Crossing and Redrawing the Lines

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Table of Contents

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Masculinity is all about the lines a man must not cross, and men do not stray very far outside the lines. I have mentioned some of the lines men draw in the sand, and how hard it is for us to cross them. For instance, how hard it is for men to let up on their steady pace, to jettison their arrhythmicity in order to take care of a sick parent or spend extra time with a child. There is a line that delineates acceptable male behaviors: men avoid dressing flamboyantly, stifle their feelings in public, do not hold hands or hug other men too openly, and in many other regards carefully avoid doing anything that might lead other men to think they are gay. Men try not to appear weak or dependent, and they do not back down.

Crossing lines can be lonely and disquieting. If a man crosses the line at work by valuing his family responsibilities more than he values rising in the hierarchy, he risks being stigmatized as "too sentimental," "not committed enough to the company," "not one of the guys." Men who are very involved with their children are considered losers in terms of career; men who are too responsive to a woman's needs are called "Momma's boys" or "soft males," and so forth. If we are to change traditional notions of masculinity for the better, we have quite a few lines to cross, and we will have to do something to change the way men are ostracized for crossing lines. We can begin by examining the ways lines are traditionally drawn.

Schoolyard Fights

I was not prepared for schoolyard fights. I had brothers, and we would fight. But there was an unwritten code at home that you never actually hit a brother, especially not in the face. So our fights were usually ninety percent wrestling, and when we did swing at each other we always made sure we missed. Somehow older brother taught the code to younger, even though no words were ever spoken.

In the third grade I was in an argument with another boy that led to some pushing and shouting. Suddenly, certainly without my ever expecting it, he swung and hit me in the face with his closed fist. I cried. I think some of the tears must have been on account of having to give up the reassuring illusion that all boys played by my family's unstated code. I learned the more universal code of the schoolyard, what Connell (1987, 1990) calls "hegemonic masculinity." Boys do not cry. Boys do not walk away from fights. And if you do either, you're chicken, a sissy, or queer.

After recovering from that incident, I, like all grade school boys, had to make a decision about how I would respond in the future when called to fight. I happened to be fairly strong, and with a certain amount of practice wrestling at home I could grab most boys my age and throw them to the ground. The problem was that other boys watching the tussle would not then consider the fight over, and did not consider me the victor. You had to punch the other guy.

I, on the other hand, had not given up entirely on the original family code, nor did I particularly want to hurt anyone—or be hurt. So I could not bring myself to hit very hard. In two other memorable fights I threw my opponent to the ground, pinned his arm behind his back and tried to hurt him just enough to make him give up. He and the other boys would say I was unwilling to really fight. Some said I was chicken. And I think a kind of truce evolved, they feeling superior to me because I did not want to "really fight," me feeling a little safe knowing I could throw most of them to the ground and that few of them wanted that to happen. Even though this meant I had gained some respect from the other boys, I continued into adulthood to harbor a nagging suspicion that I might really be chicken. I discussed none of this with my brothers, of course, that would have been a violation of the family code.

It was not until I was in a leaderless men's group in my thirties that I finally felt safe enough, and sufficiently compelled, to relate my story about schoolyard fights. The group met for about five years in the late 1970s. At the end of one weekly meeting we agreed to discuss schoolyard fights at the following meeting. I remember the anxious anticipation. Would they consider me chicken? The evening came, we told our stories—some of the men had been fighters, some had avoided fights at all costs, one had "chickened out," and I believe one confessed having been a bully. But it did not matter. The men in the room listened attentively to every man's story, sympathized (we found out no one really liked the schoolyard scenario, not even the bully), and

we all laughed about how serious it had seemed once.

My problem in grade school was that I was not yet sufficiently formed as an autonomous individual to fathom a tenable third alternative for myself. I did opt to do something other than slugging it out—wrestling my opponents to the ground—but, perhaps because I was unable to exude enough confidence in my alternative stance, the other boys were able to make me doubt my manliness. And boys who were having the same difficulty were unable to support each other at that time because all of us believed "real men" just did not do that sort of thing. Our shame depended on our social isolation. For most men, the idea that there is a tenable third alternative to the drama of top and bottom is a revelation that comes much later, the early years being dominated by the either/or theme.

