

Affirming life, affirming men: Pro-feminist and mythopoetic perspectives

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Chapter one – Introduction

"Nothing is more distinctive of the Old Being than the separation of man from man. Nothing is more passionately demanded than social healing. This is our ultimate concern and should be the infinite passion of every human being in every age."

- Paul Tillich, 1955, p. 23

My whole self wishes to change the world and who I am in it.
This text comes from that desire.
This desire wants to work and play with others.
You, reading, is one way for that to happen.
Thank you.

For more than twenty years, feminist theorist bell hooks has called for men to participate in feminist struggle. hooks's 1984 work, *Feminist theory: From margin to center*, was one of the first feminist texts I encountered. Passed on to me by my then partner, a passionate, feminist woman, I found the nascent steps of my own journey described therein. In her essay "Men: comrades in struggle", hooks quotes Jon Snodgrass, author of *A book of readings: For men against sexism* (1977) who describes his introduction to feminism:

"It began with a personal relationship ... As our relationship developed, I began to receive repeated criticism for being sexist. At first I responded, as part of the male backlash, with anger and denial. In time, however, I began to recognize the validity of the accusation, and eventually even to acknowledge the sexism in my denial of the accusations" (as cited in hooks, 1984, p. 80).

I see myself in this reflection. My partner's questions and criticism challenged me deeply and gave me two options: leave my old self behind, or watch her leave me behind. Both choices involved pain. I tried to make the one that would help me grow. That meant staying with her and beginning to change how I thought, and how I related to her.

That relationship eventually inspired me to begin a Women's Studies Bachelor's degree at the University of Victoria. Throughout, I have been sustained by the dream of becoming a positive man and reclaiming a fuller humanity. As hooks suggests, I hoped to find a model for what liberation could be:

“Women and men need to know what is on the other side of the pain experienced in politicization. We need detailed accounts of the ways our lives are fuller and richer as we change and grow politically, as we learn to live each moment as committed feminists, as comrades working to end domination” (1988, p. 27).

I have found insight, nuance and growth in Women's Studies. The knowledge I've gained here has mainly improved my critical thinking and writing skills. Evidently, finding positive male role models has been difficult here, and I continue to seek models of visionary, vital and creative masculinity.

Now concluding my degree, I return to my original vision with the question: What does a positive, feminist man look like? For hooks, this is one of the principle oversights of feminism. Throughout *The will to change: Men, masculinity and love* (2004), she encourages feminist activists to generate alternative masculinities to replace the dysfunctional dominator model:

“I am amazed that [feminists] have so little to say about men and masculinities ... men cannot change without the blueprints for change” (p. xii);

“One of the first revolutionary acts of visionary feminism must be to restore maleness ... as an ethical biological category divorced from the dominator model” (p. 114).

Thus, according to hooks, my search for an ethical, positive male selfhood through feminism should “ideally” not be in vain. Visionary feminists could support my journey and that of other questing men. However, hooks does not speak for all feminists. Another prominent feminist,

Minnie Bruce Pratt, recognizes the value of hooks' suggestion, but doesn't want to do the work: "I don't want the personal contact ... when people talk about not giving men our energies, I agree with that ... they have to deliver themselves" (as cited in hooks, 2004, p. 110). Similarly, I have often encountered this refrain in personal relationships with feminists: women have too much liberatory work to do to be able to support my own.

These contradictory impulses from feminist thinkers and friends have left me without resolution to my search for positive manhood. After all, Pratt is correct: Women cannot save men anymore than one person can force another to change. Men must take responsibility for their healing. Thus, I have taken that search into conversations with other men, inside men's circles and men's initiation rituals. I now know that my dream of a positive manhood isn't mine alone, and that if I pursue it in isolation, it will die.

I write this thesis to be heard, and to invite other men to give nourishment to this collective dream. Women cannot know what is at stake for a man who challenges his privilege and takes steps to shake loose from the contradictory rewards and costs of conforming to dominant masculinity. Individuals are immensely powerful catalysts for initiating personal and social shifts, but to sustain profound change, bonds of community solidarity must be established. I believe that for men to change deeply, they need other men to assume the same risks and create those bonds of solidarity.

I value mutuality, collaboration, courage and creativity. By using these ideals as guides, we can envision and begin to live out beautiful ways of being men that support all people to live freely and fully. Because of these core values, I have chosen to focus – both in this thesis, and in my personal life – on men’s groups as a means of exploring “positive manhood”. And so, from this space of uncertainty and active curiosity, I present this text. The research guiding this thesis has focused on the following questions:

- Where can I find models for positive manhood?
- What value is there in working with groups of men?
- What kind of impact, personally and socially, do men’s groups have?

This thesis is focused on two types of men’s groups that have something to offer to these questions: pro-feminist and mythopoetic. Pro-feminist men arose in response to the women’s liberation movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, often taking the form of men’s “anti-sexist consciousness raising” groups. Pro-feminists have since evolved as allies with the broader feminist movement. Today, pro-feminists are focused on confronting male privilege. They/we see gender as a basic site of domination interwoven with racism, classism, homophobia and other forms of oppression.

“Mythopoetic” comes from “mytho-poesis”, or the creation of myth; thus, mythopoetic men are creating a new men’s mythology relevant to our contemporary moment (Bliss, 1996, p. 293). Mythopoetic groups emerged, less visibly, in the early 80s and reached their public apex (or nadir, depending on whom you ask) in the early 90s, coincident with the 1990 publication of Robert Bly’s best-selling *Iron John*. Explicitly apolitical, mythopoetic groups work to meet the psychological and spiritual needs of individual men, aiming to “change the world, one man at a

time”.¹ Both “pro-feminist” and “mythopoetic” are loose designations, and many individual men, including myself, pick and choose the pieces of both groups that work for them.

On a personal level, I work with these two groups because of my background in feminist politics and my love of working in groups. Academically, I believe that by thinking through the differences and overlap between these two groups, important insights into the relationship between the poet (mythopoetics) and the philosopher (pro-feminists) will be generated. Finally, I am a dedicated bridge-builder and so I hope to inspire men involved in either one or neither of these groups to explore them both.

In the next chapter, I will consider both mainstream and critical feminist approaches to understanding masculinities. While acknowledging that there is no singular “masculinity” or male way of being, I illustrate that all men’s lives are structured in power relations and cannot assume neutral positions with respect to social justice. Furthermore, my analysis reveals the limits of analysis; that is, in investigating how power works in men’s lives, responsible theorizing must recognize how men’s emotional and spiritual lives can be ignored in rationalist discourse. This chapter offers a context for the following discussion of mythopoetic and pro-feminist men’s groups.

¹ This is the mission statement of the ManKind Project, an international mythopoetic men’s organization active since 1985 (www.mkp.org).

In chapter three, I review mythopoetic and pro-feminist men's movements by focusing on their respective activities, key literature, ideologies of masculinity, implications for advancing social justice and well-being, and by highlighting exemplary organizations within each movement.

I reflect on my relationship to pro-feminist and mythopoetic work in the final chapter and consider ways that pro-feminist and mythopoetic groups can balance, serve and deepen their respective work through collaboration and dialogue. While noting their respective weaknesses, I affirm that both pro-feminist and mythopoetic movements are carrying out extraordinary work with profound consequences for both social equality and psychic well-being. I conclude by advancing a vision for public dialogue on gender inspired by popular education models that draw upon "participant wisdom" and defer to the real experts on gender: everyone.

Chapter Two – The paradox of power and pain: Theorizing men’s lives

Imagine two “Canadian” men: Jorgen, a twenty-five year old, homeless, depressed, white, queer, non-English speaking recent immigrant in Edmonton; and Lawrence, a forty-year old, blind, heterosexual, fifth-generation, African-Canadian corporate executive in Toronto. What connections exist between these two men? How, by examining their shared but very different experiences of manhood, can we generate useful insights into their respective lives? Is it possible to speak simultaneously to psychodynamics and the complex power arrangements that structure their lives? And if there’s something about their masculinity that hinders or hurts either of these two men or the people with whom they share community, can thinking through their masculinity help identify productive ways to grow?

This chapter introduces both mainstream and critical feminist frameworks that grapple with these questions.² These models variously illustrate ways of thinking about men that reveal and address men’s contradictory experiences of psychological powerlessness and social, political and economic authority.³ Such theories are essential for guiding men’s personal and social change. I begin by evaluating these frameworks based upon Messner’s 1997 examination of U.S. men’s

² This discussion of masculinities is theoretical and draws exclusively upon feminist thinkers. In setting up a binary of “mainstream”/“critical” approaches to masculinity, I risk misleading the reader and inexcusably oversimplifying the discussion. Binaries, however, are useful for theoretical organization and accessibility. I acknowledge that important ways of thinking about men particularly relevant to mythopoetic work, including psychoanalytic, Jungian and literary, are not included here, or are discussed through their reception by critical, feminist thinkers. Ultimately, this omission is a flaw of this thesis. Provisionally, however, I ask for the reader’s indulgence in recognizing that my academic training is feminist. Feminist thinking has made substantial contributions to theorizing masculinity and deserve our attention. At present time, I am incapable of offering rigorous attention to mythopoetic ways of understanding masculinity. However, the two pro-feminist perspectives I draw upon can usefully be applied to understanding mythopoetic men’s work.

³ I recognize that some men experience a great deal of psychological power, and that many men experience very little social, economic or political power. I speak of men as a group in relation to women as a group.

movements and apply his criteria to our two Canadian examples, Lawrence and Jorgen.

Throughout this chapter, I aim to illustrate how these ideas connect with pro-feminist and mythopoetic work.

In *Politics of masculinities: Men in movements* (1997), Messner maps the diverse terrain of U.S. men's movements. He identifies three key concerns that guide these movements: (1) men's institutional privileges; (2) differences and inequalities among men; and (3) the costs for men of subscribing to and/or resisting dominant scripts of masculinity. Organizations addressing men's privileges include pro-feminist groups like Men Can Stop Rape and the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS), further discussed in chapter three. Differences and inequalities among men have been the focus of masculinity politics based on racial identity or sexual orientation, such as the 1995 Million Man March⁴, and gay liberation movements. Finally, the costs of masculinity are the focus of various "father's rights" and "men's rights" groups, the Promise Keepers, an evangelical Christian men's movement, and the mythopoetic men's movement.⁵ These three concerns touch men from a diverse cross-section of political, social, economic, racial and sexual-orientation locations in U.S. society. I examine here how mainstream and feminist perspectives account or fail to account for men's privileges over women, differences among men, and the psychic and relational costs of masculinity that men

⁴ The Million Man March (MMM) saw over 800,000 people – almost all of them African-American men – converge at Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. The MMM reflected an urgency about the dearth of leadership in young black men's lives, and signaled that adult black men were ready to "stand up" and care for families and communities and mentor young black males. (Messner, 1997, p.64-66).

