The false and widespread belief that feminists are misandrists

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It seems absurd to most modern minds that women should be denied the right to vote. Women enjoy this right in every nation on earth bar the Vatican City State, in which only Cardinal Cardinals can vote, and only men can be Cardinals. Though universal suffrage is practically universal, it is remarkably new. Only in 1896 did New Zealand, then part of the British Empire, become the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote. Only in 1913 did Norway become the first fully sovereign nation to do so (Schaeffer, 2020). This monumental political innovation, alongside the abolition of slavery in the US and the British Empire, was among the most significant of the social advancements that took place in the 19th and 20th centuries, informed by growing universalistic concern for human rights and welfare (Bloom, 2010; Leach et al., 2023a).

Viewed with the benefit of a century of hindsight, these activists were inspired by a noble and reasonable cause – all they wanted was the right to vote – and the term ‘suffragette’ is honorific. But at the time the term did not have this tone, and to be described as ‘suffragettish” was it to be disparaged (OED). Politicians and propagandists portrayed suffragettes as ugly, mannish, driven to usurp men’s role in society, and fired by resentment and contempt for men (John & Eustace, 2013): in short, by *misandry*. It was indeed at around this time (in 1885) that this term was coined in the English language, adapted from the older term misogyny (OED). The stereotypes attached to these early feminists are eerily familiar to us today, because feminists seem still to be stereotyped in much the same, negative terms (Bashir et al., 2013; Ging, 2019). The persistence of these stereotypes is all the more remarkable given the dramatic improvements in women’s circumstances, and changes in the specific concerns of feminism, over the intervening century

(Anderson, 2015). It not only demands explanation, but raises important and interesting questions for social psychologists.

In this chapter, we focus in particular on the stereotype that feminists and feminism are guilty of misandry. A parsimonious explanation of its endurance is that it is true, or at least contains grains of truth. Building on our recently published work (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2024), we therefore ask whether the stereotype is accurate. Finding that it is not, we then ask why it has nevertheless persisted. What social-cognitive processes might have sustained it, and what ideological purposes might it have served? We then ask why the stereotype matters: what effects has it had on the progress and consequences of feminism? Our discussion then touches upon more general methodological and conceptual questions including the purposes of social psychological research. Why does truth and falsity matter, and what difficulties arise in designating any belief, let alone a stereotype, as 'true' or 'false'? First, however, we consider what might be meant specifically by the claim that feminists hate men.

What is feminism, and who are feminists?

The claim that feminists are man-haters is touted publicly with enthusiasm and certitude by people who seldom take the time to define their terms. We as social scientists cannot think like this. To subject the claim to an empirical reality test, we must unpack it, defining it and its elements in terms that make them amenable to measurement. Thus, we must first arrive at a workable definition of whom the claim is about. What is feminism, and who are feminists?

This is complicated, because there is no single, agreed over-arching definition of 'feminist' or 'feminism' (Miles, 2023; Offen, 1988). In addition, 'feminist' is used as an adjective as well as a noun, and is therefore a quality that can be imbued not only

to people but beliefs (e.g., a feminist doctrine) and behaviours (e.g., a feminist protest). Thus, a person can be defined as a feminist according to their self-identification (they think they are a feminist), their beliefs (they hold beliefs that are characteristic of feminism), and/or their actions (they take part in feminist activities). A person can be defined on these dimensions in both discrete and continuous terms (i.e., feminist or not; moderately or strongly feminist: Liss et al., 2001). There are also different varieties of feminism, including liberal, radical, and cultural feminism, each with its own doctrines and social affiliations (Henley et al., 1998). Further complicating matters, feminist identities, beliefs, and actions do not align perfectly. For example, several studies have shown that some women who endorse feminist beliefs do not identify as feminists, in part because of the negative stereotypes that surround feminism (e.g., Moore & Stathi, 2020). Thus, though it is convenient and simplifying strategy for researchers to focus on how individuals self-identify (i.e., to believe participants when they say they are feminist), it is also important to examine their beliefs and actions.

Despite all these complexities, we can define feminism in simple overarching terms as a social movement that motivates collective *action* to try to improve the circumstances of women and girls (van Zomeren et al., 2008). This movement is predicated on the *belief* that women and girls are systematically disadvantaged. To view oneself as a feminist is to adopt a politicised *identity* that aligns with these beliefs and actions (Gamble, 2004). We therefore assume that people can meaningfully be characterised as feminist (or not) according to whether their identities, beliefs, or behaviours conform to this definition, whatever specific form they may take. We assume that they can also be characterised as more or less feminist on each of these dimensions.

