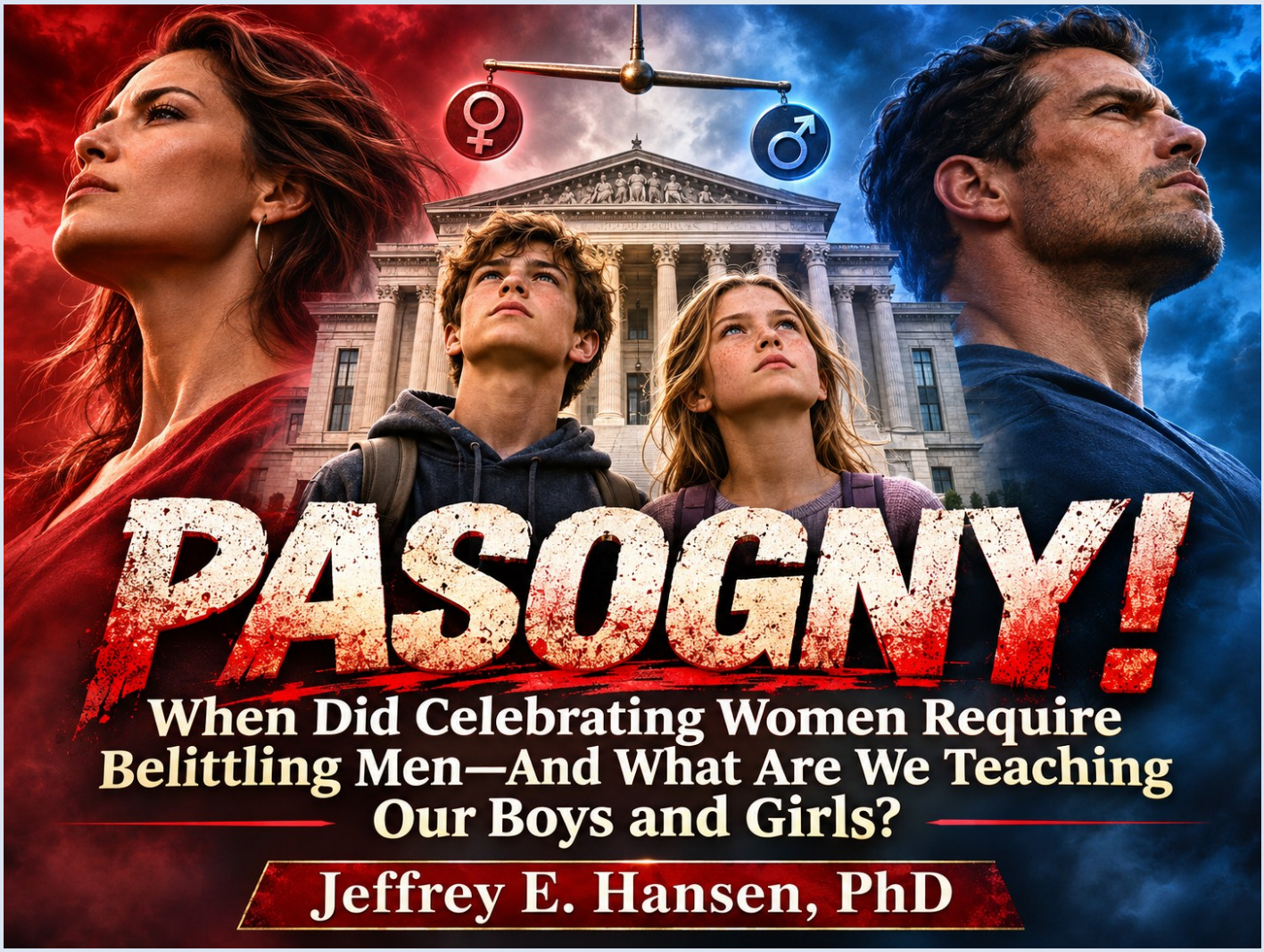

My Confession

I have a confession to make. I love strong women. Always have. And I am not talking about women who can bench-press 200 pounds, although God bless them, too. I am talking about women who know who they are, stand on their convictions, refuse to be pushed around, and understand that their dignity is not something another human being gets to grant or take away.