⁵ While this thesis focuses only on pro-feminist and mythopoetic men's work, the interested reader can find book-length studies of (mostly American) men's movements in Messner, M. (1997) *Politics of masculinities: Men in movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Clatterbaugh, K. (1990). *Contemporary perspectives on masculinity: Men, women, and politics in modern society*. Boulder: Westview Press; and, Newton, J. (2005). *From Panthers to Promise Keepers: Rethinking the men's movement*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Readers interested in a more international focus can find ample resources in recent issues of the *Journal of Men and Masculinity*.

bear. In doing so, I illustrate how particular ways of thinking about men can be harnessed to support or undermine social equality and well-being.

I write of “masculinities” and not “maleness”. Maleness primarily refers to biological sex, while masculinities signal how men, individually and collectively, perform their gendered selves and incorporate these behaviors into their identities (Kimmel & Aronson, 2003, p. 503)⁶. I emphasize experience and the intervenable, socially-constructed aspects of masculinities, deliberately bracketing discussion of biological influences on behavior. Finally, I mark “masculinities” in the plural to recognize the variation in how different groups and individuals articulate and embody masculinity, “even in the same society at the same time” (p. 503).

Historically, men have positioned themselves as the producers, not the objects, of knowledge. Just as “white” is often not considered a race or ethnicity but the norm of humanity, men conflate themselves with the universal (e.g., “mankind” or “man” referring to human beings, as seen in the Paul Tillich quote introducing this thesis) (Andermahr et. al, 2000, p. 153). The mainstream approaches I examine illuminate how both men’s behavior and relationships are naturalized. I discuss three perspectives: (1) essentialist, (2) positivist social science, and (3) normative representations in popular culture. These perspectives must not be taken lightly; they are the

⁶ I do not presume a dichotomy of “sex” as fixed, immutable and available for empirical analysis as somatic “fact” and “gender” as fluid and socially constructed. As intersex scholar-activists Anne Fausto-Sterling and Cheryl Chase demonstrate, Western dyadic models of sex are constructions of normalcy that must be renewed through, for example, such practices as medical genital cutting to exclude and transform “deviant” (e.g., intersex or “sex-ambiguous”) bodies at birth. I understand sex and gender not as dichotomous pairings neatly situated in the biological or cultural, but rather upon a continuum between those two poles, with sex leaning towards the biological and gender towards the cultural. Fausto-Sterling, A. (1998). How to Build a Man. In Kimmel, M. and Messner, M., (eds.), *Men’s Lives*. (4th ed.). Toronto: Macmillan/Maxwell; Chase, C. (2006). Hermaphrodites with Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism. In Stryker, S. and Whittle, S. (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge. p. 300 – 302.

dominant ways that society thinks about men. With these definitions in mind, I return to the three concerns Messner discusses.

Essentialist approaches (1) are often employed in mythopoetic work.⁷ Essentialist approaches define masculinity by naming one or several features of men's bodies, spirit, behavior or identity as definitive mark(s) of the masculine. The most common essentialist discourse locates the body, and alternatively chromosomes, genitalia or hormones, as the core of masculinity (Miller, 2005, p. 115).⁸ Mythopoetic writers Robert Bly (1990), Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette (1991) and Sam Keen (1991), for instance, identify a number of essential features or mythological “archetypes” or essential “energies” of masculinity: the wild man, king, warrior and magician, or “Zeus energy” (Bly, 1990, p. 61). The fallacy of these assertions lies in their arbitrary nature. No consensus regarding the true core of the masculine among essentialist thinkers (or anyone else for that matter) has emerged.

Positivist (2) approaches emerged in the early days of 20th century sociology. Sociologists observed patterns in men's lives, and the most frequently occurring patterns were named as

⁷ In the next chapter, I provide a more complete account of mythopoetic essentialism. Mythopoetics take a critical stance on traditional masculinity. The mythopoetics argue that the social construction of contemporary masculinities belies the pernicious impacts of industrialization, damaged father-son bonds and unclear relationships with women and other men. Men's essential goodness is shrouded in the contemporary moment. Mythopoetic work facilitates men's recovery of their core goodness. As Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, two foundational neo-Jungian mythopoetic theorists argue, “It is our experience that deep within every male are blueprints, what we can also call ‘hard-wiring’ for the calm and positive mature masculine” (p. 9 in Moore, R. L. & Gillette, D. (1991). *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco).

⁸ For a refutation of somatically-grounded theories of masculinity, see Fausto-Sterling, A. (1998). *How to Build a Man*. in Kimmel, M. and Messner, M., (eds.), *Men's Lives* (4th ed.). Toronto: Macmillan/Maxwell; and Chase, C. (2006). *Hermaphrodites with Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism*. in Stryker, S. and Whittle, S. (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.

masculine sex roles.⁹ These observations generated psychological M-F (masculine-feminine) scales to regulate behavior and identify deviants (e.g., homosexuals) in “people-processing institutions” such as the military, prisons, hospitals, schools and corporations (Pleck, 1987, p. 23). Consistent with taking men as universal subjects, positivism employs a conceptual framework that lacks a fixed standpoint outside of its object of study. Culturally dominant behaviors are normalized, entrenching gender roles and attendant social inequalities. Despite receiving widespread academic criticism (Constantinople, 1973; Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1987; Pleck, 1987; Brod, 1987), positivism persists as a “common sense” way of understanding and reproducing masculinity: men are what men are.¹⁰

The third approach, normative representations of masculinity (3), track not what men are, but proclaim what they should be. Like positivist sex roles, normative definitions narrowly limit what behaviors are acceptable from men and women and can be enlisted to pathologize deviant behavior. Normative masculinities frequently find their genesis and articulation in popular culture texts (Connell, 1995, p. 70). They play upon the dreams and fears of what men (and women) wish they were and, unlike sex role theories, do not necessarily represent patterns in men's lives. Thus, while Arnold Schwarzenegger's physique represents a “normative” masculine body, the size of his musculature is not a common male feature. Normative definitions of

⁹ The most influential 20th century positivist sociologist of gender is Talcott Parsons. For a critical review of his and Catherine Miles' development of Masculine-Feminine scales, and its sustained influence on masculinity sociology, see Pleck, J. (1987). The Rise and Decline of the Male Sex Role Theory. in Brod, H. (ed.). *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*. Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin.

¹⁰ Strains of positivism are frequently found in discussions of gender in human evolutionary psychology and also in anthropological studies of non-Western cultures. In both cases, empirical observations of gender behavior in “pre-civilized” societies are taken as the definitive truth of how men and women *really are*. Again, relations of power are excluded from discussion. See, for example, Wenthe, M. (2007, December 8). Why Men Still Rule the World. *Globe and Mail*, p. A29.

masculinity are laden with this central paradox: "what is 'normative' about a norm hardly anyone meets?" (Connell, 1995, p. 70). However, despite or perhaps because of the un-reality of normative definitions, they maintain a strong influence on social understandings of masculinity.

Where are Jorgen and Lawrence in these three perspectives? By applying Messner's triad of men's concerns (privileges, differences and costs), I now demonstrate that important aspects of men's psychic and social identities are left unexamined within mainstream approaches.

The essentialist approach asks: to what degree are Jorgen and Lawrence connected to their basic "maleness"? For example, Jorgen is a social outcast, and may be asked about who taught him to be a man; somewhere along the line, the theory goes, Jorgen lost touch with his manhood, and the various markers of social incoherence in his life – e.g., poverty, queerness, depression and his language barrier – are manifestations of this disconnect. Applying Messner's (1997) triad, essentialist perspectives reveal little of the institutional privileges accorded to Jorgen and Lawrence as men and are similarly mute on structural differences among men. The focus remains on diagnosing how these men are dis/connected with the "core" of their manhood, and generating prescriptions to guide individual behavior and social structures towards supporting that connection. Mythopoetic essentialism assumes that when men are connected to their "deep masculinity", they will benefit as individuals as well as generate social well-being for others.

Positivists examine to what degree Jorgen and Lawrence correspond to and deviate from common social patterns for men. To enhance social well-being, positivists consider ways to

minimize and contain difference. These political aims are supported by epistemologies which hide the question of power in social relationships.

Positivist research methodologies attempt to achieve objectivity by maintaining distance between the researcher and the object of study. Such methodologies do not attend to personal narrative or illustrate how men have personally negotiated and come to inhabit their particular social locations. Feminist theorists, notably Nancy Hartsock (1983) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000), have written extensively about how the life experiences of subjects such as poor, African-American women, who face multiple oppressions are systematically erased within positivist epistemologies. Positivist methodologies locate the source of difference within individuals and groups on the margins; the mainstream is presumed as neutral and without influence on the production of difference and marginalization. Therefore, Jorgen and Lawrence as individuals and/or members of racial, economic, linguistic and sexual groupings are held accountable for whatever marginalization they experience. Relations of power are invisible. As for their psychic experiences, positivist assessments of mental and emotional health inform medical judgments which, again, isolate individual pathology from social structures and relations of power.

Similarly, normative accounts also ignore individual experience and are heavily prescriptive on what men should be. Normative masculinities set up unachievable standards of masculinity and judge every man who fails to measure up. No one is excepted; all will fail before normative standards in some ways. Moreover, such judgments instill fear and shame in those who fail, and pride and entitlement for those momentarily deemed acceptable. Normative masculinities are

thus closely linked to both extrinsic social rewards (i.e., professional, athletic, sexual and social success) and consumerism. Normative masculinities in the marketplace play on desires for acceptance, love, beauty and well-being and promote consumption-based paths to their realization. In this respect, normative masculinities are particularly attentive to men's psychic experiences. If most men are not feeling dependent upon material consumption or extrinsic social rewards as emotional life-preservers, then normative masculinities need reworking. Psychic distress in Jorgen and Lawrence's lives linked to racial, economic and sexual-orientation marginalization serves the normative imperative of greasing the machinery of capitalism with fear and isolation.

Normative accounts reinforce social inequality through a selective use of narratives of difference to sell products and enshrine an inequitable distribution of privilege. Male privileges and structural differences among men are both hidden and ever-present in popular culture. That is, while those marginalized by race or sexuality may appear within popular culture texts, they are abstracted from social relations while reinforcing supposed essences of race or sexuality (e.g., Black athletic prowess, or gay hyper-sexuality).

