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Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power

Michael Kaufman

In a world dominated by men, the world of men is, by definition, a world of power. That power is a structured part of our economies and systems of political and social organization; it forms part of the core of religion, family, forms of play, and intellectual life. On an individual level, much of what we associate with masculinity hinges on a man's capacity to exercise power and control.⁰

But men's lives speak of a different reality. Though men hold power and reap the privileges that come with our sex, that power is tainted.¹

There is, in the lives of men, a strange combination of power and privilege, pain and powerlessness. Men enjoy social power, many forms of privilege, and a sense of often-unconscious entitlement by virtue of being male. But the way we have set up that world of power causes immense pain, isolation, and alienation not only for women, but also for men. This is not to equate men's pain with the systemic and systematic forms of women's oppression. Rather, it is to say that men's worldly power – as we sit in our homes or walk the street, apply ourselves at work or march through history – comes with a price for us. This combination of power and pain is the hidden story in the lives of men. It is men's contradictory experiences of power.

The idea of men's contradictory experiences of power suggests not simply that there is both power and pain in men's lives. Such a statement would obscure the centrality of men's power and the roots of pain within that power. The key, indeed, is the relationship between the two. As we know, men's social power is the source of individual power and privilege, but as we shall see, it is also the source of the individual experience of pain, fear, and alienation. That pain has long been an impetus for the individual reproduction – the acceptance, affirmation, celebration, and propagation – of men's individual and collective power. Alternatively, it can be an impetus for change.²

The existence of men's pain cannot be an excuse for acts of violence or oppression at the hands of men. After all, the overarching framework for this analysis is the basic point of feminism – and here I state the obvious – that almost all humans currently live in systems of patriarchal power which privilege men and stigmatize, penalize, and oppress women.³ Rather, knowledge of this pain is a means to better understand men and the complex character of the dominant forms of masculinity.

The realization of men's contradictory experiences of power also allows us to better understand the interactions of class, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age and other factors in the lives of men – which is why I speak of contradictory experiences of power in the plural. It allows us to better understand the process of gender acquisition for men. It allows us to better grasp what we might think of as the *gender work* of a society.

An understanding of men's contradictory experiences of power, enables us, when possible, to reach out to men with compassion, even as we are highly critical of particular actions and beliefs, even as we challenge the dominant forms of masculinity. This concept can be one vehicle to understand how good human beings can do horrible things, and how some beautiful baby boys can turn into horrible adults. And it can help us understand how the majority of men can be reached with a message of change. It is, in a nutshell, the basis for men's embrace of feminism.

This article develops the concept of men's contradictory experiences of power within an analysis of gender power, of the social-psychological process of gender development, and of the relation of power, alienation and oppression. It looks at the emergence of pro-feminism among men, seeking explanations for this within an analysis of men's contradictory experiences of power. It concludes with some thoughts on the implications of this analysis for the development of counter-hegemonic practices by pro-feminist men that can have a mass appeal and a mainstream social impact.

Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power

Gender and Power

Theorizing men's contradictory experiences of power begins with two distinctions: The first is the well-known, but too-often glossed over, distinction between biological sex and socially-constructed gender. Derived from that is the second, that there is no single masculinity although there are hegemonic and subordinate forms of masculinity. These forms are based on men's social power but are embraced in complex ways by individual men who also develop harmonious and non-harmonious relationships with other masculinities.

The importance of the sex-gender distinction in this context is that it is a basic conceptual tool which suggests how integral parts of our individual identity, behavior, activities, and beliefs can be a social product, varying from one group to another, and, often, at odds with other human needs and possibilities. Our biological sex – that small set of absolute differences between all males and all females – doesn't prescribe a set and static natural personality.⁴ The sex/gender distinction suggests there are characteristics, needs and possibilities within our potential as females or males that are consciously and unconsciously suppressed, repressed, and channeled in the process of producing men and women. Such products, the masculine and the feminine, the man and the woman, is what gender is all about.⁵

Gender is the central organizing category of our psyches. It is the axis around which we organize our personalities, in which a distinct ego develops. I can no more separate “Michael Kaufman–human” from “Michael Kaufman–man” than I can talk about the activities of a whale without referring to the fact it spends its whole life in the water.

Discourses on gender have had a hard-time shaking off the handy, but limited, notion of sex-roles.⁶ Certainly, roles, expectations, and ideas about proper behavior do exist. But the central thing about gender is not the prescription of certain roles and the proscription of others – after all, the range of possible roles are wide and changing and, what's more, are rarely adopted in a non-conflictual way. Rather, perhaps the key thing about gender is that it is a description of actual social relations of power between males and females and the internalization of these relations of power.

Men's contradictory experiences of power exist in the realm of gender. This suggests there are ways that gender experience is a conflictual one. Only part of the conflict is between the social definitions of manhood and possibilities open to us within our biological sex. Conflict also exists because of the cultural imposition of what Bob Connell calls hegemonic forms of masculinity.⁷ While most men can not possibly measure up to the dominant ideals of manhood, these maintain a powerful and often unconscious presence in our lives. They have power because they describe and embody real relations of power between men and women, *and* among men: patriarchy exists not simply as a system of men's power over women, but also of hierarchies of power among different groups of men and between different masculinities.

These dominant ideals vary sharply from society-to-society, from era to era and, these days, almost from moment-to-moment. Each subgroup, based on race, class, age, sexual orientation or whatever, defines manhood in ways that conform to the economic and social possibilities of

that group. For example, part of the ideal of working-class manhood among white, North American men, stresses physical skill and the ability to physically manipulate one's environment, while part of the ideal of their upper-middle class counterparts stresses verbal skills and the ability to manipulate one's environment through economic, social and political means. Each dominant image bears a relationship to the real-life possibilities of these men and the tools at their disposal for the exercise of some form of power.⁸

Power and Masculinity

Power, indeed, is the key term when referring to hegemonic masculinities. As I argue at greater length elsewhere,⁹ the common feature of the dominant forms of contemporary masculinity is that manhood is equated with having some sort of power.

There are, of course, different ways to conceptualize and describe power. Political philosopher C.B. Macpherson points to the liberal and radical traditions of the last two centuries and tells us that one way we've come to think of human power is as the potential for using and developing our human capacities. Such a view is based on the idea that we are doers and creators able to use rational understanding, moral judgment, creativity, and emotional connection.¹⁰ We possess the power to meet our needs, the power to fight injustice and oppression, the power of muscles and brain, and the power of love. All men, to a greater or lesser extent, experience these meanings of power.

Power, obviously, also has a more negative manifestation. Men have come to see power as a capacity to impose control on others and on our own unruly emotions. It means controlling material resources around us. This understanding of power meshes with the one described by Macpherson because, in societies based on hierarchy and inequality, it appears that all people can't use and develop their capacities to an equal extent. You have power if you can take advantage of differences between people. I feel I can have power only if I have access to more resources that you do. Power is seen as power over something or someone else.