What is misandry?

Misandry is a very general and very contested term, as we shall see later in this chapter. For now, it is necessary only to establish a working understanding that lends itself to empirical scrutiny. Though the OED defines it as the *hatred* of men, this term is both strict, implying a strong intensity of emotion, and imprecise, in the sense that it does not map on easily to established constructs in the social psychology of intergroup relations. The most relevant social construct is prejudice: a negative, overall affective evaluation of a group and its members (Allport, 1954). Prejudice spans a continuum of affective attitudes ranging upwards in intensity from mild aversion (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997). Defining misandry as prejudice not only situates it in a well-established tradition of theory and research, but has practical value. Since men and women are so interdependent and intimate (Glick & Fiske, 1996), and given the powerful and internalised norms that constrain prejudice (Crandall et al., 2002), research participants are unlikely to experience or express generalized, sustained, or continuous hatred of an entire gender group. It is perhaps telling that extreme misogyny is most evident in the contemporary incel movement, comprised of men who feel excluded from intimacy with women (Farrell et al., 2019).

It is important to note that not all negative thoughts and feelings count as prejudice. Prejudice must be differentiated from stereotypes per se. For example, men are widely stereotyped as less compassionate than women, but also as more ambitious and brilliant (Leslie et al., 2015)). Likewise, intergroup emotions such as anger also should not count as prejudice (Mackie et al., 2009). Just as we can be very angry at a friend or family member but still love them, it is possible to feel anger toward a group and its members without evaluating them negatively overall.

Do feminists harbour misandrist attitudes?

To derive testable hypotheses from the claim that feminists hate men, we need not only to define its constituent terms but what is being said about them. If we take the claim to mean that *all* feminists hate men it must be false (since surely some of the millions of feminists worldwide do not), and to take it to mean that *some* feminists hate men is to reduce it to a truism (since surely some do). The sensible interpretation is therefore that the stereotype holds that feminists *tend* to hate men (e.g., Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997). To test this interpretation, we need to determine the central tendency of feminists' attitudes to men and compare it to some benchmark. A *relative* interpretation of the stereotype compares feminists' attitudes to those of other people: feminists' attitudes to men are more negative than nonfeminists'. An *absolute* interpretation compares them to a neutral reference value: feminists' attitudes are more negative than positive.

In light of its perseverance and cultural prominence, surprisingly few studies have examined its veracity. All have been founded on the relative interpretation of the stereotype. Their findings have been mixed. One study traced 62 American students as they started and completed a women's studies course that exposed them to feminist thinking. Though their feminist identity and beliefs were stronger when they completed the course, there was no detectable change in their prejudice toward men (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1999). In contrast to this lack of support for the stereotype that feminism and feminists tend to be misandrist, Iazzo (1983) developed a bespoke scale of stereotypes of men in the domains of marriage, parenthood, work, and personality and physical characteristics, and found that a group of 28 American feminists (recruited from a chapter of a leading feminist organisation) endorsed significantly less positive stereotypes than a control group of 104 local women. Henderson-King and Stewart (1997) found that among 234

American college students, those who identified as feminists recorded less positive attitudes to men than their nonfeminist classmates. In direct contrast, the authors of another study (Anderson et al., 2009) found that 41 US college students who identified as feminists scored significantly lower on a ‘hostility to men’ scale than did 167 peers who identified as non-feminist.

The mixed findings of this handful of studies is unsurprising given their reliance on small convenience samples. Their low evidential value is aggravated by the use of widely varying dependent measures, including some that confound affective evaluation of men with the endorsement of specific stereotypes about them. Larger, more representative samples and more robust and interpretable measures are clearly needed. It is also important that the design and hypotheses of research are motivated by an explicit theoretical framework, without which it is difficult to interpret mixed findings. To date, there has been little attempt to formulate a theory of how feminists evaluate men.