Applying essentialist, positivist and normative lenses to Jorgen and Lawrence's lives produces superficial accounts of their social relationships and emotional lives, and myopic and harmful prescriptions for personal and social development. Because none of these approaches contests the universalization of men's experiences, social inequalities are explained primarily as individual pathology, or attributed to racial, class and sexuality stereotypes. The three

approaches address psychic distress by vacillating between a pessimistic determinism (“this is the way it’s always been with ‘those black/gay/disabled people’”) and the Protestant injunction to pick oneself up by the bootstraps. The unexamined elephant in the room of all these theories is the simultaneous invisibility and hyper-presence of the dominant culture and the relations of inequality Jorgen and Lawrence are embedded within.

Examining this elephant is at the top of feminist theoretical agendas. For an example of this, I now turn to Raewyn Connell (1995) to illustrate how the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” can complexify and deepen our understanding of men’s lives.

Hegemony is a theory developed in the prison writings of Antonio Gramsci, an early 20th century Italian Marxist (Gramsci, Hoare, Nowell-Smith, 1971). Hegemony describes how power reproduces itself (Miller, 2005, p. 116). Widely used in progressive academic thought, the concept of hegemony refers to a “contest of meanings in which a ruling class gains consent to the social order by making its power appear normal and natural” (p. 116). The ruling or dominant social groups achieve this naturalization through “education and entertainment” (p. 116). Thus, social inequality is maintained not primarily by repressive force, but by the “consensual” submission of subordinate groups. The normative masculinities discussed above are examples of hegemony in action; by internalizing the messages of inferiority and shame circulated in cultural texts, people accept their subordination to power. As such, hegemony is a useful way of thinking through the nexus of psychic well-being and social equality.

For Connell (1995), “hegemonic masculinity” refers to the ever-changing articulation of gender relations that subordinate women in relation to men. Hegemony describes *how* this subordination is accomplished. The work of hegemony is endlessly complex and is articulated in both social relations and psychic lives. Hegemony “is constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women” (Connell, 1987, p. 183). This struggle is worked through race, class, sexuality, physical and mental abilities and other markers of social difference. It is both visible and performed through the work of representational practices¹¹ and the distribution of economic and social capital.

To clarify how thinking through hegemony can help illuminate social relationships, consider how race might play out in Lawrence’s life. Lawrence, our African-American corporate executive, may experience some economic and social power owing to his class location. While Canadian society continues to maintain racial hierarchies that subordinate Lawrence, hegemony allows us to think through how class interacts with race and other facets of his social location in producing his social power. Lawrence’s experience of power in one facet of his life may be paired with experiences of subordination, seen in, perhaps, subtle, racist practices of exclusion at elite, social men’s clubs his white colleagues frequent for power lunches and martinis. On a psychic level, Lawrence’s resentment at this instance of oppression could be transmuted into emotionally abusive relationships with his corporate subordinates. Hegemonic masculinity, in this case, refers to the psychic processes and social practices that sustain gender inequality. For

¹¹ For fuller accounts of how discursive practices sustain hegemonic masculinity, see Nixon, S. (1997). *Exhibiting Masculinity*. In Hall, S. (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practice* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Ouellette, M. (2005). *See Me Touch Me Feel Me: (Im)proving the bodily sense of masculinity*. [online]. Retrieved March 1, 2008, from <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/024/ouellette.htm>.

example, his experience of emotional pain from his social exclusion is not permitted healthy expression by Lawrence and the social communities in his life.

Inequitable power relations maintain themselves not by adhering to fixed hierarchies of race, class or gender, but by fluidly manifesting in psychic experience and social relations.

Interrupting these relations requires a recognition of their activity. By virtue of living within a society characterized by oppression, we will continually be challenged to practice counter-hegemonic behavior that consciously disrupts oppressive practices. We must both interrupt the projection of our own psychic distress on to other people *and* create new social orders and more equitable relationships (wherein, for example, Lawrence treats his secretary as his equal).

The point of this theoretical exercise is not to suggest that there are always simple ways of intervening to interrupt hegemonic power relations,¹² or that theorizing hegemony can accurately identify all the dynamics of Lawrence's life. Instead, it is to suggest that if Lawrence yells at his secretary, something more than a "bad day" is happening. The role of theory is to encourage a constant investigation into the dynamics of what might be happening, so as to generate workable, holistic solutions. Simply recognizing the constructed nature of masculinity does not imply that a "quick-fix" is possible (Tacey, 1997, p. 10). It does, however, imply an ever-present possibility of agency. That masculinities and power relations more generally are changing is not in question; rather, it's up to us to determine how much care, emotional presence and constructive thinking we bring to influencing those changes.

¹² And sometimes, there are. We must remain open to the idea that a loving world is not only a dream worth having, but a possibility that is perpetually available with each new decision.

For theories of masculinities to inform in relevant ways how we think and talk about men, they must be capable of addressing Messner's three interrelated concerns: men's institutional privileges; differences and inequalities among men; and the psychic, health and relational costs masculinity has for men. The most useful theory will be flexible and spacious enough to understand the mutual and dynamic constitution of men's emotional lives and social structures. While Connell's (1995) "hegemonic masculinity" is a useful way of understanding the complex and fluid ways that power is reproduced, theory is always a limited search for patterns and will necessarily exhibit a degree of incoherence in its representations of a messy, dynamic world.

Meaningful insight into Jorgen and Lawrence's lives will only be arrived at by maintaining a persistent curiosity and openness to how power works in their psychic and social lives. While typical dynamics of race, class, gender and sexuality are all visible and real in their lives, they may also (and likely do) operate in unusual ways that upset theoretical assumptions. Jorgen may benefit from a strong community of queer homeless men in Edmonton; and Lawrence may experience internalized shame as a successful Black man in a racist society; or, he may have an extraordinarily compassionate psychology. No person's choices can be perfectly understood through theory; we all negotiate our lives with some degree of agency. Theories aiming to liberate society cannot be projects of intellectual "heroes" who liberate "the masses" from their unconscious participation in their own oppression (Miller, 2005, p. 118) . When theory strips subjects of agency, it forfeits both relevance and usefulness as an emancipatory tool.

At its best, however, theory can help to make sense of the “crazy-making” of psychic pain and social inequality. Theory can break down isolation and apathy by assuring people that they are neither crazy nor alone, but embedded in systems of power to which they can speak back. Understanding how these systems work is key to acceptance of self, other people, and an appreciation of “where we’re at”. Theory can support bonds of solidarity between people and communities working towards liberation, and help produce practical programs for social change.

Chapter three – An overview of mythopoetic and pro-feminist men’s movements

Men are changing. The women’s movement, gay liberation, new family structures, and an economy increasingly emphasizing “people-skills” over industrial resource extraction mean that traditional male roles in our society are increasingly irrelevant for young men. Men today can no longer see their gender as a taken-for-granted job description; to some extent, men must understand gender as a problematic and uncertain cultural construct (Messner, 1997, p. 2).

These broad social shifts offer a great opportunity for growth. Some men have responded by organizing into groups captured by the umbrella term “the men’s movement”¹³. In this chapter, I focus on two branches of this movement: pro-feminist, and mythopoetic. For over thirty years, pro-feminist and progressive queer men have allied with feminist women to confront male violence, challenge patriarchy and forge coalitions across race, class, gender and sexuality. And from the 1980s to today, hundreds of thousands of men have participated in mythopoetic men’s work, such as ritual-based initiation weekends and support groups as a way to connect with their own “deep masculinity” (Newton, 2005, p. 138).

I identify with and participate in both pro-feminist and mythopoetic work. Mike Dash, who is active in both pro-feminist and mythopoetic groups, says the two are like “oil and water ... they rarely mix, are often contemptuous of each other, and are both valuable” (1996, p. 355). They also need each other. Pro-feminists need mythopoetics to reach a larger audience, deepen the

¹³ Clearly, not all men’s organizations see themselves as being part of the “men’s movement”, and some insist that none exists. In the early 1990s, after Bly’s *Iron John* was published, the media planted the idea that mythopoetic men were *the* men’s movement, despite the diversity of other men’s groups. Ironically, many mythopoetic men are the most resistant to being identified as part of a “movement”, partly owing to the term’s political connotations.

personal and emotional aspects of their analysis-heavy work, and nurture and honour positive male role models. Mythopoetics need to learn from pro-feminists to use political activism to bring the sense of freedom and communal well-being experienced in ritual to the everyday world. But these two movements remain largely distinct for persistent reasons. The relationship between personal and political change is endlessly complex, and the emotional investment of men engaged in whichever branch is often high.

Later, I highlight ways to navigate this quandary and enhance the work of both pro-feminist and mythopoetic men. Now it is time to provide an overview of the two movements. Both branches are concerned with remaking masculinity. Pro-feminists typically subscribe to a social constructionist understanding of gender, and argue that dominant masculinities can be recast by examining and transforming their institutional and everyday production (Pease, 2000). Similarly, according to Michael Schwalbe (1996b), a leading sociologist of men's movements, mythopoetic work is about “healing, recovering, and *generating* male identity ... and investing it with moral value” (p. 32). Consistent with my personal history, I engage first with pro-feminists.

Pro-feminist men

Pro-feminist men seek to reshape social relations along principles of egalitarianism and hold that gender is a fundamental arena of social inequality. As men, we embody a tension between the unearned privileges and powers ascribed to men and the pro-feminist values we hold. As a pro-feminist man, I stress that, in addition to negotiating the inherent intellectual contradictions of

this position, I experience this tension as both intimate and emotional. Visionary feminist bell hooks writes:

“[Sexism] is unlike other forms of domination: men and women live, in large numbers, intimately together. The context of our most intimate relationships are also sites of domination and oppression.” (hooks, 1988, p. 130).

By acknowledging and confronting oppressive social structures like sexism, racism and homophobia, pro-feminist men transform the intimate and daily aspects of their lives and psyches into sites of political struggle. This work can be socially alienating and emotionally draining (Funk, 1993, pp. 135-138). Pro-feminist men engage in a constant process of self-critique and recognize that social conditioning has ingrained in many men impulses to control both our social worlds and psychic lives (Schwalbe, 1996c, p. 326). Pro-feminist men can benefit from supporting each other to sustain and deepen their work. In this section, I offer an overview of pro-feminist activism by examining their history, activities, philosophy of social change, and several major organizations.

History and literature

While some men throughout history (and “herstory”) have stepped up to advance women’s rights and well-being, organized pro-feminist work appeared in response to women’s liberation work of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴ Men, often connected to feminist politics through female partners and friends, began holding discussion groups and speaking out on women’s rights and their responsibility as men. Some feminist theory held that only women could be considered feminists, and so feminist-allied men began identifying as “anti-sexist men” or “pro-feminist”

¹⁴ See Kimmel, M. & Mosmiller, T.E. (1992). *Against the Tide: Pro-feminist men in the United States, a documentary history*. Boston: Beacon.

(Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 37). Pro-feminist men's literature typically addresses a more academic audience than do mythopoetic texts.¹⁵ Academic discourse is indeed a principal activity of pro-feminist men and directly informs political practice.¹⁶ Early collections drew upon men's experiences in consciousness-raising groups, and included essays challenging sex-role theories of masculinity and manifestos for men's anti-sexist activism (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 40). In 1974, U.S. pro-feminist men rolled out the "First National Conference on the Masculine Mystique", a gathering strongly influenced by the National Organization for Women (NOW). Since 1975, annual Men & Masculinity conferences organized by the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS)¹⁷ have provided a forum for pro-feminist thinking and workshops in the U.S.

Some pro-feminist leaders, including John Stoltenberg and Robert Jensen (both close colleagues of the influential radical feminist Andrea Dworkin), see masculinity as so enmeshed with gender-based violence as to see the total renunciation of masculinity as the only moral option. In his recent book, *Getting off: Pornography and the end of masculinity* (2007), Jensen argues that redeeming masculinity is like trying to redeem an ethics of domination (pp. 142-143). Similarly, in *Refusing to be a man* (1989) Stoltenberg argues that masculinity is interwoven with a "rapist

¹⁵ For an overview of pro-feminist and other men's movement literature from the 1970s to 2000, please see Clatterbaugh, K. "Literature of the U.S. Men's Movements", *Signs*, Vol. 25, No. 3. (Spring, 2000), pp. 883-894. For an extensive (18,000+ references), regularly updated, international bibliography of men's literature, please see Michael Flood's collection at <http://mensbiblio.xyonline.net/>.

¹⁶ E.g., Kilmartin, C & Allison, J. (2007). *Men's Violence Against Women: Theory, Research and Action*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; Funk, R. E. (2006). *Reaching Men: Strategies for Preventing Sexist Attitudes, Behaviors and Violence*. Indianapolis: JIST Publishing.

¹⁷ In 1975, NOMAS was known as the "National Men's Organization". In 1982, it became the "National Organization for Changing Men" and then in 1990 adopted its current moniker. NOMAS is the longest running U.S. pro-feminist organization and is currently organizing the 33rd Men & Masculinity conference in Salt Lake City. (see www.nomas.org).

ethics" condoning a male impulse to dominate (p. 24). This will to dominate, Stoltenberg demonstrates, plays out not only in sexual relations but also within families, communities and nations (p. 59; p. 77). Masculinity for radical pro-feminists is neither "morally necessary nor biologically grounded" and is instead created by male privilege, allowing that it also has deleterious effects on men themselves (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 10). Better, Jensen and Stoltenberg agree, to bring about an *End of manhood*, the title of Stoltenberg's 1993 "how-to" guide to reject masculinity and embrace a full humanity. By throwing out masculinity with the patriarchal bathwater, it is possible that the dramatic arguments of Jensen and Stoltenberg are responsible for some of the poor appeal pro-feminism holds for many men. However, later I will discuss contemporary pro-feminist men's groups that are using innovative approaches to engage a wide variety of men without abandoning masculinity.

Pro-feminist men's discussion groups

Men's anti-sexist consciousness-raising (CR) groups are perhaps closest to mythopoetic men's groups, and indeed both are concerned with examining gender roles and remaking masculinity (Bliss, 1996, p. 294-295; Pease, 1997, p. 22). "Consciousness-raising", a term more commonly associated with women's liberation and feminist theorists like Catherine McKinnon (1982)¹⁸, was employed by two distinct men's groups: male liberationists and anti-sexist men (Pease,

¹⁸ For McKinnon, women's consciousness-raising is a concrete means of "reconstituting the meaning of women's social experience", and thereby issuing a challenge to hegemonic constructions of women as objects denied the ability to speak. Pursuing consciousness is thus a political act to reveal gender relations on a personal level; hence, the "personal is political". Consciousness-raising is, for McKinnon, the fundamental method of feminism. For men, consciousness-raising is a means of revealing how gender relations are organized by questions of power and domination and understanding how sexism works in men's lives. (McKinnon, 1982, p. 543-544). In doing so, men who participate in anti-sexist consciousness-raising groups seek to destabilize (their own) male supremacist consciousness (Hornacek, 1977, p. 124 as cited in Pease, 1997, p. 23).

1997, p. 22). Male liberationists primarily focused on how men had been hurt by rigid sex roles and often used CR groups as a means to redirect uncomfortable feelings, like guilt or shame onto other people – for example, women or the “system” (Hornacek, 1977, p. 124, as cited in Pease, 1997, p. 23). By contrast, pro-feminist Bob Pease describes the three aims of the anti-sexist CR group he founded in 1977:

- a) to explore ways in which we as men feel stunted and limited by sex-role socialization;
- b) to become more aware of sexist attitudes in ourselves ... [and to overcome these attitudes]
- c) to explore alternative ways of relating to other men (1997, p. 19).

Thus, anti-sexist CR groups incorporated some of the concerns of male liberationists, but framed discussions of their personal issues within a wider agenda for anti-sexist social change. In Pease’s group, members initially familiarized themselves with contemporary feminist literature, and held discussions to relate the texts to their own lives (p. 23). As members became more comfortable with each other, they moved to address issues that were coming up in their own lives.

Men’s anti-sexist groups have been called out for “centering themselves around self-abasement” and remaining paralyzed over the guilt of occupying an oppressor role (Pease, 1997, p. 25). Early collections of pro-feminist writings, such as Snodgrass’s 1977 collection, are heavy on narratives of men’s guilt over their sexism. While most pro-feminists today insist that guilt is not a productive platform for social change, some insist that a phase of guilt is a necessary rite of passage for pro-feminist men: “guilt is a catalyst for cutting through complacency” (Rowan, 1987, p. 52 as cited in Pease, 1997, p. 25). To what degree politics and discourse are centered on

guilt varies widely among individuals and groups; nevertheless, pro-feminism as a whole is viewed with reservation by many men because of its association with self-flagellation and its basically critical outlook on masculinity (Schwalbe, 1996c, p. 324; Connell, 1995, p. 221).

Pro-feminist public activism

While abandoning masculinity is not a position taken by all pro-feminist men, we concur that taking responsibility for violence - whether physical, sexual, emotional or otherwise - is at the core of men's work, and is the heart of pro-feminist organizing (Katz, 2006, p. 5, pp. 253-254; Messner, 1997, p. 5).

In contrast to most mythopoetic work, pro-feminist work often takes place in the public sphere. Pro-feminist activists are engaged with a myriad of gender-related issues, including: addressing sexual assault; anti-pornography; counseling for johns and men who batter; political lobbying for gender equality; and coalition work with organizations dedicated to anti-racism, anti-poverty and ending homophobia (Messner, 1997, pp. 53-54; National Organization of Men Against Sexism [NOMAS] Statement of Principles, 1998). Pro-feminists design and deliver anti-sexist education programs for schools and organizations. Articles and books regularly appear to ground anti-sexist educational efforts in solid theory (e.g., Funk, 2006; Katz, 2006; Kilmartin and Allison, 2007; Kivel, 1992; Mason, 2006). Additionally, pro-feminists attempt to reach a broader array of men through brochures and public forums (Pease, 1997, p. 29).

Some pro-feminist work focuses on issues that link all women – such as pornography and male violence against women - and thus fit neatly into an analysis that cites male privilege as the fundamental and most significant base of domination. Some feminists have taken this tendency to task, noting how less visible but perhaps more pressing issues like child-care, pay equity and welfare reform have often taken a back seat (Segal, 1990 as cited in Messner, 1997, p. 55).

Because pro-feminist activism is mainly oriented in opposition to what we don't want – violence and inequality – it often lacks a strong vision of what it does want. As Funk (2006) notes, most organizations end up "specializing" – focusing on domestic violence or sexual assault, for example, but rarely both (p. 208). This specialization limits the development of broad-based "movement" politics, and positions pro-feminist political activism as a "service provider" to heal the wounds of patriarchy, rather than as a vehicle to support wider shifts in masculinity.

Vast arrays of pro-feminist organizations and initiatives have appeared over the past twenty years¹⁹. I briefly discuss three that represent some of the most successful work taking place: Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP); Men Can Stop Rape (MCSR); and the White Ribbon Campaign.

¹⁹ For example: Atlanta-based Men Stopping Violence (<http://www.menstoppingviolence.org/index.php>); Nova Scotia's Men for Change groups (<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/CommunitySupport/Men4Change/>); Men Against Domestic Violence (<http://www.silcom.com/~paladin/madv/>); Paul Kivel's Oakland Men's Project (www.paulkivel.com); RAVEN (Rape and Violence End Now) and Montreal Men Against Sexism. For an overview of these and other pro-feminist initiatives addressing male violence against women, see Kilmartin, C. & Allison, J. (2007). *Men's Violence Against Women: Theory, Research and Action*, pp. 187-209 and Funk, R.E. (2006). *Reaching Men: Strategies for Preventing Sexist Attitudes, Behavior and Violence*, pp. 208-209.

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)

Founded in 1993 by Jonathan Katz, MVP focuses on encouraging male student-athletes to take a leadership role in preventing gender-based violence (Kilmartin & Allison, 2007, p. 199)²⁰. MVP brings in male and female educators to present athletes with sexist and potentially violent scenarios. Audience members have an opportunity to suggest what they would do to intervene. Additionally, the program provides participants with a “playbook”²¹ which analogizes anti-sexist interventions as sports moves. The metaphor emphasizes teamwork and an ability to “read the field”, or understand the complexity of anti-sexist interventions (p. 199).²²

Men Can Stop Rape (MCSR)

Founded in 1997, MCSR promotes a positive image of masculinity encouraging men to use their strength to end violence against women.²³ Programs and services include: supporting Men of Strength Clubs (MOST Clubs) in high schools and on college campuses; offering anti-sexist trainings and consultations for activists and organizations; and, producing a slick promotional program called the Strength Campaign (Kilmartin & Allison, 2007, p. 201). MOST clubs sensitize male youth to the realities of male violence against women, explore positive concepts of masculinity, and provide support for young men to undertake social justice work. The effectiveness of these clubs in supporting young men in confronting sexist and harmful behavior has been demonstrated by research (Hawkins as cited in Kilmartin & Allison, p. 202). The

²⁰ For Jonathan Katz’s “10 Things Men Can Do to Prevent Gender Violence”, please visit <http://www.jacksonkatz.com/wmcd.html>

²¹ See, for example, <http://www.jacksonkatz.com/PDF/Slapshot.pdf>

²² For testimonials from MVP participants, please see p. 237, Kilmartin & Allison, *Men’s Violence Against Women: Theory, Research and Action*.