In fact, I suppose that makes me a bit of a feminist. There. I said it. Somebody alert my conservative friends. I may have to turn in my membership card.

I have long admired Helen Reddy, whose magnificent 1972 anthem, “I Am Woman,” became a rallying cry for women who had spent generations being told to sit down, be quiet, and know their place (National Film and Sound Archive of Australia [NFSA], n.d.). I have used that song many times in therapy with women who had been beaten down, belittled, abused, and made to believe they were somehow less than the extraordinary human beings God created them to be. Watching a woman rediscover her dignity, her voice, and her strength is one of the great privileges of my professional life.

So let me establish something right out of the gate. I have no interest in returning women to an imaginary golden age when their opinions were optional and their aspirations ended at the kitchen door. Women have helped build this nation, raise its children, lead its institutions, heal its wounded, and hold families together through hardships that would buckle the knees of many of us men.

But somewhere along the way, I believe something went sideways. In our admirable determination to elevate women, we sometimes seem to have decided that men needed to be knocked down a few floors. And I, for one, am getting a little tired of riding that elevator.

We have a perfectly respectable word for contempt directed toward women: misogyny. We even have a word for contempt directed toward men: misandry. But frankly, misandry sounds like something you might contract from drinking contaminated water. It does not have nearly enough punch for what I am trying to describe.

So, I am inventing my own word: PASOGNY. P-A-S-O-G-N-Y.

There. I claim it. I want it entered into the dictionary, appropriately credited, and perhaps announced at a ceremony where somebody gives me a medal. If my progressive colleagues can introduce new terminology into our cultural conversations, surely one cranky old psychologist from Arizona can contribute a word of his own. What are they going to do—arrest me for unauthorized vocabulary?

Before somebody starts writing an angry letter to my licensing board, let me explain. Pasogny, as I am using it, describes the habit of diminishing, ridiculing, stereotyping, or treating men with contempt simply because they are men. It is the assumption that masculinity itself is a problem requiring correction rather than an aspect of human life deserving understanding, responsibility, and respect. And I believe we have tolerated far too much of it.

Look at the television sitcom. How often is Dad the village idiot? He cannot operate the washing machine, cannot prepare dinner without setting something on fire, cannot understand his children, and would probably starve to death if his wife went away for three days. Meanwhile, Mom is the brilliant, organized, emotionally sophisticated adult who somehow manages to keep this oversized adolescent alive. I love strong, capable women. I am simply wondering when the price of admission became portraying the man as a household appliance with a pulse.

And I can laugh at a good joke. Lord knows we men provide plenty of material. We occasionally forget to put the toilet seat down. We sometimes act before thinking, speak before reflecting, and spend an astonishing amount of emotional energy yelling at grown men chasing a ball around a field. Some of us can watch a heartbreaking movie without shedding a tear, then practically require grief counseling when our football team loses in overtime. I get it. We are imperfect creatures. Sometimes spectacularly so.

But imperfection is not inferiority. Being the occasional object of good-natured humor is very different from becoming the perpetual object of contempt.

Consider what men have contributed to this country. The skyscrapers, steel mills, railroads, automobile factories, bridges, electrical grids, mines, and highways that helped build modern America. Generations of men labored in dangerous conditions, suffered injuries, lost their lives, and worked themselves into exhaustion to provide for families and communities. Women contributed enormously to these achievements, too, frequently without receiving the recognition they deserved. That history must be told fully. But acknowledging women's contributions does not require erasing men's. There is room in the history books for both.

There is something deeply unsettling about asking people to apologize for qualities that, when properly directed, can make them valuable: courage, protectiveness, competitiveness, endurance, strength, initiative, and the willingness to shoulder enormous responsibility. Those qualities can become destructive when corrupted by arrogance, aggression, or selfishness. But the answer to destructive masculinity is not the destruction of masculinity. It is the cultivation of honorable masculinity.

