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Making the Personal Political

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The men's movement is divided. Some men believe that merely by meeting together—in psychotherapy, in men's groups, or in men's gatherings and conferences—they can discover the secret of "being a man" and dramatically improve their situation. This group includes psychologists who do "men's work," men who lead and participate in large workshops and subscribe to the "mythopoetic" school of thought, "men's rights" advocates including divorce reformers, a large number of men who are in recovery from drug, alcohol, and other addictions, and men who have survived childhood incest and abuse. Another group, the "political" or "pro-feminist" segment of the men's movement, believes it is the inequities inherent in our social relations that cause men's difficulties, that one cannot change one gender's plight without changing the relations between genders, and that straight men just join with women and gays in a struggle to radically transform those restrictive social relations.

The split is reminiscent of the 1960s when one large group of activists believed the righteous struggle was a political one to end racism, war, and poverty while another large group could not tolerate the personal relationships that evolved among the activists and instead created a youth-oriented counterculture. There were attempts to mend the split between

those who wanted to concentrate on political struggles and those who wanted to evolve new forms of personal life, including the notion that the personal is political.

The women's movement has survived from that era and thrived, in large part because women have succeeded to a significant extent in making the personal political. Of course, women share a common oppression, which serves to unite them. There is less unity among men. This is not only because "men are the oppressors," though that is an issue men must eventually confront. It is more a matter of men's proclivity to compete for dominance. Men have trouble agreeing on anything because each would like to convince the others he has the sole correct answer to what ails us. So we argue.

The current divisions of the men's movement bring to mind another movement's rift, the splits that erupted in 1912 between Sigmund Freud and his two brilliant collaborators, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler (Gay, 1988). It was an unfortunate parting of ways. Freud was the brilliant scientist, philosopher, and clinical strategist. Jung was more in touch with the creative spirit, the meaning of myths, and the mystery and magic of the unconscious. Adler explored the social roots of each individual's feelings of inadequacy, and the "masculine protest" that serves to compensate men for their deeply felt sense of inferiority. If these three pioneers of psychoanalysis were alive today, I imagine Freud might be a leader among therapists who do "men's work," Jung

would certainly be among the mythopoets, and Adler would likely feel at home among the "political" or "pro-feminist" sector of the men's movement. Perhaps, if the three had continued to collaborate in spite of theoretical differences and personality clashes, we would have a more unified theory of psyche, soul and society than we have today.

Psychotherapists explain men's feelings of emptiness and inadequacy in relation to early childhood deprivation, the mythopoetic section of the men's movement argues that the psychologists and the "political" men lack soul and vitality; and the "political men" claim that therapists and mythopoets are ethnocentric and lack politics. Let us assume that there is a kernel of truth in all three claims, and that we must combine all three approaches if we are to have an effective men's movement. In other words, the men's movement must relate to the personal needs that cause men to seek change (including the personal sense of inadequacy that makes men feel threatened by powerful women, the need to find meaning in one's life, and the need to express one's spirituality), while remaining aware of the social tragedies that are unfolding in front of our eyes (including the widening gap between rich and poor, high unemployment, unbridled racism, homophobia and sexism, homelessness, the destruction of the environment, and the constant threat of war). In this chapter I will examine the strengths and shortcomings of the psychological/psychotherapeutic, the mythopoetic/spiritual, and the political/pro-feminist approaches, and suggest that an integration of all three

is needed if we are to redefine power and significantly restructure gender roles and gender relations.

The Psychological Approach and the Dual Potential of Psychotherapy

Herbert Marcuse (1955) theorized the dual potential of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in his discussion of repressive desublimation. In order to demonstrate the elusiveness of the notion of social progress, he played on two psychoanalytic terms: repression and sublimation. Sublimation is the diversion of psychic (instinctual) energy from sexual to nonsexual aims, for instance, from erotic fantasies into creative ventures. Freud believed that repression of sexual impulses was at the core of the neuroses, and he viewed sublimation as a way to channel the impulses into socially accepted activities. Of course, in Freud's Vienna, massive repression of sexuality was socially sanctioned, in fact prescribed. Many early analysts, particularly Wilhelm Reich (1945), believed that a lessening of culturally mandated sexual repression would free people from neurotic constrictions and at the same time bring about social progress.