²³ http://www.mencanstoprape.org/info-url_nocat2701/info-url_nocat.htm

Strength Campaign employs variations on the slogan, “My strength is not for hurting, so when guys disrespect women, we say that’s not right”, and features multi-racial, mainly heterosexual couples.

White Ribbon Campaign

Pro-feminist activists have responded to major crises, such as the 1989 anti-feminist murders of fourteen women, students and staff, in the engineering faculty at the University of Montreal. Within six weeks following the tragedy, the White Ribbon Campaign organized over 100,000 Canadian men to “pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women or girls” by symbolically wearing a white ribbon. The campaign is renewed each year as a two-week memorial for the victims and a public recognition of the pervasiveness of violence against women.

The White Ribbon Campaign model has spread to the UK and Australia. The website (www.whiteribbon.ca) provides campaign materials at little or no cost as well as guides to initiate the campaign in local areas. Funds raised support rape crisis centres, domestic violence shelters and a public education campaign (Kilmartin & Allison, 2007, p. 203). It is the “largest effort in the world of men working to end gender-based violence” (p. 202). According to pro-feminist Michael Messner (1997), the campaign represents a significant success in broadening the involvement of men as allies in feminist struggle (p. 54).

While pro-feminist activism has traditionally attracted few men (Messner, 1997, p. 55), these three groups suggest that effective and creative steps are being taken to address sexism and connected forms of oppression. Pro-feminist work emphasizes reflective processes encouraging men to re-evaluate what masculinity means and practice new, more peaceful and egalitarian ways of being (Kaufman, 1993; Messner, 1997; Pease, 1997; Stoltenberg, 1993; Kivel, 1992; Katz, 2006). In this respect, pro-feminist men's work has much in common with mythopoetic work. However, pro-feminist work does not generally provide space for the kind of emotional and spiritual depth mythopoetic work aspires to – though certainly pro-feminist men would recommend that many (if not all) men seek out individual or group counseling to support personal transformation. Because pro-feminist work is generally done in the public sphere (i.e., in schools, through the media, or in organizations such as sports teams and workplaces), the “heads” of participants are generally engaged more than their “hearts”. This provides a distancing that can help participants feel comfortable while planting seeds for future discussions with peers, anti-sexist interventions, and reflections on identity and behavior.

Personal experience: Engaging men in pro-feminist dialogue

My personal experience with pro-feminist activism is limited to short-term participation in anti-sexist discussion groups and quietly listening at public feminist events. Finding men interested in feminism remains an ongoing activist project in its own right. However, I have found a hunger within men, feminist or not, for meaningful dialogue on gender. Men, including myself, are often deeply confused by the role of gender in their lives. When introducing myself to new men, I often come to explain what Women's Studies is, and why I chose to undertake an undergraduate

degree in that discipline. Attempting to avoid alienating other men, I would explain “Women’s Studies is a misnomer – it’s actually all about power and investigating social inequality by looking at race, class, sexuality *and* gender”. Somehow, this explanation didn’t bring me or feminism any closer to many men I met. My explanation failed to tap into men’s basic curiosity around gender. More recently, I’ve realized that in moving the dialogue to a place of openness (i.e., asking men “well, I’ve been asked what Women’s Studies is a lot, and I’d love to share, *and* I’m also really curious to first know what it means to you”), I have found both closer relationships with men, greater curiosity about feminism and engaged dialogues on gender.

This basic curiosity about gender brought me, less than a year ago, to mythopoetic work. Bearing in mind that caveat of limited personal experience, I present the following overview.

Mythopoetic men

The term “mythopoetic” comes from “mythopoesis”, or the creation of a men’s mythology for our time (Bliss, 1996, p. 293). Gregory Baldauf, a mythopoetic leader, describes the work:

“Men’s work is the process by which men turn inward into their hearts, souls, and minds, both by themselves and in the company of other men, in order to better understand [and access] their feelings, who they are as men, and how they relate to others in their lives. Men’s work is about creating meaning. Men’s work is heart work. Men’s work is about men healing, about self-definition, about creating healthy relationships, and about being generative [by giving back] and serving other men and the larger community” (1995, p. 2).

Baldauf’s definition emphasizes reflective individual and group work, an integration of heart, soul and mind. Furthermore, men’s work is primarily concerned with *men* as the starting point for effecting changes in relationships and the larger community. Mythopoetic work is androcentric; “[it is] an exploration of male spirituality and male psychology” (Wilson &

Mankowski, 2000, p. 21). Absent from Baldauf's remarks are any specific regard for women and men who are marginalized because of sexuality, race or class. The emphasis, instead, is on individual and collective spirituality and healing.

Social worker and mythopoetic participant Marty Pentz (2000) shares his experience at a typical weekend men's initiation ritual:

“At the opening staff meeting ... each man was to share what he needed to learn for himself on this weekend ... Some wanted mentoring or were learning how to release and experience joy, openly deal with grief, and learn to be of more service to the world. At the point where each man came forward with a need, another man would come forward with his willingness to teach what he has of this knowledge.

‘One man came [and] tearfully said, “I need to learn how to truly live within my grief.” The man who [responded] (who had lung cancer and died a month and a half after the weekend) stated, “I would be honoured to teach you what I know about living in joy while you grieve” (p. 204).

Through mythopoetic work, men learn to connect to their feelings, ask for, receive and give emotional support to other men. That alone subverts dominant paradigms of unfeeling masculinity (Hennessey, as cited in Diamond, 1996, p. 318; Schwalbe, 1996a, p. 203). However, is the community-based men's therapy of the mythopoetics enough to transform masculinity, and make progressive steps towards a more equitable and just society for all?

Overview of mythopoetic work

Despite the media's aggrandizement of leaders like Robert Bly, mythopoetic men's work is largely grassroots. It is carried out inside a vast array of experiential events from discussions held in living rooms to intense, multi-day retreats put on by organizations like the ManKind Project²⁴

²⁴ <http://www.mkp.org>

and Men's Division International²⁵. Gatherings are often advertised through word-of-mouth, classified ads, cafes and online. Event titles include "Wild Men weekends", the Inner King Training²⁶, Shadow Work Seminars²⁷, vision quests, the New Warrior Training Adventure²⁸, Warrior Monk²⁹, men's weekends³⁰, and many others. More frequent, however, are the weekly and biweekly support groups that often form following mythopoetic weekends. These groups vary from tightly facilitated groups with a committed, long-term membership to the most informal of potlucks and discussion groups. (Harding, 1992, p. xv).

While some work receives organizational support, most mythopoetic work is participant-led. Thus, reliable figures on participation rates are difficult to determine. In 1991, Judith Newton estimated that 100,000 men had participated in mythopoetic work (Newton, 2005, p. 138). The ManKind Project, founded in 1985, has initiated over 30,000 men into its New Warrior Training Adventure, and initiates 3,000 to 4,000 new men each year³¹. While predominantly active in the U.S., the ManKind Project has chapters in Europe, Oceania, South Africa and Canada.

Participation in most mythopoetic men's retreats costs a significant amount of money (Messner, 1997, p. 18). However, most ongoing support groups for mythopoetic men, such as MKP's New Warrior Integration Groups, are run free of charge. Mythopoetic men's work mainly attracts

²⁵ <http://www.mdionline.org/>

²⁶ <http://www.livingartsfoundation.com/innerking.html>

²⁷ <http://shadowwork.org>

²⁸ <http://mkp.org/training.htm>

²⁹ <http://www.warriormonk.org>

³⁰ E.g., Wissocki, G.W. & Andronico, M. P. (1996). The Somerset Institute's modern men's weekend. In M. P. Andronico (ed.), *Men in groups: Insights, interventions, and psychoeducational work* (pp. 113-126). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

³¹ www.mkp.org/mkp.htm

middle-class, middle-aged, white, heterosexual men. Kimmel and Kaufman, two pro-feminist authors, report that, of the retreats and conferences they attended across the U.S. in the early 90s, men of colour comprised between zero and two percent of attendees and homosexual men not more than five percent. The majority of the men were between 40 and 55, with about ten percent over 60 and five percent younger than 30. White-collar workers were more present than working-class men (1996, p. 18).

Mythopoetic activities

Techniques employed in men's work include sharing circles, drumming, sweat lodges, truth-telling circles, psychodrama, personal mission development, guided visualizations, breath work and rebirthing rituals, massage, father quests, and Jungian shadow work (Barton, 2000, p. 4; Grof, 1992; Kauth, 1992). For most mythopoetic groups, the work is both sacred and confidential; men are permitted to share their own experiences but any other sharing is prohibited.

Mythopoetic activities can be easily ridiculed. Often conducted by white-collar men in camps, community centres, hotels, churches, and living rooms, the activities can feel somewhat at odds with a notion of "deep, wild masculinity". Drawing on diverse cultural traditions worldwide, mythopoetic activities seem to have been found in some post-modern supermarket of cultural appropriation. For Connell (1996), this practice represents yet another unaccountable cultural

theft of indigenous traditions by white men (p. 86).³² Moreover, performing animal identities, dancing around naked and allowing one's mind to be guided into visualizations challenge men to suspend disbelief. Clearly, the activities of mythopoetic work will not appeal to all men. However, I illustrate here some of the positive values for men who are ready for the work.

Mythopoetic theory: Men's rituals and the Jungian-archetypal psychology of James Hillman

Men's initiation rituals are a form of what anthropologist Victor Turner (1982) calls *communitas*. In *communitas*, people exceed their everyday capacities for thinking, feeling, volition and creativity by participating in a gathering that transcends normal constraints on behavior and interaction (p. 44). In this space, old structures and patterns of relation may die, and "new, life-enhancing paradigms can emerge" (Mason, 2006, p. 173).

Thus, men's rituals can be constructed to subvert life-numbing patterns of patriarchy, allowing participants to shed old behaviors and psychic scripts and collectively practice new ways of being. What comes from the ashes of men's rituals can be transmuted in infinite ways: "Males experience themselves in a transformational way, not as [persons trapped in] pre-determined traditional masculine ideology scripts, but as whole, complete beings, connected in a sacred world" (Mason, 2006, p. 174).

Mythopoetic rituals draw on a blend of Jungian psychology and James Hillman's archetypal psychology. In combination, these psychologies offer tools to diagnose and solve men's issues

³² I have yet to find a defence in any mythopoetic texts concerning the appropriation and use of non-European cultural traditions.

(Schwalbe, 1996b, p. 31). In brief, Jung argued that people begin life as whole beings, but become fragmented and lose their identity from social wounding (p. 37). In order to reintegrate the fragmented pieces and become a “Wise Old Man”, men must attend to different aspects of their personality, represented by archetypes such as the innocent boy, king, warrior, magician, lover and wild man (p. 39). Additionally, men must also incorporate their “anima” or feminine side alongside the masculine “animus”. Each archetype has a dark side – the shadow elements – which must also be accepted into identity. Men who have not integrated their shadow archetypes will project them onto other people, and act hurtfully towards them because they are reminded by parts of themselves they dislike.