Although we all experience power in diverse ways, some that celebrate life and diversity, and others that hinge on control and domination, the two types of experiences aren't equal in the eyes of men for the latter is the dominant conception of power in our world. The equation of power with domination and control is a definition that has emerged over time in societies where various divisions are central to the way we've organized our lives: one class has control over economic resources and politics, adults have control over children, humans try to control

nature, men dominate women, and, in many countries, one ethnic, racial, or religious group, or group based on sexual orientation, has control over others. Whatever the forms of inequality, in all cases, these societies relations of power are structured into social and cultural, political and economic institutions. There is, though, a common factor to all these societies: all are societies of male domination.. The equation of masculinity with power is one that developed over centuries. It conformed to, and in turn justified, the real-life domination of men over women and the valuation of males over females.

Individual men internalize all this into their developing personalities because, born into such a life, we learn to experience our power as a capacity to exercise control. Men learn to accept and exercise power this way because it gives us privileges and advantages that women or children do not usually enjoy or, simply, because it is an available tool that allows us to feel capable and strong. The source of this power is in the society around us, but we learn to exercise it as our own. This is a discourse about social power, but the collective power of men rests not simply on transgenerational and abstract institutions and structures of power but on the ways we internalize, individualize, and come to embody and reproduce these institutions, structures, and conceptualizations of men's power.

Gender Work

The way in which power is internalized is the basis for a contradictory relationship to that power.¹¹ The most important body of work that looks at this process is, paradoxically, that of one of the more famous of twentieth century intellectual patriarchs, Sigmund Freud. Whatever his miserable, sexist beliefs and confusions about women's sexualities, he identified the psychological processes and structures through which gender is created. The work of Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Jessica Benjamin and, in a different sense, the psychoanalytic writings of Gad Horowitz, make a important contribution to our understanding of the processes by which gender is individually acquired.¹²

The development of individual personalities of "normal" manhood is a social process within patriarchal family relationships.¹³ The possibility for the creation of gender lies in two biological realities, the malleability of human drives and the long period of dependency of children. Upon this biological edifice, a social process is able to go to work for the simple reason that this period of dependency is lived out in society. Within different family forms, each society provides a charged setting in which love and longing, support and disappointment become the vehicles for developing a gendered psyche. The family gives a personalized stamp to the categories, values, ideals, and beliefs of a society in

which one's sex is a fundamental aspect of self-definition and life. The family takes abstract ideals and turns them into the stuff of love and hate. As femininity gets represented by the mother (or mother figures) and masculinity by the father (or father figures) in both nuclear and extended families, complicated conceptions take on flesh and blood form: We are no longer talking of patriarchy and sexism, masculinity and femininity as abstract categories. I am talking about your mother and father, your sisters and brothers, your home, kin, and family.¹⁴

By five or six years old, before we have much conscious knowledge of the world, the building blocks of our gendered personalities are firmly anchored. Over this skeleton we build the adult as we learn to survive and, with luck, thrive within an interlocked set of patriarchal realities that includes schools, religious establishments, the media, and the world of work.

The internalization of gender relations is a building block of our personalities – that is, it is the individual elaboration of gender, and our own subsequent contributions to replenishing and adapting institutions and social structures in a way that wittingly or unwittingly preserves patriarchal systems. This process, when taken in its totality, forms what I call the gender work of a society. Because of the multiple identities of individuals and the complex ways we all embody both power and powerlessness – as a result of the interaction of our sex, race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, intellectual and physical abilities, family particularities, and sheer chance – gender work is not a linear process. Although gender ideals exist in the form of hegemonic masculinities and femininities, and although gender power is a social reality, when we live in heterogeneous societies, we each grapple with often conflicting pressures, demands, and possibilities.

The notion of gender work suggests there is an active process that creates and recreates gender. It suggests that this process can be an ongoing one, with particular tasks at particular times of our lives and that allows us to respond to changing relations of gender power. It suggests that gender is not a static thing that we become, but is a form of ongoing interaction with the structures of the surrounding world.

My masculinity is a bond, a glue, to the patriarchal world. It is the thing which makes that world mine, which makes it more or less comfortable to live in. Through the incorporation of a dominant form of masculinity particular to my class, race, nationality, era, sexual orientation, and religion, I gained real benefits *and* an individual sense of self-worth. From the moment when I learned, unconsciously, there were not only two sexes but a social significance to the sexes, my own self-worth became measured against the yardstick of gender. As a young male, I was granted a fantasy reprieve from the powerlessness of early child-

hood because I unconsciously realized I was part of that half of humanity with social power. My ability to incorporate not simply the roles, but to grasp onto this power – even if, at first, it existed only in my imagination – was part of the development of my individuality.

The Price

In more concrete terms the acquisition of hegemonic (and most subordinate) masculinities is a process through which men come to suppress a range of emotions, needs, and possibilities, such as nurturing, receptivity, empathy, and compassion, which are experienced as inconsistent with the power of manhood. These emotions and needs don't disappear; they are simply held in check or not allowed to play as full a role in our lives as would be healthy for ourselves and those around us. We dampen these abilities and emotions because they might restrict our capacity and desire to control ourselves or dominate the human beings around us upon whom we depend for love and friendship. We suppress them because they come to be associated with the femininity we have rejected as part of our quest for masculinity.

These are many things men do to have the type of power we associate with masculinity: We have to perform and stay in control. We're supposed to conquer, be on top of things, and call the shots. We have to tough it out, provide, and achieve. Meanwhile we learn to beat back our feelings, hide our emotions, and suppress our needs.

Whatever power might be associated with dominant masculinities, they also can be the source of enormous pain. Because the images are, ultimately, childhood pictures of omnipotence, they are impossible to obtain. Surface appearances aside, no man is completely able to live up to these ideals and images. For one thing we all continue to experience a range of needs and feelings that are deemed inconsistent with manhood. Such experiences become the source of enormous fear. In our society, this fear is experienced as homophobia or, to express it differently, homophobia is the vehicle that simultaneously transmits and quells the fear.

Such fear and pain have visceral, emotional, intellectual dimensions – although none of these dimensions is necessarily conscious – and the more we are the prisoners of the fear, the more we need to exercise the power we grant ourselves as men. In other words, men exercise patriarchal power not only because we reap tangible benefits from it. The assertion of power is also a response to fear and to the wounds we have experienced in the quest for power. Paradoxically, men are wounded by the very way we have learned to embody and exercise our power.