Since Freud's day, sexuality has become part of public life. Sex is explored openly in the cinema, manipulated by advertising, taught to the young, and discussed in newspapers and magazines. Are the younger generations who are immersed in explicit sexuality from a very tender age

any more free of neurotic constrictions, or any more ready to make a revolution, than were those who learned to repress sexuality in Freud's day? There may no longer be the same need to sublimate; the forms of neurosis and character structure may change; but sex thus "de-sublimated" can still be "repressive"—this to the extent consumers are programmed to desire and fantasize about *Playboy* bunnies and movie stars, for instance, in the service of commodity sales. Marcuse's point is that there is no single event or advance that represents progress in any absolute sense. What is progress at one moment or in one context may well become the new form of repression in the next. In fact, built into contemporary social relations is a tendency to co-opt seemingly subversive developments and weave them into the fabric of existing commodity relations.

I have presented an example of the dual potential of psychotherapy in regard to friendship (Chapter Eight). Therapy can help men transcend their personal blocks and be better friends; at the same time reliance on a therapist diminishes the urgency of a man's need to take time out from a busy schedule and develop same-sex intimacies. Elsewhere I discuss therapy's dual potential in relation to the widespread practice of brief psychotherapy (Kupers, 1986).

"Men's work" is the latest rubric of the therapy world. Everyone seems to be doing it, women therapists as well as men. A plethora of books have been published on male psychology, men's dreams, men in therapy, and so

forth. There are leaderless men's groups, and there are those that are run by therapists. Ideally, on the positive side of therapy's dual potential, therapy can help men reclaim their vitality and power in interpersonal relationships without becoming sexist. Therapy can also help men be more in touch with their feelings, more open with others, and more spontaneous. It can help men work through unresolved conflicts with their fathers, as well as their ambivalence about being a father. Men in therapy can process their conflicts about work and ambition and seek a work place that makes them feel comfortable. And therapy can help men transcend their obsession with pornography and their conflicts about homosexuality. All of these functions of therapy weigh in heavily on the progressive side of therapy's dual potential.

On the other side, immersion in psychotherapy tends to direct one's gaze inward, away from social problems. James Hillman (1990), a Jungian analyst who has become a leader of the mythopoetic men's movement, says it very well:

> Why are the intelligent people—at least among the white middle class—so passive now? Because the sensitive, intelligent people are in therapy! They've been in therapy in the United States for 30, 40 years, and during that time there's been a tremendous political decline in this country.

Psychotherapy turns our gaze inward as we search for the childhood precedents of our current tragedies or the deeper meaning of our problems being intimate. Meanwhile, social problems are ignored by a numbed

populace.

Another Jungian who is popular at men's gatherings is Robert Moore (Moore & Gillette, 1990). His approach is the opposite of Hillman's:

> Ours is a psychological age rather than an institutional one. What used to be done for us by institutional structures and through ritual process, we now have to do inside ourselves, for ourselves. Ours is a culture of the individual rather than the collective, (p. 45)

Moore grasps the problem correctly—it is our extreme individualism. But unlike Hillman he leaves the social problem untouched as he instructs the privileged few how to cope with our hyper-individualistic status quo.

The clinician is constantly making a choice: focus entirely inward or integrate the inner dynamics with due consideration of contemporary social reality. I hear a certain list of complaints from a client in therapy. I can check the list against the known symptoms of a mental disorder—for instance depression or narcissistic personality—and begin to analyze the childhood roots of a man's narcissism; or I can think about the man's complaints in the context of social events. Some clinicians have attempted to integrate psychological and social concerns in their theories and clinical practices, including Alfred Adler (1927), Wilhelm Reich (1972), Erich Fromm (1962), Franz Fanon (1965), Franco Basaglia (1980), R. D. Laing (1967), The Radical Therapist Collective (1971), Jean Baker Miller (1976), and Joel Kovel (1981).

It is relatively easy to demonstrate the interconnections of psychological and social themes in the lives of actual men, if the therapist chooses to do so. Gender issues, in particular, touch on the interconnections.

Roger walks into my office for the first time just after hitting his wife. He insists: “It was only a slap with an open hand, she’s making too much of it.”

He is convinced that if he does not seek therapy she will leave him forever. Of course, if she had not insisted, he would never have come to see a psychiatrist. A part of him believes her current ultimatum is just another of her “histrionic stances,” and will “blow over,” just like the half dozen other times he has hit her during their five years together.