James Hillman, a revered mythopoetic leader, emphasizes that everyday life is full of symbols that can be apprehended through metaphorical, non-linear thinking (Schwalbe, 1996b, p. 45). He argues that because our society privileges rational thinking, our collective capacity for “imaginal” thinking is scarce. We miss out on life and its meaning by neglecting to see the patterns underlying our spiritual and material existence (p. 45). Hillman expanded on Jung’s work by saying that anything in our lives can hold meaning as an archetypal image (p. 45). Departing from traditional counseling practices, Hillman (1983) holds that everyone can engage with archetypal thinking and access inner wisdom (p. 26).

Thus, many mythopoetic men make use of archetypal themes to promote psychological integration. Mythopoetics understand most men in contemporary society to be fundamentally insecure with their manhood because industrial society and its divisive, individualistic pressures

have thwarted the natural process of integrating men's archetypes and shadow-archetypes (Bly, 1990, p. x). Fragmented men may lash out violently, projecting their inadequacies onto others, or they may become feeble conformists who uphold bureaucratic truths at the expense of personal and communal well-being. By putting men in touch with these archetypes, mythopoetic work encourages balanced, generative and whole masculinities to emerge.

Mythopoetic work is hopeful. By emphasizing that men have everything they need to be whole and healed, the work fosters self-confidence in its practitioners (Schwalbe, 1996b, p. 55). Internal shadows are recast by mythopoetics as sources of strength and wisdom (Schwalbe, 1996c, p. 324). The real enemies of mythopoetic work are clear: rationalist thinking and unfeeling bureaucratic institutions. In reclaiming their masculine identity, mythopoetic men engage in a mythological, "hero's journey" of the self to heal psychic wounds.

As a social movement, however, mythopoetic men are not well-positioned to establish alliances with other social justice groups. An intellectual consideration of the ways socio-economic structures have shaped men's and women's lives is antithetical to mythopoetic work. Thus, mythopoetic work remains largely insensitive to race, class and other structural ways that people remain separate and unequal. The mythopoetic men in Schwalbe's (1996a) study "believed that engaging in political or sociological analysis would have led them away from their goals of self-acceptance, self-knowledge, emotional authenticity, and *communitas*" (p. 202). While mythopoetic work may encourage individual men to accept their psychic shadows and become

more loving men, the larger, collective shadows of structural oppression - such as racism, class inequality and homophobia - are not directly engaged.

Mythopoetic writers

In 1990, Robert Bly's best-selling book, *Iron John: A book about men*, brought the public eye to mythopoetic men. *Newsweek*, *Esquire* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly* quickly capitalized on the sensationalist photo opportunities afforded by middle-class white men in war paint and loin cloths³³. In January 1990, Bill Moyers' more thoughtful interview with Bly in the PBS special *A gathering of men* further drew a national audience to mythopoetic work. Moyers' interview aside, the media generally treated the mythopoetic movement with bemused contempt. Mythopoetic adherents soon retreated from the spotlight (Kimmel, 1996, p. 4).

Bly is the best known mythopoetic leader, and, much to the chagrin of many mythopoetic participants, he and *Iron John* have been taken to represent much of mythopoetic work. This is a distortion. Mythopoetic work depends upon grassroots leadership and is focused on men's internal lives. Many mythopoetic participants have never encountered Bly or other prominent figures like Michael Meade or James Hillman (Schwalbe, 1996a, p. 202). Nonetheless, Bly's work has deeply influenced mythopoetic work and contains many of its basic tenets.

In his preface to *Iron John* (1990), Bly deplores Western society's "mad exploitation of earth resources, devaluation and humiliation of women [and] obsessions with trivial warfare." Men

³³ See, for example, Doug Stanton, "Inward Ho", *Esquire* 116, 4 (October 1991), p. 112 ff; and Jerry Adler et. al., "Drums, Sweat and Tears," *Newsweek* (24 June 1991), pp. 46-53.

and women are led by defunct mythologies “teaching obedience to the wrong powers” (p. xi).

Bly has consistently been an outspoken critic of the conservative U.S. administrations. However, throughout *Iron John*, Bly’s politics are only vaguely countercultural. While Bly lauds feminist liberation, he is wary of the “softening” it has had on some men:

“In the seventies, I began to see all over the country ... ‘the soft male’ ... They’re lovely, valuable people – I like them – they’re not interested in harming the earth or starting wars ... but many of these men are not happy ...’
‘They are life-preserving but not exactly life-giving. Ironically, you often see these men with strong women who positively radiate energy.’
‘Here we have a finely tuned young man, ecologically superior to his father, sympathetic to the whole harmony of the universe, yet he himself has little vitality to offer” (pp. 2–3).

Feminism, according to Bly, is only partially responsible for the “soft man”. Additionally, the absence of fathers and the demanding rhythms of modern work-life have produced a vacuum of male leadership. His book encourages men to discover male role models through myth, poetry, ritual initiations and participating in individual and group work exploring masculine and Jungian archetypes. Like popular self-help books, *Iron John* is sufficiently open-ended to allow most men to find something that speaks to them.

Aside from a generalized distaste for his scholarship and writing, pro-feminist critics primarily take issue with the Bly’s gender essentialism. Throughout *Iron John*, Bly speaks of a “deep masculinity” residing within all men (1990, p. 36; p. 55; p. 234). He points to genetic differences, ancestral archetypes, and myths, not sociological studies or scientific data to illustrate his points. Pro-feminists are concerned with how such essentialism can naturalize social inequalities (Clatterbaugh, 1996, p. 49; Kimmel & Kaufman, 1996, p. 25). Additionally, Bly’s use of transcultural narratives (emblematic of mythopoetic cultural appropriation) tends to

minimize cultural differences, and imply that masculinities in Papua New Guinea are the same as those in Alberta. In short, Bly is accused of being too loose with his words and, whether by ignorance or patriarchal impulse, of reinscribing sexist gender roles.

Other mythopoetic works include Sam Keen's *Fire in the belly* (1991) which presents an alternative vision of masculinity based on self-discovery. Keen argues that separation from women is the first step on the masculine quest (Kimmel, 1996, p. 6).³⁴ Many mythopoetic works have been popular because they combine religion and psychology, and offer perspectives on healing and personal growth through a non-institutional spirituality (Brunner, 2000, p. 75)³⁵.

For many men, including myself, mythopoetic work represents a rare opportunity to connect on an emotional and spiritual level with other men. Mythopoetic work is celebratory of men and the "male spirit". However, journalist Don Shewey (1996) writes that homophobia also shows up in mythopoetic work: "at conferences across the country ... gay men complain. [Clearly, for Michael Meade and Robert Bly] gay culture is alien and threatening to them" (p. 348).

According to observers both within and outside the mythopoetic movement, the long shadow of sexuality remains obscured (Murray, 1996; Diamond, 1996, p. 318). However, I believe that the

³⁴ Other important mythopoetic authors include: Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, who published five books on the male archetypes – the *King warrior magician lover* (1990) series; and Michael Meade who published *Men and the water of life* (1993, San Francisco: HarperCollinsSanFrancisco) and continues to be active with mythopoetic work, myth in general, and multicultural healing. Importantly, Meade's work includes organizing the 1992 men's conference at Buffalo Gap, which brought together fifty African-American and fifty white men to address racial division through a mythopoetic perspective. For more on Meade, please visit <http://www.mosaicvoices.org/>

³⁵ For a comparative analysis of mythopoetic men's writings, please see Brunner, Thomas M. *A proposed model for comparing writers in the mythopoetic branch of the contemporary men's movement* in Barton, 2000.

relative safety and acceptance of fears within mythopoetic work makes it a promising forum to explore the how homophobia keeps men of all sexualities distant from each other.

Many men experiencing isolation and emotional and spiritual emptiness find a home in mythopoetic men's work. One man describes his men's centre as "a true church ... [because] it helps you do soul work and is accepting" (Schwalbe, 1996a, p. 28). While mythopoetic men consciously avoid identifying political beliefs, some argue that their work "has made a politics out of breaking men's isolation from one another" (Wilson & Mankowski, 2000, p. 42). Indeed, the ManKind Project's slogan is politically engaged: "Changing the world, one man at a time."³⁶ Since the 1960s, feminists have insisted that the "personal is political". Mythopoetic work finds political change inside personal journeys using therapeutic ritual and male communion.

Conclusion

Mythopoetic and pro-feminist groups offer men unique and challenging opportunities to engage with and work to transform psychic pain and social inequality. While both movements do not attract large numbers of men, this doesn't necessarily signal a deficiency. Both movements are basically critical of many aspects of dominant culture, and are thus automatically positioned on the margins. While many mythopoetic groups energetically seek out new men, there is a general appreciation that men should only participate "when they're ready". Men who lack sufficient personal and social well-being may be overwhelmed by the shadows of psychic fragmentation and social inequality that mythopoetic and pro-feminist groups respectively emphasize. I feel

³⁶ www.mkp.org

deep gratitude for the men willing to engage with these shadows and blaze a trail towards greater social and personal integrity.

Chapter four - Integration

“Only by going into the place where the corruption of power and energy is at its worst do we reclaim that power and use it to heal ourselves.”

– Alix Pirani, 1989, p. xiii

“Politics is what we dare to imagine.”

- Senator Paul Wellstone, as cited in Newton, 2005, p. 273.

I approach this chapter with a mix of doubt and revolutionary *chutzpah*. I drown my writing in coffee and long hours. I hold my inspiration and fear with clumsy, beginning hands.

In this final chapter, I plead for integration. Mind, body, spirit. Feminine and masculine.

Therapeutic and sociological. Social and psychic. Let us transcend binary thinking. We are all connected. We are here for such a short time, and here forever. This world belongs to the dead; we are short-term tenants, but our collective choices seed the soil for our descendants. Hope for the future rests in the capacity of ordinary men to change. By change, I mean growing through integrating both psychic and social challenges. Psychic challenges include overcoming a limited sense of personal power, a hyper-valuation of rationalist thinking, poor relationships and emotional inexpressivity. Social challenges include recognizing that patriarchy remains the dominant paradigm of power relations, and that feminine and “alternative masculine” subject positions (read: women, non-white, immigrant, queer, economically underprivileged, differently abled) continue to be subordinated to a culturally dominant masculinity (Seidler, 2006, p. 36).

These challenges are *alive* in my life. I believe that they are alive for all people. Acknowledging these challenges is the first step in transforming their darkness. This thesis is a part of that

process and is also an invitation to form community and solidarity between *people* who wish to support each other in engaging the shadows of psyche and society.