A man's pain may be deeply buried, barely a whisper in his heart, or it may flood from every pore. The pain might be the lasting trace of

things that happened or attitudes and needs acquired 20, 30, or 60 years earlier. Whatever it is, the pain inspires fear for it means not being a man, which means, in a society that confuses gender and sex, not being a male. This means losing power and ungluing basic building blocks of our personalities. This fear must be suppressed for it itself is inconsistent with dominant masculinities.

As every woman who knows men can tell us, the strange thing about men's trying to suppress emotions is that it leads not to less, but to more emotional dependency. By losing track of a wide range of our human needs and capacities, and by blocking our need for care and nurturance, men dampen our emotional common sense and our ability to look after ourselves. Unmet, unknown, and unexpected emotions and needs don't disappear but rather spill into our lives at work, on the road, in a bar, or at home. The very emotions and feelings we have tried to suppress gain a strange hold over us. No matter how cool and in control, these emotions dominate us. I think of the man who feels powerlessness who beats his wife in uncontrolled rage. I walk into a bar and see two men hugging each other in a drunken embrace, the two of them able to express their affection for each other only when plastered. I read about the teenage boys who go out gay-bashing and the men who turn their sense of impotence into a rage against blacks, Jews, or any who are convenient scapegoats.

Alternatively, men might direct buried pain against themselves in the form of self-hate, self-deprecation, physical illness, insecurity, or addictions. Sometimes this is connected with the first. Interviews with rapists and batterers often show not only contempt for women, but often an even-deeper hatred and contempt for oneself. It's as if, not able to stand themselves, they lash out at others, possibly to inflict similar feelings on another who has been defined as a socially-acceptable target, possibly to experience a momentary sense of mastery.¹⁵

We can thus think of men's pain as having a dynamic aspect. We might displace it or make it invisible, but in doing so we give it even more urgency. This blanking out of a sense of pain is another way of saying that men learn to wear a suit of armor, that is, we learn to maintain an emotional barrier from those around us in order to keep fighting and winning. The impermeable ego barriers discussed by feminist psychoanalysts simultaneously protect men and keep us locked in a prison of our own creation.

Power, Alienation, and Oppression

Men's pain and the way we exercise power aren't just symptoms of our current gender order. Together they shape our sense of manhood, for masculinity has become a form of alienation. Men's alienation is our ignorance of our own emotions, feelings, needs, and of our potential for human connection and nurturance. Our alienation also results from our distance from women and our distance and isolation from other men. In his book *The Gender of Oppression*, Jeff Hearn suggests that what we think of as masculinity is the result of the way our power and our alienation combine. Our alienation increases the lonely pursuit of power and emphasizes our belief that power requires an ability to be detached and distant.¹⁶

Men's alienation and distance from women and other men takes on strange and rather conflicting forms. Robert Bly and those in the mythopoetic men's movement have made a lot out of the loss of the father and the distance of many men, in dominant North American cultures anyway, from their own fathers. Part of their point is accurate and reaffirms important work done over the past couple of decades on issues around fathers and fathering.¹⁷ Their discussion of these points, however, lacks the richness and depth of feminist psychoanalysis which holds, as a central issue, that the absence of men from most parenting and nurturing tasks means that the masculinity internalized by little boys is based on distance, separation, and a fantasy image of what constitutes manhood, rather than on the type of oneness and inseparability that typifies early mother-child relationships.

The distance from other men is accentuated, in many contemporary heterosexual men's cultures at least, by the emotional distance from other males that begins to develop in adolescence. Men might have buddies, pals, workmates, and friends, but they seldom have the level of complete trust and intimacy enjoyed among many women. Our experience of friendships are limited by the reduced empathy that becomes the masculine norm.¹⁸ As a result we have the paradox that most heterosexual men (and even many gay men) in the dominant North American culture are extremely isolated from other men. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, many of the institutions of male bonding – the clubs, sporting events, card games, locker rooms, workplaces, professional and religious hierarchies – are a means to provide safety for isolated men who need to find ways to affirm themselves, find common ground with other men and collectively exercise their power.¹⁹ Such isolation means that each man can remain blind to his dialogue of self-doubt about making the masculine grade. Virtually all adolescent males consciously experience these self-doubts, doubts that are later consciously or unconsciously

experienced as adults. In a strange sense, this isolation is key in preserving patriarchy: to a greater or lesser extent it increases the possibility that all men end up colluding with patriarchy – in all its diverse myths and realities – since their own doubts and sense of confusion remain buried.

It is not only other men from whom most men (and certainly most straight men) remain distant. It is also from women. Here another important insight of feminist psychoanalysis is key: Boy's separation from their mothers or mother figures means the erection of more or less impermeable ego barriers and an affirmation of distinction, difference, and opposition to those things identified with women and femininity. Boys repress characteristics and possibilities unconsciously and consciously associated with mother/women/the feminine. Thus Bly and the mythopoetic theorists have it all wrong when they suggest that the central problem with contemporary men (and by this they seem to mean North American middle class, young to middle-aged, white, straight urban men) is that they have become feminized. The problem as suggested above is the wholesale repression and suppression of those traits and possibilities associated with women.²⁰

These factors suggest the complexity of gender identity, gender formation, and gender relations. It appears that we need forms of analysis that allow for contradictory relationships between individuals and the power structures from which they benefit. It is a strange situation when men's very real power and privilege in the world hinges not only on that power but also on an experience of alienation and powerlessness – rooted in childhood experiences but reinforced in different ways as adolescents and then adults. These experiences (in addition to the obvious and tangible benefits) become a spur for individual men to recreate and celebrate the forms and structures through which men exercise power.

But, as we've seen, there is no single masculinity nor one experience of being a man. The experience of different men, their actual power and privilege in the world, is based on a range of social positions and relations. The social power of a poor white man is different from a rich one, a working class black man from a working class white man, a gay man from a bisexual man from a straight man, a Jewish man in Ethiopia from a Jewish man in Israel, a teenage boy from an adult. Within each group, men usually have privileges and power relative to the women in that group, but in society as a whole, things are not always so straightforward.