“Then why did you come to see me—couldn’t you just wait out the storm?” I ask.

“Yeah, but something’s different this time. I think she might really leave me.”

Honesty—a beginning—perhaps a toehold. If I can only maintain some semblance of neutrality, perhaps I can reach this man. But I am repelled by his sexism, the way he can brutalize a woman and worry only about whether she will leave him. At this point, I am not even certain I can work with him.

Weeks pass. He and his wife make up. He begins to like therapy. He tells me he is frightened of losing control again. We explore the roots of his uncontrollable rage, tracing it back to his relationship with an alcoholic mother. He was angry at her for never driving him to school and for never visiting his school and meeting his teachers. Maybe he was even angry at her for deserting him, leaving him at school when he was so ill-prepared to be there. When he entered kindergarten he did not know how to relate to other kids—he had spent his whole life alone at home with his mother, and there he was left to his own devices while she turned to the bottle. He was rejected by the other kids, and beaten by bullies. He did not know how to play the games. Meanwhile he longed to be home with his mother.

Roger attempted to cope, acting the loner at school, shying away from games and activities. But after the first few beatings, whenever someone tried to bully him, he lost his temper. He fought often, and beat up many opponents. He never was in any real trouble—a few suspensions, a warning here and there. By the time he entered high school he had learned to be more sociable, almost popular, and had his temper under control. In his early twenties, he lived with a woman for a year. He loved her. She left him. He beat her up. This outburst of violence frightened him, but he quickly forgot about it. His present relationship began just after that.

I ask if there is a temporal sequence to his loss of control.

"I've never thought about it in those terms. Let me think."

He ponders a moment. Then he remembers that the day he hit his wife was the day he had been unfairly penalized at work because he had failed to get an assignment done on time. He begins to make connections. He left work in a rage, came home, and started a fight with his wife.

"As if it was her fault," he adds solemnly.

This realization leads to the next: he always blamed his mother for the beatings he received on the school yard. At this point Roger recalls another relevant childhood memory: his father drank and argued loudly with his mother, occasionally beating her. This occurred in front of the boy, who was overwhelmed by a mixture of rage, fear, and impotence.

Where is the questioning to be turned at this point? Should we explore the early dynamics further? The mixture of rage, fear, and impotence he felt watching his father beat his mother? Or should we turn attention to the social context, the unfairness of the hierarchy at work, the economic realities of speedups and layoffs? Too often therapy proceeds as if by formula: first, the personal history and important intimacies are examined, then psychodynamic formulations are established, and finally the client's perceptions of the larger picture are analyzed in terms of the psychodynamics. For instance a therapist might point out that while Roger's

complaints about unfairness at work may be well founded, the thing to note is that his relationship with his supervisor resembles that with his father. This selective attention occurs in the name of therapeutic neutrality.

Of course, there are important events in Roger's past. His father, a factory worker like Roger, drank and beat Roger's mother after being fired or docked pay at work. He displaced his impotent rage from the workplace to the home, and like Roger, he was unaware of doing so. In other words, he provided the model for Roger's displacement. By encouraging Roger to focus on his early internalization of an abusive father, a therapist would be directing Roger to find the roots of his uncontrollable rage entirely inside his own psyche. Michael Lemer

points out the role of the American dream in all of this. If we believe that each individual has the potential to strike it rich and become an Andrew Carnegie or John Rockefeller, then each individual's failure to do so is attributable solely to his personal deficiencies. It was the depth to which the American dream was inscribed within the American psyche that made it so easy for psychotherapy to become an indispensable way of life for so many Americans.

It is a fact that, because of identifiable trends in the economy, plants like Roger's are speeding up their production lines or closing. The threat of the

latter is used to attain worker compliance in the former. The management of Roger's plant is resorting to authoritarian methods to enforce the speedup, methods that tend to evoke feelings of impotence and humiliation among workers. I opt to discuss this with Roger, and then extrapolate back in time and talk about how Roger's father's brutality was likewise reactive to an alienating work experience. Roger is ready to grasp the crucial difference: whereas his father felt impotent and could do nothing about it except drink and beat his mother, and whereas Roger actually was impotent as a child in terms of protecting his mother, he is now an adult and in a much better position to do something constructive about this kind of harassment at work. By admitting how bad he feels about being abusive at home, Roger is able to uncover a psychosocial dynamic that explains his misdirected rage. He decides to play a more active role in his union's struggle to end the speedup, thus hoping to diminish the humiliation he feels. And he is able to talk about all this with his wife and arrive at a new level of resolve not to abuse her in the future.