I begin by sharing my emotional process with respect to this thesis. Second, I articulate a vision of positive masculinity. Third, I revisit the mythopoetic and pro-feminist men's movements, and name some of the questions their work elicits concerning men's relation to personal and social change. I frame their respective challenges as invitations to mobilize the creative energy of communities to manifest new ways of discussing, performing and transforming masculinity and gender relations. In Matthew Fox's *The reinvention of work*, he writes that "there are three types of work. Inner work, outer work, and the work you do to bring the two together" (as cited in Elias, 2002, p. 43). In the spirit of this last form of work, I write this chapter. To meet these challenges, I suggest an integration of spirit, mind and body alongside the work of collapsing the boundaries between sociological, psychological and spiritual realities. More concretely, I call attention to the art of civic engagement as expressed by Toronto artist Darren O'Donnell's (2006) "social acupuncture" to address how men's transformation can be explored in public spaces.

Shadows and social change

Recently, a dear friend asks me, "Steve, you're eight months into your thesis. What does it mean to be a man?" I am silenced. I watch feminist clichés about hegemonic masculinities compete with emotional yearnings for brotherhood and friendship and for a spiritual-political revolutionary solidarity among men. I muster a few words about responsibility for psychic and social shadows. My words are meek. My eyes cast downward and meet dirty kitchen linoleum.

Who am I to speak about men? What qualifies me? Am I merely stirring a bland soup of tired feminist axioms and pop-psych bromides about transcendence and liberation? Yes, men should really change, sure. Of course they'll gladly give up their power, do the work of liberation, yes, they've just been waiting for your invitation, Steve.

I offer these doubts as an example of how emotional shadows can be given space, and thus rendered available for transformation. I present an alternative to the dichotomy between "feel-good" activism (e.g., the purchase of moral righteousness connected with "fair-trade" products, or charity-campaigns that require money, not self-reflection) and the strains of cynical defeatism within "anti-" politics (e.g., anti-oppression, anti-globalization, anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-homophobia etc.). It's okay to feel terrible. It's okay to not know what we're doing. Despair and confusion need not be shut out of our lives for fear that we will slip into apathy and indifference as inevitable consequences to letting the pain of the world in. Heavy emotions signal that we care about the world and ourselves and that we're struggling to come to terms with the complex and ongoing relationship between self and society. It is precisely by offering space for challenging emotions to exist that we protect ourselves and communities from paralyzing depression, apathy, guilt, and social isolation.

I wish that I knew a long time ago that feeling pain, weakness and confusion is okay. However, my own experiences of intense psychological distress are, in part, what inspire me to advocate an intimate knowing and appreciation of pain on both personal and social levels. I allow myself doubt. My faith in humanity, possibility, change and growth far exceeds my desire to remain stuck within the comfortable numbness of self-doubt and cynicism. Despair, doubt and

depression are a few of my shadows. It's taking me some time to consume them and find their place inside my internal cosmology. Writing helps.

Like the mythopoetics, I understand shadows as fundamental sites of growth (Bliss, 1996, p. 300; Schwalbe, 1996c, p. 324). By integrating darkness, I step into my wholeness. Fearing incoherency and the alienation of those men who have courageously brought their wounds to them, mythopoetic men's groups have hesitated to embrace shadow-work on a broader, social level. This fear is understandable. Outside the container of mythopoetic ritual, the resistance to see shadows is enormous. Our collective investment in racism, sexism, homophobia and all inequitable power relations is as overwhelming as it is immense. Before entering therapy or other transformative work, most people, including myself, have had to face crisis. Even if some glimmer of a deeper reality emerges, what resources do we have at our weakest to engage with those shadows, those hard truths? In a society that rewards productivity within the existing paradigm, we citizens are censured and isolated should we choose to remain in the dark. There is no support to remain with the truth of despair, even if it is a truth.

So what then? If neither psyche nor society can bear witness to shadows, then how will they ever be transformed? Reflecting on her studies of *A Course in Miracles*, a new-age spiritual path, Marianne Williamson (1992) writes,

"...Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."³⁷

I choose to shine. Williamson suggests that paradoxically, embracing light and power is the only way to illuminate the shadows and to confront our darkest fears. Only under a dim, unfocused light do the shadows remain hidden. To recognize the shadows of social injustice, we must collectively shine forth a tremendous light. Courage is needed to hold that light strong; the shadows will tempt those who encounter them to be consumed. Call it depression, or call it the paralyzing grip of (white/male/hetero) "privilege-guilt". Both can crush the hope of revolutionary action. But so too will retreating from empathy and returning to a numbed psychic state.

For men, there is a middle path between seeking refuge in the warm, nostalgic embrace of the patriarch with his "deep", essentialized masculinity and the Oedipal, radical pro-feminist desire to kill the father and gouge one's eyes out in the same stroke (Tacey, 1997, p.191). The new man transcends the patriarchal era not by lashing out and killing the father, but by redeeming the shadows of masculinity inherited from his father and alchemically transforming them into life-serving energy. Tacey writes, "the sons must strike out anew, rebuild the world and refashion its politics, and the most creative sons of all must 'father' themselves" (1997, p. 5). Tacey argues that this middle path is necessarily lonely. I disagree. Isolation and the heroic individual are archetypes of the old patriarchy. The creative son, committed to the creation of new paradigms

³⁷ http://skdesigns.com/internet/articles/quotes/williamson/our_deepest_fear/

for other men, does this work cooperatively and in interdependence with other people. We can hold the light, together, as we walk into the dark.

Questions and opportunities prompted by pro-feminist and mythopoetic men's work

Pro-feminist and mythopoetic men highlight significant opportunities for progress in healing psychic and social trauma. I begin this section with a vision of men's liberation, and then consider opportunities for synthesis between mythopoetic and pro-feminist work.

What would a world look like free of sexism and packed with men dedicated to personal and social healing? This world would be populated by individuals who are self-actualized, connected, healthy, and have significantly "individuated", or integrated, the masculine, feminine and shadow aspects of their souls. Self-love and supportive community are essential ingredients for this world of "compassion, beauty, equality, pleasure and grace where all people come together to actualize our finest potentials" (Clark as cited in Newton, 2005, p. 273). Perhaps such dreaming is too indulgent of both my writing and audience; but, without a vision to guide us towards transcending the paradigms of dominance, how will we orient our actions, coordinate our efforts and find motivation to sustain solidarity? (hooks, 1988, p. 27)

I write with great curiosity about dreams of a better world. Too often, such discussions are truncated by cynicism. To normalize a culture of hope, I acknowledge visionaries like Starhawk (1992) who shares her dreams for men's liberation:

"Feminists long for men to heal... we dream of a world full of men who could be passionate lovers, grounded in their own bodies, capable of profound loves and

deep sorrows, strong allies of women, sensitive nurturers, fearless defenders of all people's liberation, unbound by stifling convention yet respectful of their own and others' boundaries, serious without being humorless, stable without being dull, disciplined without being rigid, sweet without being spineless, proud without being insufferably egotistical, fierce without being violent, wild without being, well, assholes ... at its best, I believe the men's movement also aims for this goal" (pp. 27-28)³⁸

For solidarity movements to transcend reactionary politics, they must be guided by a positive vision, both relevant for our contemporary moment and cognizant of the slow shifts of spirit and history. Following the pro-feminist/mythopoet David Tacey (1997), I attend to the productive tensions between mythopoetic and pro-feminist men's work; "it is time to bring depth and surface, emotional life and sociopolitical awareness together in a lively discourse that attempts to look inside and outside at the same time" (pp. xi – x).

Mythopoetic men's work provides a glimpse of progressive male solidarity. Starting from the premise that "working in groups of men may be the most effective and efficient way for males to break out of their emotional armor, defensiveness and isolation", mythopoetic work elaborates a politics of healing anchored in the reconstruction of damaged individual, familial, and community relationships (Allen, 1996, p. 309; Newton, 2005, p. 260). Performance artist Keith Hennessey concurs, writing that "men meeting together to tell stories and pray and touch and commit to love is a world-healing r/evolutionary act" (as cited in Diamond, 1996, p. 318).

Because mythopoetic work encourages men to bear their wounds, they foster the leadership of

³⁸ Similarities and differences in Starhawk's aspirations for men's healing and those of the mythopoetic men's movement can be found in the ManKind Project's description of the "New Warrior": "The New Warrior is a man who has confronted this destructive "shadow" and has achieved hard-won ownership of the highly focused, aggressive energy that empowers and shapes the inner masculine self. Sustained by this new energy, the New Warrior is at once tough and loving, wild and gentle, fierce and tolerant. He lives passionately and compassionately, because he has learned to face his own shadow and to live his mission with integrity and without apology." (www.mkp.org/nw.htm)

what gay liberation activist Michael Lerner calls “wounded healers” (as cited in Newton, 2005, p. 266). Following Alix Pirani whom I quote at the beginning of this chapter, mythopoetic work views these wounds as blessings. Through acknowledging, honouring and caring for our wounds, growth is inevitable.

Pro-feminist men challenge mythopoetic men to heal broader social shadows. Pro-feminists argue that the paradox of men’s contradictory experiences of personal impotence and social authority cannot be solely explained, as Bly (1990) would have it, by Western industrialization or degraded bonds between father and son. Feminism offers a highly sophisticated analysis of power that highlights how race, class, sexuality and other differences are interwoven to sustain inequality (Dash, 1996, p. 357). Schwalbe (1996c) argues that feminist sociology can support men in doing their shadow work by freeing them of the paralyzing grip of guilt. Mythopoetics might heed the words of Jung himself, who wrote that:

“if the connection between the personal problem and the larger contemporary events is discerned and understood, it brings release from the loneliness of the purely personal, and the subjective problem is magnified into a general question of our society. In this way, the personal problem acquires a dignity it lacked hitherto” (Jung 1921, as cited in Tacey, p. 15)³⁹.

