On April 28, 2005, Dr. Janice S. Lieberman presented an enlightening discourse on the concept of masculinity in the 21st century. As a training and supervising analyst and faculty member at the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research (IPTAR) in New York with special interests in gender issues, body image concerns, the analysis of single women over 30, and the relationship between psychoanalysis and contemporary art, Dr. Lieberman has written and presented numerous papers and book reviews, authored the book *Body Talk: Looking and Being Looked at in Psychotherapy* (2000), and coauthored the book *The Many Faces of Deceit: Omissions, Lies and Disguise in Psychotherapy* (1996). In her paper Lieberman revisited male psychology and concluded that little has been written about what it is like to be a man in a man’s body and that there are many kinds of “masculinity.” This contradicts society’s assumption that men manifest a limited range of male characteristics: dominant, in charge, and rational. Lieberman stressed the need to recognize that some men are not suited for the traditional role of the “strong” primary bread-winner.

Lieberman noted that the role of the father, which encompasses the concept of one’s own father, as well as the idea of oneself as a potential father, affects a man’s sense of his own masculinity. More specifically, the “massive collapse of the function of father/father figure,” Lieberman cited Verhaeghe, may influence a developing boy’s ideas regarding gender roles, as well as his ability to internalize the relationship of his mother and father. To best illustrate her concepts, Lieberman presented three cases of men who externally appeared stereotypically male (i.e., each
was considered the dominant family member, was the major breadwinner, and was married to a passive woman) but suffered from internal conflicts regarding issues of identity, gender, and sexuality. These complex and emotional dilemmas resulted in feelings of suicidality, depression, anxiety, and ego-dystonic behaviors that rebelled against traditional male norms for all three men.

In all three cases Lieberman identified similarities, such as that all three men had mothers who assumed traditional roles, all had fathers who were overbearing, and all were either the youngest or the middle child, suggesting that, perhaps, the parents were “burned out” by the time the patients came along. Lieberman provided rich demographic data, background information, and detailed treatment material about each case, although, in order to protect the identity of the patients, only general facts can be revealed in this summary. In some cases, traumatic experiences were related to these patients’ behaviors. For example, one patient’s homoerotic fantasies and sexual harassment of a female coworker appeared to be a reenactment of having been sexually abused as a child by his older brother. In another case, Lieberman articulated how a male patient’s secret Internet identity as a cross-dresser, and erotic fantasies of being a woman (who was “being made love to by a man”), was related to his family’s focus on the nurturance of women over men. This patient’s observations of his father’s devoted caretaking of his mother, as well as his experience of his sisters’ manipulation of his parents, produced dreams flooded with castration images and fueled his desire to be a beautiful woman (i.e., cross-dresser) for whom others would care.

Dr. Arthur A. Lynch, training and supervising analyst at The American Institute for Psychoanalysis, the discussant, stimulated by the rich case material in Dr. Lieberman’s paper, acknowledged the multiple “male psychology” perspectives endemic to this postmodern era, while also questioning the differential influences of biology, psychology, and sociology on masculinity. Lynch asked a series of questions: “What is male psychology?” “Is it the psychological study of man?” “Is it a learned process?” “Is it driven by a macro system?” and, finally, “Does anatomy determine destiny?” He answered by stating that there was a broad range/spectrum that distinguished what was male or masculine. Lynch asserted that this spectrum allowed for gender variations and that perhaps traditional expectations were based on ignorance and ideological intolerance. Although men may be expected to become the “primary breadwinners,” gender roles have shifted. Women have become more assertive and some men have become more comfortable with being sensitive. Lynch also elaborated on Lieberman’s emphasis on the role of the father in the establishment of “masculinity.” Lynch argued that in