Roger's dilemma is not unique. Wife-beating, child abuse, and incest are widespread. Too often therapists focus on the psychopathology and childhood antecedents in explaining domestic violence and abuse, failing to recognize social variables such as unemployment and the kind of underemployment and demeaning work that deprive a man of his self-respect. Such conditions do not excuse the perpetrator and they do not

entirely explain his motivation to abuse, but they are important considerations nonetheless, and can be a productive topic for exploration, in therapy and in the men's movement. Working with men who abuse women and children is hard work, and I deeply respect the clinicians and counselors who are dedicated to providing this sorely needed service. For a review of their work, see Warters (1991). Of course, in doing this work, men must be accountable to the victims and the women who run shelters for battered women; at all costs we must minimize the liklihood that the batterer will be put through a counseling program only to return to his partner, supposedly "changed," and proceed to batter her again. The National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) task force on Ending Men's Violence is developing a framework for collaboration between men and women doing this kind of work.

Men are taxed heavily by the burdens of success and power. Is it any wonder there are disturbingly high rates of suicide, heart attack, hypertension, incarceration, loneliness, and depression in men? Men who can afford the fees consult therapists for advice about all of this. Thus there is a dual potential in psychotherapy and "men's work": it can serve to prop up the American dream and the idea that those of us who do not strike it rich are suffering from an inner flaw, or it can serve to give us the strength to break free of this defeatist attitude.

Men's Gatherings and Mythopoets

Men's gatherings are not new. Lionel Tiger (1969) chronicles the evolution of men's groups and gatherings from prehistoric times to the present. Today men gather in union halls, athletic fields, on picket lines, in boardrooms, at conventions, in demonstrations against racism and war, and so forth. What is new is for men to gather for the express purpose of figuring out what it means to be a man. Why don't we know that? Why do men experience a need to gather in the woods, to drum and to create rituals? It seems obvious that men are trying in these ways to fill a void in their lives. The men who gather say that in their routine lives men lack fellowship, spirituality, a meaning larger than themselves and their everyday pursuits, and a sense of their own vitality and worthiness (Erkel, 1990; Shewey, 1992; Stanton, 1991). They turn to the leaders of the men's movement for wisdom and they gather together to begin to experience mentorship, initiation, and a new kind of brotherhood. It feels good to be at such gatherings. It is fun to dance with men, to hug, to tell one's story. It even breaks down some of the posturing and intellectuality.

Shepherd Bliss borrowed the term "mythopoetic" from philosophy (where it refers to the pre-Hellenic oral tradition) and applied it to contemporary men's pursuits. Bliss (1990) says it is:

> the remythologizing of masculinity. The looking back to the old stories for our contemporary times. New images, new metaphors— and old ones.

> Because there's a lot of confusion about what it means to be a man.

Bliss goes on to say:

> When somebody dies, you cry and you grieve. But in our society we put these spells on men. We tell them big boys don't cry. Don't lean on me. Stiff upper lip. And what we need to do is break these spells. We need to remember what those exact words put on you as a man to repress you were. What were the gestures that your parents, school-teachers made and how can you free yourself of them? That's why we use storytelling, poetry, drumming, dance— to break those kinds of spells, (pp. xx)

Men "in recovery" flock to men's gatherings. They suffer from the same gender traps that afflict nonaddicts, and they are aware that they fled into addiction while trying desparately to fill the void they felt in the center of their souls. Phil Z (1990) discusses the warm collaboration between C. G. Jung and Bill W, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1939) and explains:

> The alcoholic drinks, despite the indisputable evidence that he should not, to ameliorate the psychological and spiritual suffering resulting from the loss of contact between his ego and Higher Self. The obsession to drink grows out of a misguided effort to satisfy what is, in essence, a spiritual thirst, (p. 210)

Men's gatherings offer a spiritual community, a "ritual space," and a safe place to vent all the feelings that had been trapped for so many years inside a traditional male persona or drowned in a bottle.