We (Hopkins-Doyle et al, 2024) distilled relevant social-psychological theories into a theoretical model of feminists’ attitudes to men. In this model, feminists attitudes to men are guided by opposing psychological forces, some of which promote more positive, and some less positive, attitudes to men. Note that it is intended to model the attitudes of *female* feminists in particular, not least because the stereotype seems to be focused on them. In this model, the forces that promote less positive attitudes to men are associated with perceptions of threat. Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan et al., 2016) identifies perceptions of threat to the ingroup as a major cause of prejudice toward outgroups. Feminism is characteristically concerned with the realistic and symbolic threats that men pose to women, through economic and political oppression, discrimination, violence, overt misogyny,

objectification, sexual assault and harassment. All in all, this means that relative to nonfeminists, feminists are likely to perceive men as more of a threat, and thereby to harbour more prejudice (framed differently, less positive attitudes) to men.

On the other hand, the forces that promote more positive attitudes to men are associated with perceptions of gender similarity. Traditional gender ideology is predicated on gender differentiation – the view that men and women are essentially different (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In general, feminists typically eschew and oppose traditional gender ideology in general, and its claims about gender difference in particular, regarding them as mythical justifications of prescribed gender roles and inequalities (e.g., Fine, 2012). Since we tend to feel more positively towards people and groups that we perceive as more similar to ourselves (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000), this entails that feminists will have more favourable attitudes toward men because they see them as more similar to women.

Our simple theoretical model of opponent processes is concerned only with the *relative* interpretation of the stereotype that feminists are misandrist – that is, the view that their affective evaluation of men is less positive than women who are not feminist. Indeed, research to date has been concerned only with this interpretation. What then of the *absolute* interpretation of the stereotype – that feminists' attitudes to men tend to be negative rather than positive? In colloquial terms, we tend to think of this interpretation as a 'non-starter'. Overall evaluations of individuals and groups tend to be more positive than negative (e.g., Brewer & Silver, 1978; Sears, 1983). This suggests – though it is an empirical question that we addressed in our research – that we are likely to be dealing with variations in positivity, from qualified to enthusiastic, rather than negatively, from moderate antipathy to hatred.

Informed by this theoretical model of feminists' attitude to men, and a testable framing of the stereotype that feminists are man-haters, we conducted five empirical studies, complemented by a random effects meta-analysis of their findings (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2024). The 9,799 participants were drawn from various national territories including the US, UK, Poland, Italy, Japan, India, South Korea, and China (separate samples were recruited from mainland China, Macau, Taiwan, and Hong Kong). Most samples (18 samples in total) were recruited through convenience sampling, comprising university students or participant panels on Prolific (REF). Two samples (one from Poland, one from the UK) were nationally representative. The proportion of participants who identified as feminist was 40.1% overall, and ranged from 8.1% (in the Polish nationally representative sample) to 72% (in a convenience sample of British psychology undergraduates).

Across these studies, feminism was operationalised in discrete and continuous measures of feminist identification (e.g., "Are you a feminist"; "How feminist do you consider yourself to be"), feminist ideology (including core or liberal feminist beliefs such as "Girls and women have not been treated as well as boys and men in our society"; and feminist collective action (including participation in and support for the #metoo movement as well as a generic, established measure of willingness to take part in demonstrations and other feminist actions). Attitudes to men were operationalised in a variety of ways including, in most studies, feeling thermometers in which participants indicated their overall feelings toward men on a scale ranging from 'extremely cool/unfavourable' to 'extremely warm/favourable', with a marked midpoint labelled 'neutral' (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997), and in some studies, scales including liking and trust of men, emotional relations to men, and benevolence and hostility to men (Glick & Fiske, 1999). In one study, we used the Single-Category

Implicit Association Test (Karpinski & Steinman, 2006) which relies on reaction times to discern whether a target group (here, men), are associated with positive or negative mental representations.

We also took measures of realistic and symbolic threat (e.g., “Many women live in fear of men’s aggression”, & “Men do not value childrearing as much as they should”: Stephan et al., 2000), and gender similarity using a variant of the Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) scale (Aron et al., 1992) in which participants indicated which of an increasingly close and overlapping pair of circles, in the style of a Venn diagram, “best describes the similarity or difference between men and women”. Since we wanted to conduct critical tests of the focal stereotype, we hypothesized that feminist identification, ideology, and collective action would be associated with less positive attitudes to men. Though these hypotheses were directional, we nonetheless conducted two-tailed significance tests. This enabled us to consider as statistically significant any results in the opposite direction – that is, findings that feminism was associated with more positive attitudes to men.