The emergent discourses on the relation between oppression based on gender, racial, class, and social orientation are but one reflection of the complexity of the problem. These discussions are critical in the development of a new generation of feminist analysis and practice. The

tendency, unfortunately, is often to add up categories of oppression as if they were separate units. Sometimes, such tallies are even used to decide who, supposedly, is the most oppressed. The problem can become absurd for two simple reasons: one is the impossibility of quantifying experiences of oppression; the other is that the sources of oppression do not come in discreet units. After all, let's think of an unemployed black gay working class man. We might say this man has been economically exploited by owners and controlled by supervisors bosses (as a working class man) yet also enjoyed certain workplace privileges as a man vis-a-vis women; he's oppressed and stigmatized as a gay man, oppressed and the victim of racism because he is black, suffering terrible because he is out-of-work (and is more likely to be unemployed than are black women), and is demeaned and possibly feels strength by dominant images of his supposed hypersexual masculinity, but we're not going to say, oh, he's oppressed *as a man*. Of course he's not oppressed as a man, but, I worry that the distinction is rather academic because none of the qualities used to describe him is completely separable from the others. After all, his particular sense of manhood, that is his masculinity, is in part a product of those other factors. "Man" becomes as much an adjective modifying "black" "working class" "out-of-work" and "gay" as these things modify the word "man." Our lives, our minds, our bodies simply aren't divided up in a way that allows us to separate out the different categories of our existence. This man's experiences, self-definition(s), and location in the hierarchies of power are co-determined by a multitude of factors. Furthermore, since the reality of different masculinities includes within it relations of power among men, and not just men against women, a man who has little social power in the dominant society, whose masculinity is not of a hegemonic variety, who is the victim of tremendous social oppression, might also wield tremendous power in his own milieu and neighborhood vis-a-vis women of his own class or social grouping or other males, as in the case of a schoolyard bully or a member of an urban gang who certainly doesn't have structural power in the society as a whole.

Our whole language of oppression is in need of an overhaul for it is based on simplistic binary oppositions, reductionist equations between identity and social location, and unifocal notions of the self. What is important for us here is not to deny that men, as a group, have social power nor even that men, within their subgroups, tend to have considerable power, but rather that there are different forms of structural power and powerless among men. Similarly, it is important not to deny the structural and individual oppression of women as a social group. Rather it is to recognize, as we have seen above, that there isn't a linear relationships between a structured system of power inequalities, the real

and supposed benefits of power, and ones own experience of these relations of power.

Men and Feminism

An analysis of men's contradictory experiences of power give us useful insights into the potential relation of men to feminism. The power side of the equation isn't anything new and, indeed, men's power and privileges form a very good reason for men to individually and collectively oppose feminism.

But we do know that an increasing number of men have become sympathetic to feminism (in content if not always in name) and have embraced feminist theory and action (although, again, often more in theory than in action.) There are different reasons for this acceptance of feminism. It might be outrage at inequality, it might result from the influence of a partner, family member or friend, in might be his own sense of injustice at the hands of other men, it might be a sense of shared oppression, say because of his sexual orientation, it might be his own guilt about the privileges he enjoys as a man, it might be horror at men's violence, it might be sheer decency.

While the majority of men in North America would still not label themselves pro-feminist, a strong majority of men in Canada and a reasonable percentage of men in the United States would sympathize with many of the issues as presented by feminists. As we know, this sympathy does not always translate into changes of behavior, but, increasingly, ideas are changing and in some cases, behavior is starting to catch up. How do we explain the growing number of men who are supportive of feminism and women's liberation (to use that term which was perhaps too hastily abandoned by the end of the 1970s)? Except for the rare outcast or iconoclast, there are few examples from history where significant numbers of a ruling group supported the liberation of those over whom they ruled and from whose subordination they benefitted.

One answer is that the current feminist wave – whatever it's weaknesses and whatever backlash might exist against it – has had a massive impact during the past two-and-a-half decades. Large numbers of men, along with many women who had supported the status quo, now realize that the tide has turned and, like it or not, the world is changing. Women's rebellion against patriarchy holds the promise of bringing patriarchy to an end and, in the meantime, dramatically reducing the differential power of men and women. Although patriarchy in its many different social and economic forms still has considerable staying power, an increasing number of its social, political, economic, and emotional structures are proving unworkable. Some men react with rearguard actions while others step tentatively or strongly in the direction of change.

This explanation of men's support for change only catches part of the picture. The existence of contradictory experiences of power suggests there is a basis for men's embrace of feminism that goes beyond swimming with a change in the tide.

The rise of feminism has shifted the balance between men's power and men's pain. In societies and eras where men's social power went largely unchallenged, men's power so outweighed men's pain that the existence of this pain could remain buried, effectively denied because it was amply compensated for. When you rule the roost, call the shots, and are closer to God, there isn't a lot of room left for doubt and pain, at least for pain that appears to be linked to the practices of masculinity. But with the rise of modern feminism, the fulcrum between men's power and men's pain has been undergoing a rapid shift. This is particularly true in cultures where the definition of men's power had already moved away from tight control over the home and tight monopolies in the realm of work.²¹

As men's power is challenged, those things that came as a compensation, a reward, or a life-long distraction from any potential pain are progressively reduced or, at least, called into question. As women's oppression becomes problematized, many forms of this oppression become problems for men. Individual gender-related experiences of pain and disquietude among men have become increasingly manifest and have started to gain a social hearing and social expression in widely-diverse forms, including different branches of the men's movement – from reactionary, anti-feminists, to the Bly-type mythopoetic movement, to pro-feminist men's organizing.

In other words, if gender is about power, then as actual relations of power between men and women, and between different groups of men (such as straight and gay men or black and white men) start to shift, then our experiences of gender and our gender definitions must also begin to change. The process of gender work is ongoing and includes this process of reformulation and upheaval.

Rising Support and Looming Pitfalls

The embrace of feminism by men is not, surprisingly, entirely new. As Michael Kimmel argues in his insightful introduction to *Against the Tide: Profeminist Men in the United States, 1796-1990. A Documentary History*, pro-feminist men have constituted a small, but persistent feature of the US socio-political scene for two centuries.²² What makes the current situation different is that pro-feminism among men (or at least acceptance of aspects of feminist critiques and feminist political action) is reaching such large-scale dimensions. Ideas that were almost unanimously discounted by men (and indeed most women) only twenty-five

years ago, now have widespread legitimacy. When I lead workshops in high schools, colleges, and workplaces, men – even those who are on the surface are upset by the pace of change in gender relations or because they feel slighted or put-down – will give a list of the forms of power and privilege that men are still accorded and women still denied, and they will suggest without prompting that women are right to be concerned about these disparities. Of course it doesn't help to overstate the progress that has been made; many males and females remain staunchly pro-patriarchal and most institutions remain male-dominated. But changes are visible. Affirmative action programs are widespread, many social institutions controlled by men – in education, the arts, professions, politics and religion – are undergoing a process of sexual integration even though this usually requires not only ongoing pressure but often women adapting to masculinist work cultures. In various countries the percentage of men favoring abortion rights for women equals or outstrips support by women. Male-dominated governments have accepted the need to adopt laws that have been part of the feminist agenda. (One of the most dramatic instances was in Canada in 1992 when the Conservative Party government completely recast the law on rape – following a process of consultation with women's groups. The law states that all sexual relations must be explicitly consensual, that “no means no” and that it takes a clearly-stated and freely-given “yes” to mean yes. Again, in Canada, one thinks of the way that feminist organizations insisted on their presence – and were accepted as key players – at the bargaining table in the 1991 and 1992 round of constitutional talks.) All such changes were a result of the hard work and impact of the women's movement; this impact on institutions controlled by men shows the increased acceptance by men of at least some of the terms of feminism, whether this acceptance is begrudging or welcome.