Casualties of War

In *Casualties of War,* the 1989 film starring Michael J. Fox as Pfc. Erikson and Sean Penn as Sgt. Meserve, a patrol of five soldiers on a dangerous mission in Viet Nam kidnap a civilian woman from a neighboring village, gang rape, and murder her. The incident actually occurred, and the movie illustrates well what I mean by crossing lines. War, like prison, makes men's issues stand out in boldface. There is Sgt. Meserve, the "real man" who fights heroically, protects and takes care of his men, and feels that because he was

not permitted by his C.O. to visit a whorehouse the night before, he is "entitled" to steal a "girl" from the village and use her for his sadistic sexual pleasure and then discard the body. Then there is Pfc. Erikson, who is forced to stand by and watch the rape and murder. At first Sgt. Meserve and the others try desparately to convince Erikson to join them in their "sexual fun." Taunts are thrown Erikson's way, taunts that contain a menacing threat of violence. One man yells: "Erikson doesn't want to ball the chick!" Another says: "Maybe he's a queer." Another chimes in: "He's a chickenshit!" When it becomes clear Erikson will not change his mind and join the others, Sgt. Meserve glares at him and threatens: "Maybe when I'm done with her I'm going to take my turn with you!" Another soldier, Diaz, had declared to Erikson he did not want any part in the rape. Meserve, sensing the potential alliance between Diaz and Erikson, jokes about tbe possibility of the two of them having a homosexual affair. Thus Erikson and Diaz are intimidated so that they will not adopt a third, alternative stance in regard to the male culture of the patrol that requires one to participate in gang rape in order to be "one of the guys." Diaz does change his mind and joins in the gang rape.

The requirements for membership among the "real men" are established and the outsider, Erikson, is called "chickenshit" and "queer" and threatened with sodomy. It takes much courage for a man to cross the line that "real men" draw in the sand in order to follow the dictates of his own conscience, just as in the workplace it takes courage for a male worker to

refuse to take part in the daily sexual harassment that goes on in the name of "good clean fun." Michael J. Fox's character crosses the line by empathizing with the woman, by refusing to be "one of the guys" and participating in the defiling of a woman, and finally he reports the incident, breaking the most important rule: "real men don't snitch."

Pfc. Erikson goes up the line of command, telling two officers about the incident, and each responds that he should forget about it. Finally, a chaplain listens to his story and initiates an investigation. The soldiers involved attempt to kill Erikson in retaliation. The movie ends with Pfc. Erikson back home suffering from symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder as well as the perpetual dread that one of the soldiers he reported will be released from prison and come after him seeking revenge.

Sex Roles

The lines across which men do not cross seem well defined, yet difficult to describe. Most men believe certain things are expected of them "as men," and yet, when asked to delineate those expectations, men get flustered and protest they cannot really come up with a list—and then when men do produce their lists no two men agree on the items to include. But all men agree on one thing: traditional sex roles are constricting.

Just as men cannot agree on the list of expectations that go with the

male role, there is little agreement among scholars on the theoretical model that best describes men's experience. The current debate focuses on "role theory," which has held sway in departments of sociology since Talcott Parsons (Parsons & Bales, 1955) explicated the basics. We are socialized to play roles in society. For instance, gender-appropriate behaviors and attitudes are taught to young children. Thus there are proper or "normal" roles for men as well as for women—Parsons offers that famous dichotomy: men are "instrumental" while women are "expressive"—and men as well as women learn their parts in the course of socialization. Anyone who does not play their gendered part well is subject to stigmatization as a deviant.

There are a number of critiques of role theory. Joseph Pleck (1981) charges that role theorists clump all men into a homogeneous population as if all were trying to play the same role, thus failing to explain the diversity among men and the variety of "role models." In addition, if there is a clear masculine role and any man who fails to play the correct role is stigmatized, how does one explain the changing social functions of men and the evolving forms of masculinity? For instance, Barbara Ehrenreich (1983) traces the evolution of middle class male roles from the 1950s through the 1980s: In the 1950s there was the conformist, the man in the grey flannel suit who worked hard and was a good provider; then there were the noncomformists, the playboys of Hugh Hefner's generation, the beatniks, the humanistic psychologists, and the androgynous hippies in revolt against conformism; and

then, with the women's movement, there was the evolution of new roles for both sexes and a "male revolt" against the "breadwinner ethic." Role theory is unable to explain these developments.