Terrence O'Connor (1990) reports on a large, week-long gathering he

attended:

> And there is sharing. Sometime during the week nearly every man stands and bares his heart to the group. The pain is breaking through. The burdens of isolation are dropped. Most of the sharing is about fathers and grandfathers, but some is of a more immediate nature. One construction worker, a man in his fifties, stands up and tells us that in all his life he had never let another man get physically close to him. This morning in mask-making his partner had touched his face with gentle fingers, and, here he chokes up, "and I like it." He bursts into tears. He is immediately surrounded by comforting men. (p. 38)

Of course men who so desire have every right to play drums, dance together and get in touch with those inner kings, warriors and wild men, and there is much to be gained by creating new ways for men to be together. The question is, should we stop there? Will we continue to leave those weekend gatherings and return home to an unchanged world? Will we continue to lose touch with each other between meetings, as men traditionally do, or will we establish new ways for men to be intimate on a day-to-day basis? What of political issues and social movements? What about sexism? How can men play a role in changing what ails us as a gender and as a society?

Unless men who are trying to create new forms of masculinity pay serious attention to the power relationships that shape the experience of both genders, men's meetings with each other will result in little more than nontraditional forms for male encounters. When I hear leaders in the men's movement say that the problem is that women have become too powerful and

men have lost the power they once had, I begin to worry about the possiblity that the men's movement might take a bad turn, a turn toward backlash and the reassertion of male dominance in a new guise. Susan Faludi (1991) is worried about this possibility, too. She demonstrates convincingly that, contrary to claims that women have won their freedom in the last twenty years and that it is their victory that causes problems such as partnerlessness and the feminization of poverty, women are actually far from winning the battle for equal rights and it is the same old garden variety sexism that holds women back today.

The reason men have lost their way is not that women are beginning to find theirs. Women's success in claiming a voice and a place for themselves in the public arena should be cause for men to celebrate, not a reason for men to shudder and blame women for men's feelings of inadequacy. Tony Astrachan (1986) reports on his interviews with men of all classes and races who feel their lives have been improved on account of women's gains. A large number of men realize that their feelings of inadequacy stem from the state of the economy, the requirement that men fight for dominance in a ruthless rat race if they are to feel like "real men," and the lack of any real say in this society's political direction.

The men's movement is also subject to the laws of repressive desublimation. I have mentioned the progressive potential, for instance the

opportunity to collaborate closely with other men in the creation of a new kind of community. Sharing our stories offers us an opportunity to rewrite them together. The energy that is generated at men's gatherings is a welcome alternative to men's isolation and inability to fill emotional space with each other. And the mythopoetic men's movement is becoming fiercely protective of the environment and the Earth, and opposed to wars of aggression.

But there is a dual potential in the creation of new rituals. On the one hand, there is the attempt to reclaim ageless wisdom about the conduct of lives that was passed on in myths and rituals until recent generations when change became the byword and tradition receded from our cultural life. Many people believe that by rediscovering the myths of the past we can salvage that ageless wisdom and find a more grounded path for ourselves in today's tumultuous world. On the other hand, especially when the traditions come from a past of patriarchal domination and the myths were collected from the only class that had access to the written word—Greek patricians, the aristocrats of Old England and Europe, and so forth—the values of the past, including racism, sexism, and homophobia, are passed along with the wisdom.

An example of patriarchal bias is this description of the warrior archetype by Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette (1990):

> The Warrior energy, then, no matter what else it may be, is indeed universally present in us men and in the civilizations we create, defend, and extend. It is a vital ingredient in our world-building and plays an

> important role in extending the benefits of the highest human virtues and cultural achievements to all of humanity, (p. 79)

I see nothing wrong with giving the warrior energy its due. But I do not believe that men are biologically fated to make war. Erich Fromm (1973) and Ashley Montagu (1968) debunked this biologistic bias many years ago, and it is alarming to find it reappearing in the new men's literature. Moore and Gillette rationalize wars of empire on the basis of spreading "higher" human virtues, as if the peoples and nations that have been plundered and raped by successive waves of advancing warrior nations throughout history did not have valuable cultures of their own. Have the lives of Native Americans improved since their conquest by European-American warriors?

A striking characteristic of late capitalism is the tendency for people to be alienated from various aspects of what we consider most human, and then for those aspects of humanness to reappear as commodities one can purchase —if one can afford to—in order to feel more human. Consider the human need to have clear skies, to see trees and beautiful lanscapes, to feel connected with nature. Industrial urban life means smog, buildings on every horizon, and concrete pavements that insulate people from the earth. The aspiring young adult must inhabit this smoggy and unnatural environment if she or he wishes to become successful, but then after a certain modicum of success has been attained, she or he can begin to buy back what was given up, for instance, by moving to the suburbs or buying a home in the hills, thereby

purchasing a clearer sky and a landscape with trees.