Men need accountability. Absolutely. Some of us need a swift metaphorical kick in the backside. Some need to listen more, speak less, become more emotionally available, and learn that admitting pain is not surrendering our manhood. But correction and contempt are two entirely different things.

John Gottman's research on intimate relationships identifies contempt as a particularly destructive conflict pattern: ridicule and moral superiority poison the relationship in ways that a specific, respectful complaint need not (Wilde, 2026). Contempt does not merely say, “You did something wrong.” It says, “You are beneath me.” As a psychologist, I have watched shame become one of contempt's most effective delivery systems. Correct someone while preserving dignity, and you create room for growth. Humiliate someone, and you may produce defensiveness, withdrawal, resentment, or a desperate need to prove worth. Men do not become better husbands, fathers, brothers, or citizens simply because we make them ashamed of being men.

And What in God's Name Are We Teaching Our Boys and Girls?

That brings me to what may be my greatest concern, especially as a psychologist who has spent decades working with children, adolescents, and families. What are we teaching our boys—and, for that matter, our girls—about the worth of being male or female?

I am alarmed by messages that encourage boys to regard their masculinity as inherently suspect and, particularly for white boys, to regard their sex and race as an inherited moral liability. If an

adult tells a young boy that he begins life owing an apology for who he is, I have a question: What conceivable developmental good are we expecting from that? A child has enough to figure out without being handed somebody else's ancestral guilt at recess.

I refuse to accept inherited shame as a healthy developmental objective.

Historical injustice deserves honest teaching. Racism deserves condemnation. Sexism deserves condemnation. Children should learn the truth about discrimination, exploitation, and the ways societies have mistreated people. But a child should not be made personally guilty for injustices he did not commit; neither should any child be excused from moral responsibility by virtue of belonging to a historically disadvantaged group. We can teach history without assigning hereditary guilt. We can demand justice without manufacturing shame.

Adolescence is a period of identity formation, social comparison, increasing independence, and heightened sensitivity to peers. Kingsman (2023), examining boys' experiences of a school-based rite-of-passage program, explored how social environments influence masculine identity. The OECD (2026) likewise reviewed the role that gender expectations play in adolescents' behavior and well-being. This is precisely why I care about what adults communicate to children: their identities are taking shape, and adult contempt is not a harmless educational tool.

And then ideology walks through the schoolhouse door wearing a lab coat and demanding to be called science. I see echoes of neo-Marxist conflict thinking in narratives that sort children into oppressors and oppressed before they have learned to understand themselves as individuals. That is my critique of those narratives, not a laboratory finding. You can teach injustice without training a child to see every relationship as a power struggle. You can teach history without putting a moral ankle bracelet on an eight-year-old. The child is a person, not a mascot for somebody's political theory.

Children are not miniature political manifestos. They are children. For heaven's sake, let them become people before we ask them to carry the weight of every adult argument in America.

Let boys enjoy being boys. Let girls enjoy being girls. Let them run, build, nurture, compete, create, climb, argue, make mistakes, and discover their own strengths. A spirited boy is not a disorder. A strong-willed girl is not an ideological problem. They are human beings, wonderfully varied within each sex. The OECD (2026) documents how gender expectations shape adolescent experiences; that is all the more reason to defend children's dignity rather than handing them a script about what they must feel ashamed of.

That leads to another difficult contemporary question: how children understand biological sex, gender, and their developing sense of self. My Christian convictions begin with Genesis 1:27, which describes humanity as created in God's image, male and female. I regard both as blessings, neither as an embarrassment or a condition requiring apology. I want children to grow up able

to appreciate their bodies and development without being taught that an ordinary variation in interests or temperament makes their sex somehow wrong. A boy who loves music or dance is not less of a boy; a girl who loves motorcycles or engineering is not less of a girl.

When a child experiences genuine distress about sex or gender, my response as a clinician is not ridicule, rejection, or an ideological sales pitch. It is to listen carefully, consider the whole child and family, and take development seriously. Heathcote et al. (2024) found that the available evidence on psychosocial interventions was limited and generally low quality. That is a challenge to clinical certainty, not a reason to surrender clinical judgment. We owe children attention, not slogans.