The omnipresence of institutional racism in our society sets up very different roles for black men (the same is true for other minorities as well as for different classes). According to Clyde Franklin (1987), because of the "institutional decimation" of black men that is reflected in the fact that so many grow up in poverty, land in prison, or are murdered at an early age, young black male sex-role expectations include toughness, sexual conquest, and thrill seeking—all of which serve to mitigate the low self-esteem that results from racism and the black male's inability to satisfy traditional majority male role expectations.

Arthur Brittan (1989) is critical of role theory as well as psychoanalysis to the extent that these "mechanical" approaches assign abstract qualities to each gender and assume these qualities are fixed at a very early stage of socialization.

> But what if we argued to the contrary, namely that gender identity is infinitely negotiable, that the specification of masculine and feminine traits was simply an aspect of a continuing process of interactive relationships in which both men and women mutually construct, confirm, reject or deny their identity claims? Why should we assume that identity is predetermined or made in the crucible of family relationships? (p. 35)

And Michael Kimmel (1987) argues that role theory minimizes the way male and female roles are mutually determinative, and ignores the importance of power in gender relations.

In order to transcend these deficiencies in sex-role theory, Pleck (1981) would have us replace the sex-role paradigm with a "Sex-Role Strain Paradigm." He lists and contrasts the basic assumptions of the two paradigms. Sex-role theory holds that there is a male sex type: males learn their roles from identification with fathers and other men; the development of appropriate sex-role identity is a risky and failure-prone process; psychological health depends on the acquisition of an appropriate sex-type identity; homosexuality reflects a disturbance of sex-role identity; and problems in the area of sex-role identity are the cause of men's problems relating to women. In contrast, the sex-role strain paradigm contains a very different set of basic assumptions: sex roles are defined in relation to stereotypes; sex roles are contradictory and inconsistent (for instance, male adolescents are encouraged to excel in physical contests but as adults men are rewarded more for their intellectual prowess); a high proportion of men violate sex-role expectations and are condemned for it; fear of condemnation causes some men to overconform to the stereotypic roles; most men experience sex-role strain; and historical changes—for instance the "crisis in masculinity" we are now witnessing—cause sex-role strain. Pleck believes that the role-strain paradigm is much more adequate for the job of explaining

historical changes in gender relations.

According to Bob Connell (1987), all role theories, including the role-strain paradigm, fall short in explaining gendered experience. He argues:

> Change is always something that happens to sex roles, that impinges on them—whether from the direction of the society at large (as in discussions of how technological and economic change demands a shift to a "modern" male sex role) or from the direction of the asocial "real self" inside the person, demanding more room to breathe. Sex-role theory cannot grasp change as a dialectic arising within gender relations themselves, (pp. 78-79)

He also points out that role theory fails to attend to domination and ways it might be transcended. Connell is critical of Pleck's role-strain paradigm as well. For instance, he claims Pleck's paradigm rests on "the fixed dichotomy of sex," and is concerned only with "mapping changes in attitudes and expectations about the dichotomy." Connell would have us radically alter the dichotomy itself. I will not pursue the academic debate any further, the reader who is interested in the details can turn to the voluminous literature, beginning with the work of Pleck, Connell, Kimmel, and Brittan.

The mystifications of theory reflect those in the real social world, in this case one might say that men-on-the-street are as confused as the academics about their roles, and they think in static terms about the male role because they cannot imagine things ever being very different. Most men think in terms

of a "right way" for men to do things, and even though there would be little if any consensus among men regarding the specifics of that "right" male way, most men believe that when their lives begin to go awry it is a sign of their inadequacy as men. While role theory attempts to delineate the "right way," it provides no place for an alternative vision.