Though there were some variations between studies, findings were on the whole remarkably consistent. For brevity we focus mostly on the results arising from mixed-effects meta-analyses of all data, and focus mostly on effects associated with feminist identification. These showed, first, that feminists’ attitudes to men were significantly more positive than neutral when subjected to one-sample tests against the midpoint, $d = 0.73$. The results thus contradict the belief that feminists are misandrist in *absolute* terms. Results also failed to support the *relative* interpretation of the stereotype: the valence of feminists’ overall attitudes to men did not differ significantly from those of nonfeminists ($d = -0.07$). In our study of the SC-IAT, feminists ($d = 0.71$) and nonfeminists ($d = 0.59$) harboured positive implicit attitudes

to men that did not differ significantly from each other. Two studies testing theoretical mechanisms showed, consistent with our model of opponent mechanisms, that feminists perceived that men are a greater threat, but also more similar to women. Also as predicted by this model, these perceptions were associated with less, and more, positive attitudes to men respectively.

We did not meta-analyse effects involving feminist ideology and collective action, but found across studies that participants' core or liberal feminist beliefs were significantly associated with the valence of their attitudes to men. In the one study that included non-mainstream feminist ideologies, radical and cultural feminism were associated with less positive attitudes to men. These effects were robust, but their magnitude was such that a participant would have to be located 3 or 4 standard deviations above the mean for their predicted attitudes to men to fall to neutral values. Finally, we observed no reliable association between feminist collective action, including participation and support for the #metoo movement, and attitudes to men.

Is the belief that feminists hate men widely held and mistaken?

The evidence and logic we have outlined so far show that when translated into coherent and observable concepts, the belief that feminists hate men fails to withstand empirical scrutiny. Stereotypes however tend not to be mere beliefs but widely shared beliefs (Beukeboom & Burgers, 2019; Haslam et al., 1997). Following other scholars (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Roy et al., 2007), our work was motivated by the hypothesis that feminism is not only misunderstood *by some* but *generally* misunderstood, with meaningful sociopolitical consequences. Though terms like 'widely' and 'generally' are dangerously undefined, a stringent and testable definition requires that the stereotype is consensual: the beliefs of an entire population (say, at

national level) should conform to it (Jussim et al., 2011)). Specifically, this requires that the average person believes that feminists' attitudes to men are more negative than positive (the absolute version of the stereotype), or more negative than nonfeminists' attitudes (the relative version).

To test these hypotheses, we (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2024, Study 4 and 5) asked participants to estimate the attitudes of feminists and nonfeminists on the same items used to solicit their own attitudes – predominantly, the feeling thermometers. Participants believed that feminists' attitudes fell significantly below scale midpoints – in other words, that they were more negative than positive (d = -0.22). Participants also perceived feminists' attitudes to be significantly more negative than nonfeminists' attitudes. Thus, we obtained clear confirmation of both hypotheses.

Though there is an obvious discrepancy between feminists' attitudes and participants' beliefs about them, this is not sufficient to establish that participants were mistaken. Not only must participants' estimates and feminists' attitudes be measured in the same way, but participants must make these estimates with the correct reference population in mind. Thus, following best practice in studies on self-other biases (e.g., Krueger & Dunning, 1999), we asked participants to estimate how they believed relevant participants in the study (e.g., "women who indicated 'yes' to the question 'are you a feminist'") would have answered the same questions. Any discrepancy is therefore a clear misprediction of the precisely-defined responses of a precisely-defined group of people. Thus, we can conclude that participants *falsely* believed that feminists' reported attitudes to men are negative both in absolute terms and relative those of nonfeminists'. Further, direct comparisons of feminists' responses to participants' estimates revealed that participants underestimated the

positivity of feminists' attitudes to men (*d* = -0.95). Though to a significantly lesser degree, even feminist participants made the same mistake (*d*s for the error ranged from -0.38 among male feminists in Study 4 to -1.44 among male feminists in Study 5).

What mechanisms underly this mistaken stereotype?