I want parents, educators, and clinicians to teach children that their worth cannot be reduced to a political category, a stereotype, or another person's grievance. Boys and girls need adults who can teach responsibility without shame, offer guidance without coercion, and communicate dignity without making someone else the villain.

Let Boys Be Boys. Let Girls Be Girls. And Let Them Grow Up.

Here is where I want to be unmistakably clear. I am not demanding that boys march in formation toward football practice or that girls arrive from the maternity ward clutching a doll. I am saying that being male or female is not a defect requiring correction, and that a child's interests do not need to become a referendum on the child's sex. I cannot believe I have to write this sentence, but apparently the cultural committee has misplaced the obvious.

I want boys to be comfortable in their bodies and unashamed of becoming men. I want girls to be comfortable in theirs and unashamed of becoming women. I want us to stop treating healthy masculine qualities as embarrassing artifacts from an unenlightened century. Strength, courage, initiative, competitive energy, protectiveness, and the willingness to shoulder responsibility deserve formation, not blanket condemnation. These qualities are not the exclusive property of men, of course. But neither should a boy be taught that he must distance himself from them to earn approval.

And let us not confuse biological sex with a personality questionnaire. A boy who prefers dolls to football has not necessarily made an announcement about his gender identity. A girl who would rather dismantle the lawnmower than hold a tea party has not declared war on femininity. She may simply want to know how the damn thing works. Give her the wrench. I want children free to develop without either the old-fashioned pressure to conform to stereotypes or the newer temptation to interpret every departure from a stereotype as evidence of a different identity.

Here is the research I believe deserves much more attention. Singh et al. (2021) followed 139 boys referred for childhood gender-identity concerns and classified 122—87.8%—as desisters at

follow-up. The original referral group included boys who did not meet full diagnostic criteria, an important detail when interpreting the result. But do not miss the finding while arguing over the footnotes: for most boys in this historical cohort, childhood gender-identity concerns did not persist into the follow-up years. That should get the attention of every adult tempted to treat early uncertainty as a settled destination.

Steensma et al. (2013) likewise documented substantial desistance in a follow-up of 127 children referred for gender dysphoria, while finding that more intense childhood dysphoria was associated with persistence. Children do not all follow one developmental trajectory. That is precisely my point. Childhood is a process, not a verdict. Why should adult certainty outrun the child's own maturation?

These were observational follow-up studies, not randomized trials comparing therapeutic approaches; they cannot, by themselves, establish that waiting caused desistance. But they absolutely establish a serious reason to protect developmental time. Hall et al. (2024) found that research on social transition in childhood and adolescence was too limited to yield confident conclusions about benefits or harms, while Heathcote et al. (2024) found similar limitations in the evidence on psychosocial interventions. My clinical conclusion is forceful: when the evidence is uncertain and the child is still developing, comprehensive assessment and patience must not be treated as cowardice. They are part of responsible care.

I made this argument at greater length in my book, Transgender Confusion Amidst the Search for Identity (Hansen, 2024). I have spent decades sitting across from young people who are desperately trying to make sense of themselves. I have no interest in turning their anguish into an ideological trophy. A child asking a difficult question deserves a clinician who listens long enough to understand the question—not someone racing to hand over an answer because the answer is fashionable.

What troubles me is the adult impulse to arrive with a permanent conclusion before childhood has had a chance to unfold. A boy who loves dance is still entitled to be a boy. A girl who repairs motorcycles is still entitled to be a girl. A child with persistent gender distress is entitled to careful, humane, individualized care. None of these children needs somebody waving a political banner over the examination table. Development is not a fire alarm. And childhood is not a deadline.

Here is my plea: stop making children apologize for being male or female. Stop treating ordinary differences in interests as a diagnosis. Stop assigning inherited guilt. Stop substituting ideology for the patient, sometimes messy business of growing up. Let boys be boys. Let girls be girls. And let every child be an individual, deserving of respect and capable of becoming more than any adult's label.

Bringing the Pendulum Home

The biblical vision that moves me is not male above female or female above male. It is the shared dignity of human beings made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Paul urges Timothy to treat older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with purity (1 Timothy 5:1–2). Peter calls husbands to honor their wives as fellow heirs of grace (1 Peter 3:7). Honor is not rationed by sex. Human dignity is not a competition.