For those men and women interested in social change and speeding up the type of changes described above, some serious problems remain: while there are ever-increasing sympathies among men to the ideas of women's equality, and while some institutions have been forced to adopt measures promoting women's equality, there is still a lag between the ideas accepted by men and their actual behavior. And while many men might reluctantly or enthusiastically support efforts for change, pro-feminism among men has not yet reached mass organizational forms in most cases.

This brings us to the implications of the analysis in this article to the issue of pro-feminist organizing by men.

Stimulated by the ever-widening impact of modern feminism, the past two decades have seen the emergence of something that, for lack of a better phrase, has been called the men's movement. For our purposes,

there have been two major currents to the men's movements.²³ One is the mytho-poetic men's movement which came to prominence in the late 1980s, in particular, with the success of Robert Bly's *Iron John*. This movement is not only the latest expression of an approach dating back to the 1970s that focuses on the pain and costs of being men; it is the continuation a masculinist politic dating back almost one hundred years that sought to create homosocial spaces as an antidote to the supposed feminization of men.²⁴

A second has been the less prominent pro-feminist men's movement (within which I count my own activities) which has focused on the social and individual expressions of men's power and privileges, including issues of men's violence.

Unfortunately, the dominant expressions of these two wings of the men's movement have developed with their own deformities, idiosyncrasies, and mistakes in analysis and action. In particular, each has tended to grapple primarily with one aspect of men's lives – men's power, in the case of the pro-feminist movement; men's pain, in the case of the mythopoetic. In doing so, they not only miss the totality of men's experience in a male-dominated society, but miss the crucial relationship between men's power and men's pain.²⁵

The pro-feminist men's movement starts from the acknowledgment that men have power and privilege in a male-dominated society. Although I feel strongly that this must be our starting point, it is only a beginning for there are many challenging issues: How can we build mass and active support for a change in gender relations and gender identity among men? How can we encourage men to realize that support for feminism means more than supporting institutional and legal changes but also requires personal changes in their own lives? How can we link the struggles against homophobia and sexism and to realize in practice that homophobia is a major factor in promoting misogyny and sexism among men?

Within these questions are a set of theoretical, strategic and tactical problems. I would suggest we need to take such questions very seriously, particularly if our goal is not simply to score academic or political debating points, or to feel good about our pro-feminist credentials, but rather, alongside women, to actually effect the course of history in a positive direction.

For me, several points emerge from this analysis:

Whether a man assumes that his most pressing concern is working in support of women's equality and challenging patriarchy, or in challenging homophobia and encouraging a gay- and lesbian-positive culture, or in enhancing the lives of all men, or in challenging the racism that is linked to gender oppression, our starting point as men must be a recog-

nition of the centrality of men's power and privilege and a recognition of the need to challenge that power. This is not only in support of feminism, but it is a recognition that the social and personal construction of this power is the source of the malaise, confusion, and alienation felt by men in our era as well as an important source of homophobia.

The more we realize that homophobia is central to the experience of men in most patriarchal societies, that homophobia and heterosexism shape the daily experiences of all men, and that such homophobia is central to the construction of sexism, the more we will be able to develop the understanding and the practical tools to achieve equality. The pro-feminist men's movement in North America, Europe, and Australia has provided men with a unique opportunity for gay, straight, and bisexual men to come together, to work together, to dance together. And yet, I don't think that most straight pro-feminist men see confronting homophobia as a priority or, even if a part of a list of priorities, as something that has a central bearing on their own lives.²⁶

The notion of contradictory experiences of power, in the plural, provides an analytical tool for integrating issues of race, class, age, and ethnicity into the heart of pro-feminist men's organizing. It allows us to sympathetically relate to a range of men's experiences, to understand that men's power is non-linear and subject to a variety of social and psychological forces. It suggests forms of analysis and action that understands that the behavior of any group of men is the result of an often contradictory insertion into various hierarchies of power. It belies any notion that our identities and experiences as men can be separated from our identities and experiences based on the color of our skin or our class background. It therefore suggests that struggling against racism, anti-semitism, and class privilege, for example, are integral to a struggle to transform contemporary gender relations.

Perhaps, the very nomenclature I am using is a problem. I, along with others, have repeatedly referred to "pro-feminism." This term situates the issues from beginning to end as one of men supporting women's struggles and challenging men's power over women. But this analysis suggests that while this support and challenge are indeed fundamental, they are not the singular issues or problems for men. Nor are they the sole path to demolishing patriarchy and creating a society of human equality and liberation. Once we include an analysis of the impact of a male-dominated society on men ourselves, then the project becomes not just "pro-feminist" but something that is "anti-sexist" (in the sense that sexist ideas and practices effect both women and men, even if very differentially), "anti-patriarchal," and "anti-masculinist" (while being clearly male-affirmative, just as it is female-affirmative.)

Today, the rewards of hegemonic masculinity are simply not enough to compensate for the pain in the lives of so many men. For the majority of men in North American culture, at any rate, the pain of trying to conform and live up to the impossible standards of manhood outweigh the rewards they currently receive. In other words, patriarchy isn't only a problem for women. The great paradox of our patriarchal culture (especially since experiencing significant challenges from feminism) is that the damaging forms of masculinity within our male-dominated society are damaging not only for women, but for men as well.

Various groups of men know this and understand this. For example, gay and bisexual men have developed both a new self-consciousness and cultural institutions, and have been organizing as men, in opposition to the hatred, fear, and bigotry they receive and to the dominant forms of masculinity (even as, at the same time, many gay men have embraced parts of the dominant vision and practices.) They have long been aware of the pain inflicted on them by current patriarchal society. Black men have developed their own cultures of resistance against structural discrimination and the hatred they experience from many men and women in the dominant, white society. Even though some of these forms of resistance include a reaffirmation of some of the worst features of patriarchal culture (one thinks of the sexism, homophobia and anti-semitism of the Nation of Islam, the brutality both reflected in, and reaffirmed by, gangsta rap, or the machismo of dominant sports culture in which black male athletes are now at the pinnacle), there is also an affirmation of the intelligence of black men, of masculine grace, and of a distinct language, all of which were denigrated by the dominant culture and dominant forms of manhood. And, to give a short third example, young men of all races, know that their possibilities of repeating the relative economic privileges enjoyed by their fathers and grandfathers have been dramatically diminished.