Our studies show that the belief that feminists harbour misandrist attitudes is widely shared and therefore qualifies as a stereotype, and also show that this stereotype is inaccurate. In terms of its underlying mechanisms, it is therefore a counterexample to the 'stereotype accuracy' view of social stereotypes (e.g., Jussim et al., 2011). People's inferences about feminists must be faulty, based on faulty information, or both. Our studies uncovered two types of fault in people's inferences. The first was consistent with the motivated reasoning tradition in social psychology (Allport, 1954; Haslam et al., 1997; Kunda, 1999; Tetlock, 2002): inferences about feminists' attitudes to men were associated with ideological unease or opposition to feminism. Specifically, the belief that feminists harbour negative attitudes to men was reliably associated with hostile sexism, a gender ideology that perceives women as trying to usurp men's dominant social position (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

The second type of fault was consistent with the heuristics-and-biases tradition in social psychology (e.g., Milne & Bodenhausen, 1994): controlling for participants' ideological motivations, their inferences about feminists' attitudes to men were founded on mistaken assumptions. In Studies 4 and 5 we asked participants to estimate the degree to which feminists and nonfeminists perceived men as a threat to women, and perceived men and women as similar. We found (adjusting for hostile sexism) that participants accurately perceived that feminists see men as a greater threat to women, and accurately appreciated that this in turn is

associated with less positive attitudes to men. Participants also accurately perceived that believing men and women to be similar was associated with more positive attitudes to men. In many respects, therefore, the structural logic of participants' mental models of feminists' attitudes was impeccable. However, they were incorrect in one crucial respect: they perceived that feminists see men as less similar to women. Thus, though experimental and longitudinal evidence is needed to establish causality, misperceptions of feminists' beliefs about gender similarity may contribute to the misandry myth.

Precisely why participants misunderstood feminists in this way was beyond the scope of our studies. We argued however that it may arise from a heuristic misunderstanding of activist discourses. Feminists publicly and necessarily urge solidarity among women, and highlight distinctive aspects of women's experiences including discrimination and prejudice (Anderson, 2015). We speculated that such discourses are easy to perceive as divisive (e.g., Chinchilla, 2018), and to *mis*perceive as suggesting that men and women are fundamentally different. Feminist discourses also involve criticism of men, and an extensive research literature on intergroup criticism (negative comments about another group's behaviours or traits) shows that it tends to be seen as motivated by prejudice rather than by a sincere effort to foster positive change (e.g., Hornsey et al., 2002; Sutton et al., 2006; Thürmer & Macrae, 2021). Thus, we speculate that this heuristic view of intergroup criticism may be in part responsible for the misandry myth: it is hard to criticize another group without looking like a hater.

The possibility that participants' beliefs about feminists are founded on faulty information, as well as faulty inferences, was also beyond the scope of our studies. A resurgent tradition of thought in social psychology holds that people's faulty beliefs

may stem from defects in available information (Dawtry et al., 2015; Fiedler & Wänke, 2009; Lazer et al., 2018). As Galesic et al. (2012, p. 7) put it, biases can result from “an unbiased mind acting in a particular social structure”. One such distortion in the environment may arise from normal communication processes. Information that provokes strong negative emotional reactions including disgust and anger tends to be more communicable than other types of information, and can lead to distorted perceptions of the social environment (Schaller & Conway, 2002; Wilson et al., 2020). One example is the intense coverage given to feminists who promote overtly misandrist ideas (e.g., Harmange, 2020)). Such messages are likely amplified on both sides – by feminists as they debate these ideas, and by opponents of feminism who are motivated to discredit feminism (Ging, 2019). The information that people get about feminists’ attitudes to men is likely biased systematically by these communication processes. These processes are worthy of sustained research attention because they may contribute to the large-scale misunderstanding of feminism that is evident in our data.

The scope of the misandry myth

A myth is a false and widespread belief (OED). Since both criteria are met by the belief that feminists in general harbour prejudice toward men, we dubbed this belief *the misandry myth* (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2024). In so doing, we did not intend to portray the concept of misandry itself as a myth. Defined specifically as prejudice toward men, it clearly exists. Some scholars and lay commentators however have argued that the term is deeply misleading (Ringrose & Lawrence, 2018). Their critique is that the etymology and use of ‘misandry’ wrongly portrays it as some kind of equivalent to misogyny: its mirror image. In particular, they point out that misandry is used to refer to a hypothetical nexus of attitudes and discriminatory social

