\(#endnote_anchor-35\)](#)

Studies of primates have reinforced these findings. One researcher, studying the effects of hormones on the prenatal development of rhesus monkeys, found that the elevated levels of testosterone in male fetuses actually "masculinizes the nervous

system," predisposing it to acquire predominantly masculine patterns of behavior after birth. This biological "masculinization" occurred early in fetal development and had clearly identifiable consequences in stimulating subsequent "male" behavior such as rough and tumble play, threats, and play initiation.³⁶ [\(#endnote_anchor-36\)](#)

Writing in *Science*, Neil MacLusky and Frederick Naftolin of Yale's School of Medicine summarized the evidence showing that male and female patterns of behavior were largely affected by hormones produced in the gonads (testes or ovaries). In many higher vertebrates, they concluded, "an integral part of this process is the induction of permanent and essentially irreversible sex differences in central nervous function, in response to gonadal hormones secreted early in development."³⁷ [\(#endnote_anchor-37\)](#) As Thomas Fleming has noted, even cases of abnormal human sexual development point to the powerful impact of nature. Men suffering from Klinefelter's syndrome (a genetic disorder involving an extra X female chromosome) have a lower sex drive and increased emotional dependence. Women affected by physiological androgenization, caused by a defect in the adrenal glands, develop external male genitalia and show higher levels of male behavior: rough play, aggression, and so on. Fleming concludes "that some, if not all, of the psychological differences between men and women are prescribed genetically and hormonally."³⁸ [\(#endnote_anchor-38\)](#)

Psychologists report similar findings. Howard Moss of the National Institute of Mental Health studied infant behaviors in the period immediately following birth, when environmental or social factors could play little or no role. He reported that "male infants tend to function at a less well organized and less efficient level than female infants," showing irritability and less competence in responding to touch and other "social stimuli." Female newborns were better able to quiet or otherwise restore themselves to equilibrium and exhibited significantly higher attention to smiles and facial stimuli. In short, newborn girls proved to be more social.³⁹ [\(#endnote_anchor-39\)](#) Marvin Simner of Brown University investigated the reported ability of newborn babies to respond sympathetically to the cry of another infant. He discovered that newborns could distinguish between the cry of a fellow newborn and that of a five and a half month old baby, a "synthetic" baby cry and "white noise" of the same decibel level. Unexpectedly, though, he also found that female infants were significantly more reactive to the cry of another infant than males.⁴⁰ [\(#endnote_anchor-40\)](#) Researcher Dorothy Ulian of Harvard University showed that aggressive behavior in boys play with guns, rough-and-tumble play, dramatic roles stressing danger, and heroes of gigantic proportion — was psychologically necessary, while girls acquired their feminine identities naturally. She warned that cross-sex play and other "sex role interventions" could psychologically cripple little boys.⁴¹ [\(#endnote_anchor-41\)](#) Working with newborns, Stanford University psychiatrist Anneliese Kerner discovered that females were more receptive to touch, oral stimuli and sweet taste, and made greater use of their facial muscles. Males, on the other hand, exhibited greater muscular vigor and strength and more "spontaneous startles." She even suggested "that behavioral sex differences within the infants [may] exert a subtle influence on the parents," evoking differences in response.⁴² [\(#endnote_anchor-42\)](#)

In short, nature will not be denied. As Yale's Helen Lewis, a committed feminist, was forced to admit to her disappointed fellow ideologues: "The difference between having an XX or an XY as the 23rd chromosome [the genetic distinction between woman and man] is tremendously powerful."⁴³ [\(#endnote_anchor-43\)](#) Hoping to find evidence of a historical convergence toward androgyny between 1973 and 1986 (using the Gough Femininity Scale), psychologist Robert Baldwin reported a negative finding: the differences between the sexes had not decreased at all. Perhaps, he observed, "it is the concept of androgyny which should be called into question."⁴⁴ [\(#endnote_anchor-44\)](#)

The question remains though: Given the overwhelming medical, social, and psychological evidence affirming the naturalness and critical importance of traditional sex roles, how can we account for the success of the androgyny concept?

History knows one parallel. In 1948, Joseph Stalin's chief aide and ideologue, Andrei Zhdanov, sought means of enforcing Marxist ideological purity on the Soviet natural sciences. Zhdanov uncovered a poorly educated plant breeder named Troim

D. Lysenko, who obligingly attacked accepted doctrines of genetics, labeling them as "metaphysical idealistic." Lysenko argued that the inheritance of environmentally acquired characteristics was possible, a "finding" of great importance to Marxists-Leninists seeking to shape "the new Soviet man." Lysenko's theory was imposed on assembled biologists, the Communist Party Central Committee having "examined and approved" his address. The leading "Mendel-Morganist" geneticists were liquidated.

In the United States a small band of ideologues has similarly succeeded in imposing a fraudulent, dangerous ideology, masquerading as science, on broad elements of our public life. From the beginning, the ideological origins of "psychological androgyny" were clear. Even Bern, the concept's chief theoretician, openly admits that her purposes were political and ideological, not scientific.

It should be noted that, after some delay, honest scientists committed to scientific research have come forward and done their job. They have exposed the errors of the androgyny theorists and affirmed the facts. While the debate rages at that level, at least their findings are being discussed, and the truth may prevail. At a more popular level, though, the tale is different. There, it has been the "helping professions" — social workers, counselors, curriculum advisers, teachers — and the magazine media — *People*, *Psychology Today*, *Vogue*, and *Cosmopolitan* — which have elevated corrupted science to the level of public truth. These professions and magazines are responsible for incalculable levels of psychological damage to Americans, young and old, and for the corruption of many American institutions.

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