Connell (1987, 1990) points out that global dominance of men over women results in, and is legitimized by, a narrowing and stereotyping of "hegemonic masculinity." According to Connell: "There is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic among men" (p. 183). Other forms of masculinity, like homosexuality, are subordinated to the dominant stereotype, despite the fact that "the cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men" (p. 184). All men share a stereotype of the "real man" just as they share the male theme of top dog and fallen subordinate—the "real man" is the guy at the top of the hierarchy. Most men feel inadequate relative to that standard, yet the majority of men do not even aspire to become that stereotype! For instance, many men abhor the way corporate executives, public administrators, and politicians abuse power and mistreat underlings; yet these same men feel inadequate because they wield very little power in the public arena and are unable to manipulate institutions in the interest of improving their lives and the lives of their intimates. The discrepancy between the stereotype of the dominant male and the actuality of

most men's lives serves to maintain a sense of inadequacy in most men and to support the social pattern of male dominance. Blye Frank (1987) underscores the importance of homophobia in the maintenance of gender dominance by suggesting the term "hegemonic heterosexual masculinity."

According to Connell (1987), masculinity takes a variety of forms.

> Their interrelation is centered on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women. This structural fact provides the main basis for relationships among men that define a hegemonic form of masculinity in the society as a whole. "Hegemonic masculinity" is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women. The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an important part of how a patriarchal social order works, (p. 183)

It is the "hegemony" of a dominant notion of masculinity—in the media, in the rules for schoolyard fights, and in the boardroom—that prevents men from exploring the possibility there might be something very wrong with the way our sex roles are written and our social relations are arranged.

This does not mean we should seek a single, correct alternative version of masculinity. Harry Brod (1987) comments:

> The level of somewhat sweeping generalizations attests to men's studies still being in its infancy (as many of these authors would be the first to admit), as does the widespread tendency to speak in the singular of the male sex rolf rather than different modes of masculinity that vary by race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, and so on. (pp. 50-51)

The implication of Brod's work is that we can strive to increase tolerance for a variety of roles for men, and no man should be stigmatized for not playing any particular one.

Role theory is just one of many possible ways to explain how lines are drawn across which "real men" do not tread. What is needed is not the single abstract theory or "correct" explanation of the way the lines are drawn, rather we need to understand what makes men hesitate to cross, to collectively redraw the lines that constrict, and to do all this with a strong sense of brotherhood and power. Stigmatization is an obstacle for men who would cross and redraw the lines. While sociologists speak of deviance, clinicians speak of psychopathology. Both involve the stigmatization of those who would cross the lines that circumscribe traditional ways of being and doing.

Gender and Psychopathology

In psychotherapy, it is often important to distinguish between the client's idiosyncratic psychopathology—his inner flaws—and the qualities and dilemmas that he shares with most men. A male client tells me he has no friends, and wonders why he is having so much difficulty finding men he really likes. We explore his psychological issues, including the intense childhood rivalry he experienced with his brothers, and the way his father, who played favorites among the boys, rewarded him for "one-upping and

never trusting the others." This psychological insight is useful, and he quickly sees how it can be applied in his current dilemma. For instance, he can reexamine the issue of trust and attempt to keep the ghost of his boyhood father out of his current relationships with males. But then he still has to transcend the gender-specific foibles that he shares with so many men, the ways male posturing prevents us from finding more meaningful ways to relate. Aware of his own personally driven need to continue the pattern of male distancing and posturing, he is at least in better position to struggle with other men to achieve the kind of friendship and intimacy he craves.

Gender and psychopathology are intricately linked. Clinicians tend to think about gender roles in terms of psychopathology. Freud tended to diagnose pathology in places where he found deviance from Victorian gender expectations, for instance, ambition in women or homosexuality. (Exceptions occurred when Freud did not agree with popular views about gender. For instance, he accepted women students and treated quite a few as peers at a time when society expected women to stay home and rear children.) He believed that men who lacked a "normal" supply of male ambition were unconsciously surrendering to their castrating fathers, and that women who tried too hard to succeed in the traditionally male world were suffering from penis envy. In other words, men and women who cross certain lines are told they suffer from psychopathology. Several psychoanalysts have taken Freud to task for his theory of gender and deviance (Homey, 1924, 1926, 1935;

Jones, 1927; Mitchell, 1974; Thompson, 1942, 1943; Weisstein, 1970; Zilboorg, 1944).