practices that systematically disadvantage men and boys (Marwick & Caplan, 2018-examples). They also point out that misandry and misogyny are decidedly *not* equivalent at these structural, systemic, or institutional level. To a much greater extent than misandry, for example, misogyny is or has been manifested in sexual assault, harassment, and objectification, in spousal homicide, and exclusion of an entire gender group from employment, education, and political representation. Unlike misandry, misogyny is implicated in mass killings, political authoritarianism, and support for political violence (Hart et al., 2023; Rottweiler et al., 2024; – Bettina Rottweiler, James Piazza). Thus, the belief that misandry and misogyny are equivalent at the systemic or institutional level is clearly false. These macrosocial differences also suggest that misandry may have different functions at the individual level of analysis, including associations with different emotions, cognitions, and behavioural tendencies. Whether this is so, and widely misunderstood to the point that it can be described as a myth, is an important question for further research (e.g., following the template of Hopkins-Doyle et al.'s, 2019, studies of misunderstandings of benevolent sexism).

Thus far we have considered whether the concept of misandry may be *more* broadly mythical than the specific sense shown by Hopkins-Doyle et al. (2024). However, it is also important to consider any sense in which it may be *less* mythical. However inaccurate, the stereotype may have some basis in social or psychological realities. A salient reality, for example, is that women are generally rated more favourably than men. This well-established finding has been dubbed the 'women are wonderful' effect (REF). In our own research, participants had more favourable attitudes to women than to men. This effect was more pronounced among feminists, because though they did not seem to be any less favourable about men, they were

more favourable about women (*d* = 0.25). Awareness of feminists' stronger *preference* for women, and the relatively less favourable attitudes to men reported by feminists and nonfeminists alike, may provide a heuristic and emotional impetus to the misandry myth.

This women are wonderful effect is, of course, far from the only relative disadvantage faced by men and boys, who for example experience widespread academic underachievement (Hartley & Sutton, 2013), are much more likely to be murdered (albeit generally by other men) and yet feel unable to disclose their anxieties about crime (Sutton & Farrall, 2005). These disadvantages are widely resented by Incels and men's rights groups (Ging, 2019). However, they are also of concern to feminist social scientists and activists, who locate them in the negative representations of men in traditional gender ideology as cold, unruly, emotionally restricted, and hyper dominant and competitive (Anderson, 2023; Mikołajczak et al., 2022). The so-called 'manosphere', comprising various influential strands of antifeminist and ostensibly pro-male activism, is also notable for its misandrist language. Men are labelled contemptuously as 'cucks' or 'betas' if they are perceived to be socially or sexually unsuccessful and as 'Chads' if they are perceived to be socially and sexually successful (Ging, 2019). When it occurs, misandry is not unique to or characteristic of feminism, which may be associated with more concern for men and boys' interests than is commonly recognised.

Critically, the concern and activism by at least some feminists suggests that feminists' regard and concern for men and women is not zero-sum. In Hopkins-Doyle et al. (2024), we found that feminists who had more positive attitudes to women also tended to have more positive attitudes to men (*r* = .46), whereas participants imagined that there was no such correlation (*r* = -.00). The PhD studies of one of us

(Chalmers, 2024) shows that this tendency extends beyond affective attitudes to policy preferences. Feminists in these studies did not have zero-sum beliefs about gender relations (i.e., did not see gains for women as losses for men or vice-versa), nor zero-sum preferences. In contrast, feminists' support for initiatives to promote the well-being of men and boys in domains as varied as resource allocation games, healthcare, and education was positively rather than negatively associated with their support for actions benefitting women and girls. This is consistent with the view that social progress and so-called progressive social movements are founded on universalistic and benevolent values as well as self-interest (Leach et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the strength of this positive-sum thinking and motivation was significantly underappreciated when participants were asked about feminists' preferences. These findings suggest that the misandry myth extends beyond beliefs about feminists' affective evaluation of men (indeed, the findings held when we adjusted for these beliefs) into a common misperception of the underlying agenda and purposes of feminism.

Wider implications for social psychology

Hopkins-Doyle et al.'s (2024) results are a snapshot of a given moment in history. Feminists' attitudes to men may change over time, such that they grow to dislike men as a group. They may already have other habits of thought, for example in their attributional or communicative style, not captured in our studies. But the studies document that at least in this historical moment, consensual views of feminists are mistaken, and provide evidence for new models of feminists' actual and perceived attitudes that are grounded in solidly established social psychological theory. It is worth noting that in our studies, collective anger was reliably associated with feminist identity, belief, and action tendencies, as predicted by theories about

the motivating force of this emotion in collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2007). However, our findings suggest that contrary to popular opinion and the rhetoric of some social psychological writing on this topic, (Dixon et al., 2010; Saguy et al., 2009), negative outgroup attitudes are neither necessary nor reliably associated with feminist collective action.

