

1. **CONFERENCE ON MEN AND A DECLARATION**

On May 1-3, 1998, Everyman: A Men's Journal, the only magazine of men's gender issues in Canada, sponsored a pivotal event. It was the First National Everyman Gathering, in Ottawa, Ontario. The intention was to bring together members of the Mthopoetic (i. e., men's growth) and men's/fathers' rights (i. e., men's politics) movements in one room, to see if agreement could be reached and a vision hammered out on what we believe gender equality will look like.

The Gathering was a complete success. The 54 men and women who attended worked to reach consensus and succeeded in articulating a written statement of vision, which was signed by all participants (except those who had to leave early). This historic document is provided for review and comment. Please distribute it widely and ask that anyone who wants to add their signature do so by sending an email to the editor of Everyman, at: ["editor@everyman.org](mailto:editor@everyman.org). Please also feel free to [forward it to the media as an example of a vision of real gender equality.](#)

Everyman Gathering, May 3rd, 1998 **Vision for Gender Equality**

Introduction:

This document begins to articulate a vision of gender equality and gender justice inside the larger context of establishing authentic equality for all members of our society. It seeks not to repudiate the achievements that women have made, nor the work left to do, but rather, wishes to advance an awareness of the important areas of systemic discrimination against men. This vision represents our clearest statement of the unique value and contribution men have made and can continue to make to society.

Reproductive Rights and Responsibilities:

Where we are now: Men have no reproductive rights at all, but full reproductive responsibilities. After conception, mothers have the right to abort or not, or to put their child up for adoption or not, as they choose. In most places, fathers have no say in any of these decisions about their child, but their legal responsibility to support the child if the woman decides to keep it is strongly enforced. This responsibility continues even when they are given no access to the child or influence in its upbringing.

What we want: A pregnant woman has the legal responsibility to promptly inform the father of her pregnancy and her intentions. A father will enjoy equal power with the mother to give up his parental rights and responsibilities through the legal adoption of his child.

Parenting:

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Where we are now: In the past 30 years, we have witnessed dramatic changes affecting the family, structure and parenting, including very high divorce rates with a rise in single parent families, traumatic custody battles, breakdown of the extended family, and even changes in the definition of the family. Family law has not kept pace with the above present day reality. The legal framework used to resolve conflicts between estranged parents is seen to systematically discriminate against men and to be deeply flawed, awarding custody of the children overwhelmingly to mothers. The divorce industry itself is a significant obstacle to positive reform. Society appears to have forgotten the value of fatherhood resulting in negative impacts on the lives of our children. Kids need both parents.

What we want: The gender bias in family court will be eliminated, and fathers will be known, in law and in practice, to be caring, effective and entitled parents, fully equal to mothers in all respects, and entitled in law to full access to their children. Shared parenting arrangements following separation will be the norm.

Sexuality:

Where we are now: Traditional promulgation and commercialization of sexual stereotypes emphasize the differences rather than the similarities between people and are harmful to men, women, and children.

Ineffective communication in talking about sex between partners leads to a lack of negotiated consent between parties, the loss of respect for the sexual act, and a separation from authentic

feelings. While some of women's unique sexual vulnerabilities have been addressed, with legislation and judicial protection dealing with consent, harassment, rape shield, date rape, and censorship legislation and judgments, men's unique sexual vulnerabilities have scarcely begun to be socially recognized or protected.

What we want: We want women and men to share equally in taking responsibility and in the task of negotiating consent in dating and intimate sexual relationships. Abuse and false allegations of abuse are equally serious and should carry equal penalties.

Work:

Where we are now: Men still work longer hours and overwhelmingly make up the "death professions" - firefighters, loggers, heavy truckers, construction workers, miners and combat troops. Ninety-six percent of Canadian workplace fatalities are men. ***What we want:*** Men are seen as fully competent and equal to women in the important role of caregiver. Men will have the same rights and opportunities to care giving professions including full time parenting. Social pressures on men to be successful providers that oblige them to take unattractive, often dangerous jobs, will be a thing of the past. Workplaces will recognize and support the equally valuable nurturing role of fathers.

Health:

Where we are now: Approximately equal in the early years of the century, Canadian women's life expectancy has increased twice as fast as men's to the current gap of almost six years. Male death rates are 23% higher for cancers, 96% higher for heart disease, 127% higher for accidents, and 350% higher for suicide. Yet not one major Canadian government commission or study has been dedicated to male health or mortality.

Among the many largely-invisible men's health issues are:

- the limited range of acceptable emotional expression for males
- men's and boy's covert depression
- higher rates of addiction and risk-taking behaviour
- sexual and physical abuse of boys and men
- underrecognition of the father's importance in child development
- routine newborn male circumcision
- the epidemic of male suicide
- men's shorter life-spans
- an insufficient awareness of and funding for male-specific cancers (prostate and testicular)
- men's reluctance to seek help for psychological and physiological symptoms

What we want: Raised visibility among men and society of each area of male health issues, ongoing education of health professionals as to men's real health needs, medical research into and provision of focused services for men's health, and accessible information for men on resources in each of these areas.

Violence:

Where we are now: The current valid focus on violence against women obscures both the reality of violence against men, and the dependence on systemic violence within society.

Most Canadian provinces have an explicit "arrest the male" zero tolerance policy when called to domestic disputes.

What we want: Violence in society will be recognized not as a war against women but as a systemic social dysfunction that causes grievous harm to both sexes. Society's social, health and penal systems will address the needs and responsibilities of all victims and perpetrators regardless of gender. Zero tolerance policies with regard to male violence or to violence against women will be recognized as sexist and eliminated.

Social Prejudice:

Where we are now: Modern society, including school curriculum, adult education and all media, emphasizes men's privilege and responsibility, irrespective of their individual circumstances. In comparison, women are more readily viewed as morally superior, better caregivers and superior arbiters of children's well-being.

What we want: We want the greater society to recognize the fundamental equality of men and women, and the equivalent validity of men's and women's issues. We want it to balance the rights and responsibilities that have been culturally assigned to men and to women. Both men and women are equally competent caregivers and family providers. This means that each individual's potential needs to be recognized in all the various roles of human endeavor. We will cease creating social expectations based on gender.

Our Intention:

We the undersigned hereby affirm and declare our intention to hold the vision of a full and loving recognition of the inherent dignity, beauty, and value of both men and women. We are convinced that ultimately justice for both genders will prevail, where men and women will be cognizant of their rights and held to their responsibilities. We urge both men and women to embrace their co-responsibility for the creation of a just and equal world.

Date: _____

Signed: _____

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"The world changes when we do"

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