Men, I am speaking to you. Treat the women in your lives with honor. Cherish them. Listen to them. Stand beside them when courage is required, and celebrate their accomplishments without believing that their success diminishes yours. Strength does not require domination, and tenderness does not require weakness.

But women, I am speaking to you as well. Extend us the same grace. Respect the men who are trying, the men who shoulder responsibilities and carry burdens they sometimes struggle to put into words. Correct us when correction is warranted; challenge us when we have lost our way. But please do not confuse belittlement with empowerment or contempt with strength.

Many men would willingly risk their lives for the women and children they love. They would run into burning buildings, stand between danger and their families, and surrender comforts to provide for someone else. Those sacrifices deserve recognition, just as women's innumerable sacrifices deserve recognition. A man should not have to surrender his dignity to demonstrate devotion. Neither should a woman.

For generations, women had legitimate reasons to demand that the cultural pendulum move toward fairness, opportunity, and recognition. Sometimes correcting an injustice requires a powerful push. But a pendulum that swings from one injustice to another has not discovered justice. It has merely changed direction.

I am not interested in winning a gender war. I am interested in ending one. But I am even less interested in watching our sons and daughters inherit it, beautifully packaged with a school-approved vocabulary list and a certificate of participation.

I want boys who can grow into honorable men without apologizing for being male. I want girls who can grow into strong women without believing that men are their natural adversaries. I want children to understand that their race, sex, and family history do not predetermine their moral character. Their conduct matters. Their choices matter. Their responsibility to others matters. I want fathers honored rather than caricatured, mothers cherished rather than taken for granted, and marriages built on friendship instead of competition.

Teach children to respect their dignity without stealing someone else's. Teach differences without manufacturing enemies. Teach history without inherited guilt. Teach confidence without

arrogance and humility without humiliation. If we must pass something on, let it be courage, compassion, accountability, forgiveness, and the capacity to love people who are not exactly like us.

So, my male brethren, stand tall. Not above women. Not against women. Beside them. Be the kind of men who deserve respect. Keep your word, protect the vulnerable, love your wives, be present for your children, and admit when you are wrong. Learn to apologize without behaving as though somebody has demanded you surrender your testicles at the courthouse. And, yes, put the toilet seat down once in a while. I have examined the engineering. It is a remarkably simple mechanism.

To the women in our lives: we love you, admire you, and need you. We know your achievements have never required our humiliation, and ours have never required yours. Correct us when we deserve it. We will try to do the same with grace. But let us stop mistaking ridicule for progress and contempt for empowerment. Maybe the real revolution is not about which sex finally wins. Maybe it is about remembering that we were never supposed to be enemies in the first place.

And now I have a second confession. The longer I write this essay, the more I adore my outrageous little word. PASOGNY! I can hardly say it without smiling. It sounds simultaneously like a medical diagnosis, a Supreme Court case, and something you ought to have removed before it spreads. I can already picture the letter from a furious professor: “Dear Dr. Hansen, your word lacks proper authorization.” Excellent. Put me on the dictionary committee. I will bring the coffee, although at seventy-two I recommend decaf. The last thing this debate needs is a caffeinated psychologist with a new noun.

Yet I want to end where I began: with love, not contempt. I want strong women and honorable men. I want boys who look forward to manhood and girls who can embrace womanhood, without either being taught to despise the other. I want parents who can correct without crushing, teachers who can inform without indoctrinating, and clinicians who remember that children need care more than crusades. I want our sons and daughters to inherit courage instead of shame, gratitude instead of grievance, and the conviction that another person’s dignity never subtracts from their own. And so, yes, I hope PASOGNY becomes a wildly popular word. I want dictionaries fighting over it. I want footnotes, pronunciation guides, perhaps even a modest commemorative plaque. But I pray the condition itself becomes increasingly rare. Let the word flourish and the contempt die. That would be the kind of revolution worth having—and the kind of inheritance worth leaving. It is time to bring the pendulum home.

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