Phyllis Chesler (1976) presents other examples from the history of psychiatry where women are deemed insane because they refuse to play the prescribed female role, including the case of Elizabeth Packard (1816-c. 1890), who was locked up in an asylum for many years merely because her husband, enraged at her refusal to bow to his authority, declared her insane; the law gave him the prerogative to have his wife committed while she had no equivalent right. I have illustrated gender bias in the construction of categories of mental illness in the case of late luteal phase dysphoric disorder. Why are women's cycles pathologized while men's compulsive need to maintain a steady pace is not? Of course, the reason is that the male proclivity to override natural cycles fits the needs of our competitive, bureaucratic public world.

The lines are not yet rigidly drawn. There is still room for debate in the American Psychiatric Association about the inclusion of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) among the list of official forms of mental disease, and the APA modified that list in 1973 when gay and lesbian activists were able to convince the membership that homosexuality is not an illness. But the fact remains that the lines are being drawn in the process of establishing a classification of mental disorders. In other words, when a behavior or attitude

is deemed to lie beyond the line it is described as a symptom of a specific pathological condition.

The interplay of roles and psychopathology becomes quite obvious in the case of the person deemed mad. Sociologists of deviance—including Erving Goffman (1961) and Thomas Scheff (1966)—argue that certain people in society are labelled "mentally ill," and that labelling initiates a social process of behavior-shaping that consolidates their role as deviants while also serving to maintain the social equilibrium, since these deviants mark by their excesses the boundaries of normal behavior. The "treatment" reserved for the mentally ill and other deviants—including stigmatization, incarceration, involuntary medication, and, in many cases, dreadful inattention to basic human needs—serve as a warning to those who would veer off the "normal" path.

In fact, the lines that separate normalcy from mental illness resemble the lines that create our definition of manliness, even though they are drawn in different places and there are different things one must do in order to be considered deviant. Thus, if one takes off one's clothes in public one is likely to be deemed mad, while it is the wearing of unusual clothes—especially clothes that are associated with women or gays—that results in one being deemed unmanly or effeminate. The lines that are drawn by our current understanding of psychopathology, like the lines that circumscribe the "real

man" role, constrict our range. It is because a large number of men are no longer willing to suffer the constriction that there is so much interest in "men's issues" today.

At this stage of the incipient men's movement a large number of men are visiting psychotherapists and asking for guidance on the unfamiliar path ahead. Of course, for psychotherapists, a thorough knowledge of psychopathology is what informs therapeutic interventions and strategies. As was explained in Chapter Nine, there is a dual potential here. To the extent men who step out of traditional gender expectations (or cross the line) are told they are suffering from some form of psychopathology, therapy serves to police the boundaries of traditional masculinity and slow men's progress in creating new definitions of manliness. Yet, if there could be a different relationship, for instance, if therapists could support the desire in their male clients to transcend traditional forms of masculinity, then therapy would be a valuable asset in the struggle to restructure gender roles and relations. Recent volumes on men in therapy, including Men *in Transition,* edited by Solomon and Levy (1982), and Men *in Therapy,* edited by Meth and

Pasick (1990), offer a ray of hope. No longer does phallocentrism have to reign in psychodynamic theorizing.

In this regard, the work of Jean Baker Miller (1976, 1988), Judith Jordan

(1989), Stephen Bergman (1991), and their collaborators at the Stone Center of Wellesley College is promising. They believe that this culture's over-valuation of autonomy and independence leaves something to be desired in terms of community and the capacity to be intimate, and that a very male notion of independence and autonomy is at the core of traditional clinical descriptions of psychopathology. Thus, women are pathologized because of their emphasis on connection and interdependence. They call upon psychotherapists to tease out this unstated assumption and redraw the line between psychopathology and mental health so that women's need for connection and community will be viewed as an admirable trait rather than a symptom (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991).

Crossing the Lines

If gender is socially constructed, there is room for change. That is cause for hope for a men's movement that would redefine male roles while ending some of the injustice and inhumanity that prevail in our competitive, narcissistic culture today. But our entrapment within traditional notions of gender—whether we talk about this in terms of gender roles or in terms of normal versus pathological behavior—keeps us from seeing the potential for change. Given the hegemony of traditional masculinity, the tendency for men to stigmatize noncomforming men and the tendency for men to be isolated and unconnected with each other, the crossing of certain lines requires great

courage.