This is not to say that men within these groups, or even these men as a group, don't still enjoy certain forms of privilege and power. It is simply to point out that various groups of men have been struggling *as men* to reject at least some of the hegemonic ideas of manhood and some aspects of hegemonic male culture. The problem is that they haven't necessarily done so within an analysis of gender and sexism, or done so combined with a sympathy either for feminism or women, or with an understanding of the nature of men's social and individual power.

Nonetheless, all men might benefit by looking to the experiences of particular groups of men. And within particular experiences, to find common cause, common concerns, and common challenges. There is, indeed, a basis for men to organize as men and to organize on our own. This would be as part of a broader anti-patriarchal movement. It would

be an anti-masculinist movement of men that goes hand-in-hand with feminism, but that has its own *raison d'être* and its own clear issues and priorities.

In setting down this pathway, we must follow the lead of the women's movement in asserting not only the importance of both "personal" and "social" change, but of the relationship of the two. As men, we need to advocate and actively organize in support of legal and social changes, from freedom of choice to childcare programs, from new initiatives to challenge men's violence to affirmative action programs at our workplaces. We must support and help build such changes not only at the level of macro-politics, but in our own workplaces, trade unions, professional associations, clubs, places of worship, and communities. We must see these matters not simply as "women's issues" but issues that confront and effect us all.

This latter point is important if we genuinely hope to shape an anti-patriarchal politic that will embrace men as much as it does women. In the case of childcare, for example, men's agenda must not only support the visions of feminist women and the needs of mothers (although this support is an important part of what we do.) It must also articulate childcare policies that will enhance the lives of boys and men, that will allow men to be better fathers, caregivers, and nurturers. We must look at experiments in Sweden, for example, where public policy and government authority have been used, with both successes and failures, to reconstruct work and family life in such a way as to make possible healthier forms of fatherhood and motherhood.

One key to future child-centered social policies is a shortening of the work day. This has enormous implications for the lives of men (including those younger men and men-of-color who have experienced huge amounts of discrimination in the job market.) It has enormous implications for the self-identity of all men, since work life, with all its emotional and physical hazards and toll, has been such an integral part of masculine identity. For men to escape the painful constraints of painful masculinity we must, among other things, redefine the work of parenting and the world of work.

This in turn opens up new possibilities for the largely middle-class organizations of anti-sexist men to bridge the chasm that sometimes separates us from the concerns and aspirations of working class men.

All this is equally true on issues of men's health and safety. The very definitions of ruling forms of masculinity – we are always strong, we don't feel pain, we are never scared, etc. etc. – mean that by definition it is terrifying for men to seriously look at issues of our own health and safety. Even recognizing such issues seems a confession that we are not masculine. This is true within dangerous workplaces, where men, in

practice, seldom refuse unsafe work or refuse the overtime that will keep them away from their families and causes huge physical and emotional stress, even as it gives financial benefit.²⁷ It is also true about the fruits of generations of patriarchal societies that have placed production, achievement, and conquest over the needs of humans within an all-too-fragile environment. I think, for example, of the low sperm count of an increasingly number of men the world over and of the increasing incidence of sexual dimorphism among newborn boys. It appears that a large part of the problem is caused by *man*-made chlorine compounds which mimic estrogen. These are issues that men don't talk about, but which have a huge impact on our lives. They are issues that men must and can address as men, in concert with similar concerns of women.

Such work not only involves providing verbal, financial, and organizational support to the campaigns organized by women; it also requires men organizing campaigns of men aimed at men. Efforts such as Canada's White Ribbon Campaign²⁸ are critical for breaking men's silence on a range of issues effecting the lives of women. This effort, which focuses on violence against women, has been surprisingly successful at encouraging men to identify with these concerns and to productively use the resources men have disproportionate access to. Such efforts must be carried out in dialogue and consultation with women's groups so that men won't come to dominate this work.

Like other groups of men working on issues of violence against women, the White Ribbon Campaign has been clear that men shouldn't shrink back from taking up pro-feminist issues as our own. The majority of men are not physically violent against women, but the majority have been silent about this violence. The campaign recognizes that men have a responsibility to speak to, and challenge, other men. It doesn't glibly say we were all responsible for incidents of violence, but rather that we have a shared responsibility for stopping it.

The Campaign has also taken some steps to go beyond reacting to violence and talk about the patriarchal culture that has produced violent men. We've talked about the individual and social changes that are necessary to raise children without violence and to bring up a generation of men who won't resort to violence. In other words, as well as appealing to men's compassion, anger, and concern about the experiences of the women we love, we also appeal to men's own best interests, encouraging men to find ways to lead healthier and happier lives.

Whatever the focus of our work to challenge sexism and patriarchy, whether it be on violence, sexual orientation, health, racism, childcare, workplace safety, or whatever, at the same time as we engage in social activism, we need to learn to scrutinize and challenge our own behavior.

We must understand that our contribution to social change will be limited if we continue to interact with women on the basis of dominance; it will be limited if we don't actively challenge homophobia and sexism among our friends and workmates and in our ourselves. Change will be limited if we don't begin to create the immediate conditions for the transformation of social life, especially striving for equality in housework and childcare.

But this doesn't mean sinking into guilt or joining those men within the anti-sexist men's community who like the feel of a good hairshirt. After all, a diffuse sense of guilt (as opposed to specific remorse for particular actions) can be a profoundly conservative, demobilizing, and disempowering emotion. For many of us active in pro-feminist, anti-patriarchal, anti-masculinist work, there are moments when we cease to be true to ourselves and worry more about attempting to please women or worry about what particular subgroups within the women's movement might think of our work. We sometimes feel guilty about our successes. Instead of such guilt, we should be saying that it's about time men were doing this work, we should be celebrating the fact we are making a contribution to change, and we should know that our successes are, ultimately, about the successes of the women's movement in reaching men.

What's more, efforts to be "accountable to feminism and the women's movement" sometime ignore the fact that there isn't one feminism and that there are very real differences and debates within the women's movement: there is no way we can agree with everyone or adopt policies that will meet the approval of all feminists. (One only has to think about a number of issues, such as the issue of pornography, to realize there are many views within feminism, that is, many feminisms.²⁹)

Rather than feeling guilty about our successes in reaching other men or questioning our ability to come up with good ideas and initiatives to contribute, as equals with women, to an anti-patriarchal politic, men need to proudly assert that gender work is men's work as much as it's women's work. We must appeal to men's enlightened self-interest. This means not just supporting the efforts of women, but exploring and discovering ways that our interests truly coincide. Unless men organize to reach other men, men as a group will never stop propping up and perpetuating the patriarchal order. Why? Because, for the majority of men, it is the definition of masculinity by other men that matters more than anything. Part of the pathway of change is for men to act as examples and models for other men about how we can be fully male – that is, simply biological creatures who are male – without being masculinist. And in this project, in this celebration of maleness, straight men have a lot to learn from gay and bisexual men.