Given that gender relations affect the lives of practically the entire human population, it is deeply unfortunate that they are so misunderstood. Whether feminism is a good or bad thing, or whether one should or support or oppose the movement, are questions of value - 'ought' rather than 'is' - and at least arguably fall outside the scope of science. If we accept this argument, eschewing and opposing feminism per se cannot be described as a mistake in scientific terms. However, eschewing and opposing it *on the grounds that feminists hate men* really does look like such a mistake. This mistake matters according to normative frameworks in social sciences and philosophy, which hold that accurate knowledge is critical to rational choice and consent to social and political activity (Kant, 1999; Meltzer & Richard, 1981; Rawls, 1971). There is already evidence that people make this mistake. Survey studies suggest that the misandry myth deters women from the movement (Liss et al., 2001; Moore & Stathi, 2020) and animates some of its most extreme, even violent opposition (Zimmerman, 2024). We are now conducting experimental studies (thus far unpublished) showing that participants, especially men, dislike feminists to the extent that they perceive them as misandrist (consistent with reciprocity effects in the attraction literature), and are less opposed to feminists' ideas when they believe that feminists like men (consistent with analyses of perceived motives in the intergroup communication literature: Hornsey et al., 2002; Sutton et al., 2006).

The normative and practical value of truth for society and individuals confers upon social psychologists important privileges and responsibilities. Our core training equips us with all the requisite skills to identify when and how public beliefs are inaccurate. It also equips us to determine not only what beliefs are incorrect but to identify effective means to correct them. We sometimes confront and internalise normative pressure to do more than this research work, for example by acting as 'science communicators' in an ambassadorial or entrepreneurial way, acting as if we were PR consultants (Walter & Brüggemann, 2020). This no doubt suits some researchers who thrive on such work and find that it opens up new research opportunities for them (Perkmann et al., 2021. But we propose that our core obligation as social scientists is to approach empirical and theoretical questions with skill and diligence.

This is especially important in light of the many instances in which we have not quite got it right. The social psychological literature is replete with reputed errors by our participants that turned out to be artifacts of our own mistakes. These include the fundamental attribution error, the false consensus bias, and errors in causal discounting (Morris & Larrick, 1995), all of which largely vanish when we revisit our methodology or assumptions about what comprises the correct judgement.

Overdiagnosing mistakes by our participants, or using language that may create the impression that we are doing this, is a persistent tendency. In other recent work, for example, some of us (Leach et al., 2023b) have addressed claims made in the study of human perceptions of animals that people are guilty of either 'mind-denial' or 'anthropomorphism.' Whether we grant animals too many or too few social, cognitive and emotional capabilities is important to understand because it forms the moral basis of our choices in food consumption, medical research, conservation, and

in our relationships with pets (REFs). These terms imply that humans err in one direction or the other, but the research has very seldom been suited to test this hypothesis – for example, it has often relied on ratings of animal sentience on subjective, 1-7 response scales on which there is no right or wrong answer. In our studies (Leach et al., 2023b) we observed that participants showed biased patterns of belief updating when compared to a normative benchmark given by Bayes' thereom. Given new information that suggests animals are stupid, they updated their beliefs too far in this direction. When new information suggested animals are smart, they did not update their beliefs far enough (see Leach et al., 2023c, for studies of this topic that used memory paradigms, which also solicit judgments that can be said to be right or wrong).

Returning finally to the question of feminists' attitudes to men, previous studies of the misandry myth had yielded valuable insights into factors that might shape attitudes to men (e.g. feminist identification, education in women's studies, membership of feminist organisations). However, they were not equipped to show that people's beliefs about feminists were wrong. Studying whether people's beliefs are inaccurate or not is not always a first priority for social psychologists since, wrong or not, beliefs may have the same effects. But we hope that we have been able to convince the reader that just sometimes, the truth or falsity of people's beliefs matters, and it is worth making the effort to determine whether people are right or wrong.

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