Artists light the path by imagining a very different reality (Marcuse, 1978). Sometimes it is as much the way they live as it is their work. For instance, I believe Vaclav Havel (1990), then President of Czechoslovakia, made a powerful statement about traditional male roles in the speech he gave when he was awarded an honorary degree at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He confessed he suffered from feelings of unworthiness and, like a Kafka character, he could easily imagine being taken by the scruff of his neck and thrown out of the hall. He told his esteemed audience:

> You may well ask how someone who thinks of himself this way can be the president of a country. It's a paradox, but I must admit that if I am a better president than many others would be in my place, then it is precisely because somewhere in the deepest substratum of

> my work lies this constant doubt about myself and my right to hold office.

As I began reading Havel's speech I assumed he would proceed from a declaration of his unworthiness to an uplifting point, perhaps about the history and fate of Eastern Europe. But he continued to speak of his own unworthiness, ending with these words:

> Once more, I thank you for the honor, and after what I've said here, I'm ashamed to repeat that I accept it with a sense of shame."

What a brilliant performance! Instead of posturing as world leaders do,

he admits he feels small in the face of the overwhelming international problems that confront all of us.

Havel's humility comes to mind as I listen to a client tell me about his shame. Phil, a gay man in his mid-forties, tells me about a small dinner party with several friends. At one point he was speaking for several minutes in an excited tone when one of his friends loudly told him to shut up so others can have a chance to talk. He felt "mortified." He ceased talking immediately, remained silent for the remainder of the evening, and felt depressed for several days. We discussed his ambivalence about being spontaneous and effusive, and his fear that his exuberance would lead to humiliation. He recalled that in his family he was expected to smile politely, "be nice," and avoid displays of excitement and intense emotionality. As a child it was easy for him to suppress his exuberance, but he was less able to disguise the moments of pain and sadness behind a smiling face. I asked what happened when he displayed unhappy feelings in this family of happy faces, and he revealed that his parents and siblings tended to poke fun at him for being so sensitive. This exhange led to the topic of shame. He told me he felt "shamed" at the dinner and that his friend's criticism "knocked the wind out of my sails."

Phil is ashamed of his emotional range. His mood swings are not wide enough to warrant a clinical diagnosis of manic-depressive disorder or even

cyclothymic personality, but they do draw notice and condemnation from his family. As an adult he is easily shamed and lacks resilience to weather the strains in social situations. His personal foibles mirror the social dilemma of men whose emotional range is beyond that permitted by traditional male roles. Unlike Havel, whose performance becomes a public statement about the limitations of traditional male posturing, Phil feels shame whenever his effusiveness runs counter to what is deemed appropriate behavior. He does not have a hard time talking to women; his women friends never complain about his effusiveness. We talk about gender roles and the constrictions tradition places on men's range of expressiveness, and we compare it to his family's requirement that he be a "nice guy" and know his place. He decides to phone the friend who cut him off at the dinner and tell him he is angry at him for being so intolerant and cruel. This action will not change his situation drastically, but at least he is beginning to transcend his shame and isolation.

Phil is not alone. Shame prevents men from crossing lines and redefining masculinity (Osherson, 1992). Each man has a personal story to tell. Many compensate for their shame with workaholism, abuse of women, alcohol and drugs, and other self-destructive and isolating patterns. When Phil and I talk about his shame and link it with the issue of gender and the limitations of the traditional male role, he is able to get past his personal hell and do something to alter the interpersonal situation that sent him into a depression. Havel's leadership is reflected in his ability to display personal

foibles in public and make a political statement that calls on all of us to reconsider our assumptions about what constitutes leadership and manliness. Shame develops where there is isolation; the shamed child goes to his room rather than seeking company and support. The sharing of the roots of our shame and the collective reexamination of our underlying assumptions provide an opportunity for us to reverse the pattern, to transcend shame while redefining masculinity.

There are many other ways to cross the lines that constrict men's lives. We cross the lines when we walk down the street holding hands. We cross the lines when we tell the boss at work we cannot stay late because we have childrearing responsibilities. We cross the lines when we refuse to laugh at a sexist affront against a female colleague, homophobic slanders against gay workmates, and other episodes of sexual harassment at the workplace. We do it independently, as conscious men who are committed to ending sexism and homophobia. But it is much easier to cross the lines when one has supporters —a partner who shares one's views, friends who listen to the problems one encounters crossing the line at work, and others who are actively struggling to improve gender relations.