The therapist's fees, like the mortgage on a home in the hills, can be understood as a cost of rediscovering aspects of one's humanity that were set aside during the climb up the ladder of success. And the men's movement, like the psychotherapy industry, appeals to men who are relatively successful but unhappy. If the weekend gathering and telling of stories merely serves to satiate the average man's desire for brotherhood and meaning and he returns to his everyday life without creating anything new from what he learned, then men's gatherings will become simply an interesting diversion for an affluent minority of men. What if it turns out that the men who say they want to change the definition of masculinity merely want to feel better, to feel less constricted by the cruel requirements of the "real man" role? What is to keep men from using their privileges and power to develop new ways of being masculine without doing anything to end sexist gender relations?

The Political, Pro-Feminist Men's Movement

Among the ranks of the "political men," for instance, those who attend the annual National Conference on Men and Masculinity sponsored by the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS), are men who teach gender studies at colleges, others who teach men who batter that there are better ways to live among women and children, activists in the struggle for

gay and lesbian rights, activists in the struggle against AIDS, quite a few therapists and healers who do "men's work," and others who ascribe to the three prongs of the NOMAS program: "pro-feminist, gay affirmative, enhancing men's lives" (Laphan, 1990). The conferences are not huge—there were just under five hundred people at the sixteenth M&.M conference in June, 1991 in Tucson—and occur only once a year. One large contingent of the men attending are straight, another gay and another bisexual. The dialogues are inspiring. Imagine gay and bisexual men, in a public forum, accusing straights of homophobia, and the straights listening very attentively in order to understand what the gays mean. The bisexual men also speak about their feeling that they "disappear" when men think in either/or terms about gay and straight.

Michael Kimmel (1991) offers a "pro-feminist" analysis of men's lives, and suggests a political strategy for the men's movement. He includes a struggle in the workplace to halt sexual harassment, a campaign to end date rape, and a collective assault on AIDS. It is a good program. Its enactment would help to change for the better what it means to be a man. A political perspective like Kimmel's, or like that of NOMAS provides the piece that is missing for me at other men's gatherings.

The problem with any political strategy that enumerates priority issues is that other deserving issues are necessarily excluded from the list. I would

add to Kimmel's list the struggle to save workers' jobs in an age of workplace mechanization, speedup and runaway plants; and the struggle to save the schools and create meaningful work for inner city youth. Unemployment, underemployment and demeaning working conditions are the biggest cause of inadequacy in American men today. The gap is widening between the rich and the poor, and politicians of both parties are trying to convince the middle class that the only way they can solidify their position among the rich is by jettisoning the poor, ignoring the homeless, and locking lawbreakers in prison. The result is that twenty-five percent of young black males are incarcerated or on probation or parole. Instead of scratching our heads at men's events wondering why so few blue collar workers and men of color are in attendance, we could be reaching out and joining the struggles of working class and minority men to improve working and living conditions. In fact, many of the men who consider themselves political and attend men's events are doing just that—but it is difficult to reflect that kind of political commitment in a list of programmatic priorities. Likewise, the struggle to prevent war and nuclear annihilation should be high on the list of priorities for the men's movement. I am certain Kimmel and other list writers would agree.

The progressive, political sector of the men's movement faces a difficult challenge: given the dual potential of men's emerging awareness of gender issues, what can be done to push the movement in a progressive direction?

For instance, there are some men who would channel the mushrooming men's movement into a campaign to increase men's rights, including the right to greater child visitation and the right not to be denied a job on account of affirmative action policies. At a time when women and gays are suffering from sexual harassment and gay-bashing and straight white men occupy an inordinate proportion of the positions of power in this inequitable society, I do not believe men's rights are the top priority. Men are needed in the struggle for abortion rights, the struggle to end men's violence against women, the struggle to attain equal opportunity for all at the workplace, the struggle to end sexual harassment and racism on the job, the struggle to end gay-bashing, and the list goes on. But in order to win support among men for the struggle to end gender inequity, political men must relate to what makes men dissatisfied with their lot and draws them to men's books and men's events.