Men can proudly take our place – for respecting women’s autonomy, capacities, priorities, and the insights of feminism – as leaders in the anti-patriarchal, anti-sexist movement. To succeed, we all need men’s unique contributions and insights alongside women’s unique contributions and voices.

Part of this struggle for personal and social change by men is the need for men to break our isolation from other men. Although this isolation might be experienced most acutely by straight men, it is not simply a question of sexual orientation. It is an issue of the nature of our interaction with other men, whether we are able to create a true sense of safety and emotional intimacy with at least some other men.

This is important because, in isolation, most men continue to accept as reality the uncontested assumptions about what it means to be a man. These act, as I have earlier pointed out, as a sort of collective hallucinations within patriarchal society. It’s as if millions of people have taken the same drug and are walking around knowing, with seeming certainty, the reality of what a man is, when, in fact, it is simply a gender construction. Any doubts we have as individuals are quickly dismissed because, in isolation from other men, we come to assume that only we have got it wrong, only we feel these differences. For many men, such doubts only confirm that they’re not real men – and, after all, no man can actually live up to the ideals. The conflict between our own reality and what we’ve learned is supposed to be the real reality becomes a basic reason why individual men construct and reconstruct personalities shaped by patriarchy.

And so, developing a social action approach is entirely consistent – and perhaps ultimately requires – that men develop supportive organizations, support groups, and informal ties of intimacy and support among men. Such groups and individual practices allow us to look at our individual process of gender work, how we have all been shaped by our patriarchal system. It allows us to examine our own contradictory relationships to men’s power. It allows us to overcome the fear that prevents most men from speaking out and challenging sexism and homophobia. It can give us a new and different sense of strength.

In all this, in our public work, in our challenges to sexism and homophobia, to racism and bigotry in our daily lives, we mustn’t shrink back from a politics of compassion. This means never losing sight of the negative impact of contemporary patriarchy on men ourselves even if our framework puts as central the oppression of women. It means looking at the negative impact of homophobia on all men. It means avoiding the language of guilt and blame and substituting for it the language of

taking responsibility for change.

Such a politics of compassion is only possible if we begin from the sex/gender distinction. If patriarchy and its symptoms were a biological fiat then not only would the problems be virtually intractable, but punishment, repression, blame, and guilt would seem to be the necessary corollaries. But if we start with the assumption that the problems are ones of gender – and that gender refers to particular relations of power that are socially-structured and individually-embodied – then we are able to be simultaneously critical of men’s collective power and the behavior and attitudes of individual men *and* to be male affirmative, to say that demolishing patriarchy will enhance the lives of men, that change is a win-win situation but which requires men giving up forms of privilege, power, and control.

On the psycho-dynamic level – the realm in which we can witness the interplay between social movements and the individual psyche – the challenge of feminism to men is one of dislodging the hegemonic masculine psyche. This isn’t a psychological interpretation of change because it is the social challenge to men’s power and the actual reduction of men’s social power that is the source of change. What was once a secure relationship between power over others/control over oneself/and the suppression of a range of men’s own needs and emotions – is under attack. What had felt stable, natural, and right is being revealed as both a source of oppression for others and the prime source of pain, anguish, and disquietude by men ourselves.

The implication of all this is that the feminist challenge to men’s power has the potential of liberating men and helping more men discover new masculinities which will be part of demolishing gender altogether. Whatever privileges and forms of power we will lose will be increasingly compensated for by the end to the pain, fear, dysfunctional forms of behavior, violence experienced at the hands of other men, violence we inflict on ourselves, endless pressure to perform and succeed, and the sheer impossibility of living up to our masculine ideals.

Our awareness of men’s contradictory experiences of power gives us the tools to simultaneously challenge men’s power and speak to men’s pain. It is the basis for a politics of compassion and for enlisting men’s support for a revolution that is challenging the most basic and long-lasting structures of human civilization.

This is a revised version of an article that originally appeared in Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, editors, *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 142-165. The major revisions occur in Part II.

¹ Although it may be somewhat awkward for women readers, I often refer to men in the first person plural – we, us, our – to acknowledge my position within the object of my analysis.

² My thanks to Harry Brod who several years ago cautioned me against talking about men's power and men's pain as two sides of the same coin, a comment which led me to focus on the relationship between the two. Thanks to Linda Briskin who, years ago, engaged me in a discussion that led me to clarify my concept of men's contradictory experiences of power. Thanks also to Harry and to Bob Connell for their comments on a draft of this article. Thanks to Varda Burstyn for her thoughts and contributions to the concluding section. I'd particularly like to express my appreciation to Michael Kimmel both for his comments on the draft and for our ongoing intellectual partnership and friendship.

³ Although there has been controversy over the applicability of the term patriarchy – see, for eg., Michele Barret and Mary MacIntosh's reservations in *The Anti-Social Family* (London: Verso, 1982) – I follow others who use it as a broad descriptive term for male-dominated social systems.

⁴ Even the apparently-fixed biological line between males and females – fixed in terms of genital and reproductive differences – is subject to variation, as seen in the relatively significant number of males and females with so-called genital, hormonal and chromosomal "abnormalities" that bend the sharp distinction between the sexes – rendering men or women infertile, women or men with secondary sex characteristics usually associated with the other sex, and women or men with different genital combinations. Nonetheless, the notion of biological sex is useful as shorthand and to distinguish sex from socially constructed gender. For an accessible discussion, particularly on the endocrinology of sex differentiation, see John Money and Anke A. Ehrhardt, *Man & Woman, Boy & Girl* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).

⁵ The sex/gender distinction is ignored or blurred not only by reactionary ideologues or socio-biologists (of both liberal and conservative persuasion) who want to assert that the current lives, roles, and relations between the sexes are timeless, biological givens. At least one stream of feminist thought – dubbed cultural feminism or difference feminism by its critics – celebrates to varying degrees a range of supposedly

timeless and natural female qualities. Similarly, some of those influenced by Jungian thought, such as Robert Bly and the mytho-poetic thinkers, also posit essential qualities of manhood and womanhood. Even those feminists who accept the sex-gender distinction often use the term “gender” when what is meant is “sex” – as in “the two genders” and “the other gender” when in fact there are a multiplicity of genders, as suggested in the concepts of femininities and masculinities. Similarly many feminist women and pro-feminist men refer erroneously to “male violence” – rather than “men’s violence” – even though the biological category “male” (as opposed to the gender category “men”) implies that a propensity to commit violence is part of the genetic mandate of half the species, a supposition that neither anthropology nor contemporary observation warrants.