This need to connect broader sociopolitical contexts with our psychic lives is reiterated by James Hillman, a leading theorist of the Jungian psychology employed in mythopoetic work. He argues that men’s pain has a basis in the state of the external world, and that

³⁹ Mark Meusse echoes this argument: “If our personal and spiritual empowerment does not lead us to rage and action in the face of male violence, substance addiction, war, rape, poverty and homelessness ... then something is indeed wrong. Spiritual empowerment without social action is shallow, just as social activism without spiritual sustenance lacks depth and vitality.” (as cited in Wilson & Mankowski, 2000, p. 42).

dissipating those feelings through therapy instead of harnessing them for political action is a mistaken approach (Schwalbe, 1996c, p. 329).⁴⁰

We can infer from Jung's and Hillman's arguments that the supposed polarity between mythopoetics and pro-feminists is exaggerated. In the conclusion to his collection of dialogues between mythopoetic and pro-feminist leaders, pro-feminist Michael Kimmel acknowledges the need for "a more complex political reading that can understand the anxieties and frustrations driving men towards anti-feminist politics" (Seidler, 2006, p. 39); and that he was "surprised to find allies in the mythopoetic movement" (Kimmel, 1996b, p. 362). Feminist scholar Victor Seidler (2006) writes extensively on men's emotions and bodies, arguing that it is "important for men to explore their own emotional histories and the diverse masculinities they had grown up to identify with, and so to learn to speak out of their own experience in response to wider structural relations of power" (p. 39). There is much writing that suggests that mythopoetic and pro-feminist work relate to each other not as opposites but upon a continuum (Kimmel & Kaufman, 1996; Schwalbe, 1996c; Dash, 1996; Seidler, 1997; Tacey, 1997).

Pro-feminist organizer and mythopoetic participant Mike Dash argues that mythopoetic men have a lot to offer their pro-feminist counterparts. First, pro-feminists can revitalize their bodies and souls by participating in the creative, fun and "out-there" mythopoetic work incorporating

⁴⁰ James Hillman's thinking and writing hold significant weight within the mythopoetic community. He has regularly held stages with Michael Meade and Robert Bly. He is a revered figure, and many mythopoetic adherents believe that history will honour his contributions to psychology with the same esteem allotted to Freud and Jung. For more on his understanding of the relationship between political and personal change, see Hillman, J. and Ventura, M. (1992). *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy – and the World's Getting Worse* New York: HarperCollins.

ritual, music, mythology, theatre and dance. Fun is an essential and often overlooked element of effective political organizing (hooks, 1994, p. 7). Second, unlike the “mainstream” men that pro-feminists often struggle to reach, mythopoetic men are ready and willing to examine their masculinity (Tacey, 1997, p. 194; Dash, 1996, pp. 357-358). Pro-feminist men might consider empathizing with men’s experiences of powerlessness in order to initiate discussions on the double-edged sword of patriarchy.

Finally, mythopoetic work has important lessons for pro-feminists to apply to political organizing. As I conclude this thesis, I daily receive dozens of e-mails from fellow New Warriors both locally and nationally who are collaborating to put on the next men’s initiation weekend. Passion, community and commitment within mythopoetic work is strong even outside the container of ritual space; I have never witnessed or participated in any pro-feminist activism that featured this level of vigor. The ManKind Project attracts high levels of commitment because the work offers significant personal growth dividends; the work changes the lives of its participants and provides a community of witnesses and support to honour and validate these transformations. Furthermore, the work of the ManKind Project is ongoing. New Warrior Training Adventures occur on regular cycles throughout North America, and each one precipitates a new recruitment drive, build-up, preparation, implementation and post-weekend follow-up, all anchored by a strong organizational infrastructure. Importantly, the ManKind Project attracts and trains highly committed and skilled lead-facilitators; many initiation leaders have dedicated more than two decades to the ManKind Project and have participated in more than fifty weekend initiations. By contrast, elders within pro-feminist movements tend to be

housed in the academy, distanced from this kind of community-based organizing. The example of mythopoetic organizing challenges pro-feminist men to provide personal and spiritual sustenance for men who are dedicated to transforming both gender relations and wider social structures.

Many feminist commentators bemoan the slow pace of men in casting off their sense of entitlement to social power (Segal, 1990, p. xii-xiii). However, while masculinities are socially constructed, this does not imply that changing how they are constructed is a straightforward task. Society itself is historically constructed by the spiritual and material topography of recent millennia characterized by patriarchal domination. It is essential to acknowledge, understand and seek to destabilize the immense concentration of power held by small groups of basically homogenous racial, economic, national, linguistic, sexual and gender identity. However, raging (even if the rage is justifiable, and it is) against this predicament is not enough. With rage must come an appreciation of both the deep psychic entrenchment of these systems of power and the newness of current alternatives to patriarchal psychosocial structures. Patriarchy and its articulation through social and internalized oppression are ingrained into the neural pathways and social habits of all people. Following bell hooks, I advocate a patient compassion for what exists *right now* in tandem with a passionate and steadfast commitment to forging a future of love and freedom (hooks, 2006). Practicing new social and psychic habits of love and connection will be awkward at first. We must take into account where we stand and engage in the imaginative work of dreaming and beginning to live a liberated future.

Public gender conversations

“Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogical itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination.”

- Paulo Freire, 1993, p. 89

Inhale. Our hearts expand and breathe in the pain of communities and societies structured by hierarchy and systemic oppression. Simultaneously, we breathe in our own traumas, narratives of exclusion, inadequacy, fear, distance and isolation. Exhale. We find space for creations of body, spirit and intellect. We find room to think and feel through a middle path and transcend the splits between rational/emotional, sociological/spiritual. There is room for a thinking heart and a feeling cognition (Tacey, 1997, p. xi). However, beyond retreats to the woods, healing professionals and yoga studios, how can we find this kind of space to unfold? How can and does spirit inhabit public space?

I return now from the poetic and visionary to the grounded and pragmatic. For talk of transcending binaries, merging spirit and politic and transmuting psychic and social wounds into growth will remain talk without concrete ideas and energy to implement them. The gap between pro-feminist and mythopoetic men's work is symptomatic of a more generalized dichotomy between reason and emotion. I advocate a critical, public discourse that is capacious enough to incorporate both reason and emotion, sociopolitical awareness and spiritual depth. I heed Seidler (2006), who argues that “through art, drama and performance we need to find new ways of reaching different generations of men, rather than assume a discourse of [hegemonic] power that allows us to communicate across cultural traditions” (p. 140). We must create more public space

for our lived experiences of gender to be articulated and heard. Let us reclaim public space for lively, democratic interactions to release ourselves from dominator relationships and practice bold, life-affirming ways of being and relating. In this final section, I explore the methodology and practice of such reclamation. In particular, I draw upon the “social acupuncture” that Toronto artist Darren O’Donnell uses in his art-as-civic engagement practices.

Social acupuncture

Since 1993, O’Donnell’s company, Mammalian Diving Reflex (MDR), has been producing art intended to shock its viewers/participants into a survival mode more appropriate to what MDR refers to as the “terrifying times” we live in⁴¹. O’Donnell’s artistic civic engagement is grounded in popular education pedagogies recalling Freire and hooks⁴². O’Donnell’s practices begin where society stands. He writes, “artistic civic engagement ... tries to remain within the activity flows already occurring in a population or community” (2006, p. 35). This work exits the black and white spaces of theatre and gallery and supports civic engagement by working within existing public (streets, schools, media, sports teams, buses and businesses) and private spaces.

O’Donnell (2006) compares his artistic practice of public intervention to social acupuncture.

Acupuncture uses needles to disturb blocked *chi* or energy and encourage the circulation of *chi* throughout the body. Blockages create sites of excessive and deficient *chi* in various parts of the body. Excess can lead to chronic tension and pain while deficiency leads to low energy (p. 47).

⁴¹ <http://www.mammalian.ca/template.php?content=about>

⁴² Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum; hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge; hooks, b. (2003). *Pedagogy of Hope: Teaching Community*. New York: Routledge.

O'Donnell examines the flow of *chi* in the social body. An excess of *chi* may manifest as persistent, inequitable relationships interrupting healthy community development (e.g., racism, sexism and class inequality) while deficiencies can be seen in isolation and a lack of social networks or free, public space for unstructured dialogue (pp. 47-48). Social acupuncture helps restore society's balance by creating new opportunities for connection and dialogue in public and private spaces. Both physical and social bodies frequently respond to acupuncture with awkwardness and resistance. Naturally, the pain of chronically held body and social patterns takes time to work through. While developing social intelligence, O'Donnell argues, some discomfort is to be expected (p. 57).

On the Mammalian Diving Reflex website, O'Donnell outlines several criteria for effective social acupuncture, including:

1. Conflating the imperative to grease the wheels of commerce with the imperative to glue the social fabric; in other words, hauling the community into the commercial and the commercial into the community to spread power.
2. Diversity of social location (age, race, sexuality etc.).
3. Atypical encounter: people doing things in unordinary contexts.
4. Inverting hierarchies: those who normally have the power give it up.
- ...
8. Fruitful Antagonisms: triggering friction, tension, and examining the ensuing dynamic in a performative arena where all is easily forgiven.⁴³

All of these criteria serve to produce social discomfort. Such provocations are spicy ingredients for vital public conversations.

⁴³ For a full list, please see <http://www.mammalian.ca/pdf/Beautiful%20Civic%20Engagement.pdf>

O'Donnell aims to enhance social intelligence by pushing the boundaries of dialogue, public participation and subverting expectations of public discourse. Observers become participants. Tension is freely provoked, acknowledged and harnessed to push the dialogue in innovative and challenging directions. Social acupuncture is one example of a practice providing the social and psychic space into which the stagnant energy of normative gender roles, expectations and stereotypes may be released.

Conclusion

Much of my thinking and dreaming around men and the possibility of personal/social healing is clearly utopian. I wish to signal to my readers that it's "okay" for them, too, to hold their doubts in response to what I'm writing. Reshaping the impact of gender on our lives is a difficult task. If I write or read without acknowledging my doubts, then I claim a clarity and resolution that does not exist for me. That kind of dishonesty cannot serve as the basis for revolutionary politics, meaningful dialogue or personal transformation. I will not pretend that I know gender better than anybody else. I speak earnestly when I say, as I do in my introduction, that everyone is an expert on gender. I believe that humility and curiosity as much as inspiration and passion serve as catalysts for change.

This journey has led me to imagine possibilities of speaking about men with all people. I began this paper focused on working with groups of men – whether mythopoetic or pro-feminist – in the belief that by working with other men who have some shared experience of male socialization, we can effect personal and social change in dramatic ways. In the early nineteenth

century, John Stuart Mill wrote that society's greatest single advancement will be accomplished by the education of women and their inclusion in intellectual and spiritual vocations alongside men. Now, mythopoetic men's work and visionary feminists like bell hooks flip the players. Hooks argues in *The will to change* (2004) that men's emotional and relational development produces tremendous good for all members of society (p. 10). Men, as a group, are synonymous with both power and pain (Kaufman, 1993). Thus, when men heal, all society makes progress in equalizing power relations and alleviating psychic pain. Men can work with one another to advance gender equality and personal liberation simultaneously. In arguing for an accessible, vibrant, incisive and challenging public discourse on gender, I suggest that such conversation holds space for dreaming, vision, and possibility to emerge and that such discussion will allow our natural, infinite capacity for understanding, empathy and growth to flow freely.

Thanks be for this chance to dream.

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