Pro-feminist men risk becoming too one-sidedly political and losing sight of the psychological pain and spiritual vacuum that plagues so many men. Men who are hurting might not be interested in running to the aid of women who are oppressed, and this is especially the case if a man believes his immediate pain was caused by a woman's rejection. And a one-sided political analysis loses sight of the spiritual quest so many men are undertaking. As I mentioned in Chapter Four in relation to pornography, there is some danger that political, pro-feminist men will be viewed as self-righteous and

judgmental, and will thereby lose many potential supporters for the anti-sexist men's movement.

Bob Connell's (1992) review of Robert Bly's *Iron John* and Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly* suffers from this kind of one-sidedness. Connell pokes fun at the men who gather in the woods and beat drums. Then he suggests a political strategy that includes more men sharing in childrearing, struggling to end sexual harassment and other sexist and homophobic practices, working toward equal employment opportunities for women and gays, organizing political support for battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers, and so forth. It is a very good agenda for the men's movement. Again, one might add other items. The problem is that Connell sets up an us-versus-them dichotomy of political-versus-nonpolitical men, and then fails to offer the latter group any reason to ascribe to his political agenda if they do not already agree with his set of political principles. How can political men recruit those who have not yet made the connections? Certainly not by proclaiming that the "correct" political strategy is to fight for a particular list of things.

Connell ends his review by suggesting: "Maybe some of the warriors would care to come down from the hills and lend a hand in the cause of social justice." This is not a bad idea. But first, someone must prove to those warriors that by coming out of the, hills and struggling to end sexism and other forms of domination, they will be improving their own lives in

important ways. Perhaps they are afraid that in the new world of strong women, liberated gays, and pro-feminist men they would be forced to be serious and politically correct all of the time, and life would be a drag.

Men cannot be politicized by condemning all that it has meant to them to be a man. John Stoltenberg's (1989) *Refusing to Be a Man* errs in this direction. Men who feel some degree of dissatisfaction with the "real man" role and feel slightly inadequate, but refuse to compensate by resorting to sexism—just the men a political men's movement wants to attract—do not want to hear about refusing to be a man. They want reasons to feel good about who they are, including their masculine qualities. The men's movement must validate men's strengths—for instance their capacity to protect and provide for those they love—because men will never change if all they hear is that everything they have stood for until now is politically incorrect.

At the end of a lecture I gave on men's issues at the Berkeley Men's Center for Therapy in 1991 a man in the audience asked: "But don't men suffer as much or more than women?" The question was disconcerting because I had just finished arguing that men need to become more aware of the suffering of women at the hands of abusive men. I began my response by pointing out ways women are more oppressed, for instance the man who asked the question does not have to worry about being raped whenever he walks on the street at night. Then I caught myself. I was simply recapitulating

the argument of my lecture while missing the underlying meaning of the man's question. This man was unhappy, he did not consider himself a sexist, and he would like someone, for a change, to pay attention to the roots of his unhappiness. I changed my tack. I said it is not a matter of who suffers more, rather it is about how gender relations based on domination are not good for anyone. The man was not quite happy with my answer, but others in the audience told me afterward that they were relieved that I had at least responded to his concern while not acceding to his suggestion that we forget about the women and concentrate exclusively on improving the plight of men.

A lesson of the 1960s was that you cannot organize people to sacrifice their own self-interests. A segment of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) campaigned on the slogan of giving up "white skin privileges." Very courageously aligning themselves with the poor and downtrodden, activists who ascribed to the principle of giving up privileges were buoyed for awhile by the large number of antiwar protesters who seemed to agree that white youth must give up certain privileges if all are to have equal opportunity. But then when the Viet Nam War ended and the self-interest of white college students was no longer served by taking to the streets to protest the draft, the mass movements waned. Activists' pleas to give up the privileges that derive from the oppression of others fell on deaf ears as a generation of rebels returned to relatively compliant lives.

Instead of asking men to give things up, including the little power they feel they have, the movement could attend to what ails men, and try to integrate their attempts to cure what ails them with a political struggle to end what, at its core, is wrong with our gendered social arrangements. There is only one way to accomplish this huge task: the political program of the men's movement must be responsive to men's needs while at the same time offering a larger vision. In other words, instead of telling men they must give away their power, we might turn our attention to helping men cross the lines that constrict their possibilities and redefine power in a way that makes it possible for men to feel powerful and yet not be sexist or homophobic. This is a tall order.

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