⁶ For a critique of the limits of sex-role theory, see for eg., Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee, “Hard and Heavy: Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity,” in *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change*, edited by Michael Kaufman (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987)

⁷ R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

⁸ The issue of different masculinities is analyzed in various articles in Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, editors, *Theorizing Masculinities* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1994).

⁹ Michael Kaufman, *Cracking the Armour: Power, Pain, and the Lives of Men* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 1993).

¹⁰ C.B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

¹¹ Although I am referring here to men’s contradictory relationships to masculine power, a parallel, although very different, discussion could also be conducted concerning women relationship to men’s power and to their own positions of individual, familial, and social power and powerlessness.

¹² See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1977), Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Random House, 1988), and Gad Horowitz, *Repression. Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

¹³ This paragraph is based on text in Kaufman, *Cracking the Armor*, *op.*

cit. and Kaufman, "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence," in *Beyond Patriarchy*, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ I am not implying that the nature of the relations or the conflicts are the same from one family form to another or, even that "the family" as such exists in all societies. (See M. Barrett and M. McIntosh *op. cit.*)

¹⁵ See, for example, the accounts in Sylvia Levine and Joseph Koenig, eds., *Why Men Rape* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1980) and Timothy Beneke, *Men on Rape* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

¹⁶ Jeff Hearn, *The Gender of Oppression* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987).

¹⁷ Among numerous sources on fatherhood, see Michael E. Lamb, ed. *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1981); Stanley H. Cath, Alan R. Gurwitt, John Munder Ross, *Father and Child* (Boston: Little Brown, 1982). Also see Michael W. Yogman, James Cooley, Daniel Kindlon, "Fathers, Infants, Toddlers: Developing Relationship" and others in Phyllis Bronstein and Carolyn Pape Cowan, *Fatherhood Today* (New York: John Wiley & sons, 1988); and Kyle D. Pruett, "Infants of Primary Nurturing Fathers," in *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, v. 38, 1983; Samuel Osherson, *Finding our Fathers* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Lillian Rubin, *Intimate Strangers* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1984). And see Peter M. Nardi, editor, *Men's Friendships* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992).

¹⁹ Kaufman, *Cracking the Armour* *op. cit.* And see Varda Burstyn's *The Rites of Men* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

²⁰ The mytho-poetic framework is discussed at length by Michael S. Kimmel and Michael Kaufman in "Weekend Warriors: The New Men's Movement," in Brod and Kaufman, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-288, and in Michael Kimmel, ed., *The Politics of Manhood* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), pp. 15-43; and in a previous, shorter version, "The New Men's Movement: Retreat and Aggression with America's Weekend Warriors," in *Feminist Issues*, v. 13, n. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 3-21.

²¹ One fascinating account of total patriarchal control of the home is Naguib Mahfouz's 1956 book *Palace Walk* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

²² Michael S. Kimmel and Tom Mosmiller, editors *Against the Tide: Profeminist Men in the United States 1776-1990. A Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon, 1992).

²³ A third is the anti-feminist and, at times, unashamedly misogynist, men's rights movement which doesn't concern us in this article.

²⁴ In the 1970s and early 1980s, books and articles by men such as Herb Goldberg and Warren Farrell spoke of the lethal characteristics of manhood – in particular in the ways it was lethal against men. By the time Robert Bly's *Iron John*, made it to the top of the bestseller lists at the end of 1990, vague analyses had crystalized into a broad North American movement with a newspaper, *Wingspan*, men's retreats, groups, drumming circles, regional newsletters, and a string of books that has yet to abate.

There are some positive and potentially progressive aspects to this approach and the work of the thousands of men who participate in some sort of men's group within this framework. One is the simple, but significant, acknowledgment of men's pain; another is the participation of men in men's groups and the decision by men (usually, but not always, straight men) to break their isolation from other men and seek collective paths of change.

On the other hand, as Michael Kimmel and I argue at length elsewhere (Kimmel and Kaufman, op. cit.), the theoretical framework of this movement virtually ignores men's social and individual power (and its relation to pain), ignores what we have called the mother wound (following the insights of feminist psychoanalysis), crudely attempts to appropriate a hodge-podge of indigenous cultures, and pulls men away from the social (and possibly the individual) practises that will challenge patriarchy. My thanks to Michael for the formulation about masculinist politics creating new homosocial space.

²⁵ Although categorizing these two wings of the men's movement is a useful tool for discussion, there are no hard and fast boundaries between the two. A number of the men (more so in Canada than the US) attracted to Robert Bly and the mythopoetic movement are actively sympathetic to feminism and the contemporary struggles of women. Meanwhile, most men pulled towards the pro-feminist framework are also very concerned about enhancing the lives of men. And men, particularly in the latter category, are concerned with the impact of homophobia on all men.

²⁶ My favorite story about the reluctance of many straight people to identify with the need to publically challenge homophobia is told by a colleague who, in Toronto in the early 1980s, was teaching a course on social change. At the student pub after class one night, one of the students was lamenting that he didn't live in another era. It would have been great to live in the late 'thirties, he said, so he could have gone off

and fought in the Spanish revolution. My colleague said, “Well you know, dozens of gay bathhouses were raided by the police this week and there have been big demonstrations almost every night. You could join those.” The student looked at him and said, “But I’m not gay,” to which my colleague responded, “I didn’t know you were Spanish.”

On the relationship of homophobia to the construction of “normal” masculinity see, Michael S. Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia,” in Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, op.cit. and Kaufman, *Cracking the Armour*, op. cit.. Also see Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (Little Rock: Chardon Press, 1988).

²⁷ A number of years ago I worked briefly at a saw mill in British Columbia. One day, my low-seniority job had me dislodging jumbled up wood from chains that were carrying lumber from one saw to the next. The foreman pointed across the vast room at a red button which would stop the moving chains before I ventured into their midst. He said it would halt the whole operation but made it clear that anyone who wasn’t man enough to go into the moving chains shouldn’t be working there in the first place.

²⁸ The White Ribbon Campaign focuses on men’s violence against women. A small group of us began the campaign in late 1991 and within a week tens of thousands of men across Canada (hundreds of thousands a year later) wore a white ribbon for a week as a pledge they would not “commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.” The campaign, aimed to break men’s silence and to mobilize the energy and resources of men, enjoys support across the social and political spectrum and has begun to spread to the US, Australia, Norway and other countries. It now gives particular attention to working with boys and young men and has produced a range of educational materials for use by teachers and students. For information please contact: The White Ribbon Campaign at www.whiteribbon.com.

²⁹ On some responses of men to the issue of pornography, for example, see Michael Kaufman, “Leather Whips and Fragile Desires: The Riddle of Pornography,” chapter 6 of *Cracking the Armour*, op. cit. and Michael S. Kimmel, editor, *Men Confront Pornography*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1990.)