I have discovered that men's difficulties being intimate—with other men as well as with women—make it more difficult to cross and redraw the lines. Miller (1983), at the beginning of his study of men's friendships, told a

friend what he wanted to do, only to have the friend warn:

> Male friendship. You mean you're going to write about homosexuality. That's what everybody will think, at least. Could be dangerous for you. (p. 2)

There is a vicious cycle that makes it very difficult for men who would change: if one is to cross the lines that define traditional masculinity and thereby risk being stigmatized and devalued, one needs the support of other men, but men tend to distance themselves from a man who seems different or unmanly, so the crossing tends to be very lonely. This is why improving our intimacies with each other and evolving better support networks are such important tasks for men who would take risks and cross the lines that constrict our possibilities.

Friendship could be the key to breaking the vicious cycle. But the difficulties men have being friends are aggravated by the cyclic dynamic. For instance, men are socialized to believe one can judge a man's worth in relation to the men he befriends. In school it is a matter of having friends who are popular, athletic, smart, stylish, sufficiently rebellious, or otherwise part of an in-crowd. Later in life, it is a matter of having friends who are successful, well-connected, sufficiently sophisticated or interesting, of the right class or demeanor, and otherwise unlikely to be an embarassment. Association with gays, losers, or "unmanly" friends can be the undoing of a man who is trying to achieve status in the hierarchy. But who are the men who take the lead in

redefining gender? They tend to be soft-spoken, in touch with the feminine if not gay, uninterested in the usual male pursuits, and "too" interested in raising a family and working on relationships with partners and friends. It is time to ask on what basis the lines are drawn, and to begin redrawing them.

Soft Males and Mama's Boys

The evolving men's movement, even while refusing to support a traditional notion of the "real man," is beginning to construct hierarchies and categories of deviance of its own. For instance, in parts of the new men's movement there is intolerance of "softness" in men. The basic idea is that certain men are Mama's boys or "pussy whipped," meaning they were too tied to their mothers as children, and as adults they are too tender, too empathic, too interested in women's issues. But against what standard is this "too" measured? Of course, the standard is a new version of the familiar concept of a "real man." The traditional concept is that a "real man" is strong, brave, independent, relatively unemotional, unflinching, *and properly distanced from the female perspective and from identification with women.* The new concept, more acceptable to sensitive men, is that a "real man" gathers with other men, tells his story, talks about feelings, plays drums, takes part in primitive dances and rituals, *and is properly distanced from the female perspective and from identification with women.*

Robert Bly's (1982, 1990) notion of "soft males" reflects and encourages this stigmatization. Bly suggests there is a step beyond feminism men must take. He begins by describing the "soft males" of the 'seventies:

> They're lovely, valuable people—I like them—they're not interested in harming the earth or starting wars. There's a gentle attitude toward life in their whole being and style of living. But many of these men are not happy. You quickly notice the lack of energy in them. They are life-preserving but not exactly *life-giving.* Ironically, you often see these men with strong women who positively radiate energy. (1990, pp. 2-3)

Bly believes that the man who wishes to be liberated from the bonds of the traditional male image must traverse two further stages of adult development: first he must get in touch with his feminine side, his "interior woman," and second he must get in touch with the wildman inside him, the "deep male." In order to accomplish the second step, the man must resolve certain issues with his father, and go to other men for help finding his way. The male who is attuned to the issue of gender equality has traversed the first stage but not the second. I agree with Bly there is another step men must take, and I agree that men must talk to other men about this, not just to women. But I do not think it is merely a matter of distancing women and getting in touch with the "wild man" within, the source of life and power that has been repressed in the "soft male."

In Bly's (1990) telling of the story of Iron John, the wild man in Grimm's fairy tale who is captured in the forest and locked in a cage in the center of

town, a boy is playing with a golden ball, the ball roles into the cage and the wild man grabs it. The boy asks him to return it and he refuses—unless the boy will free him from the cage. The boy protests he does not have the key. The wild man retorts that the key is under his mother's pillow. In other words, if the boy is to get in touch with the wild man deep within, with his desires and his power, he must break free of his mother. There is a truth to discover in the story, of course.

The problem is that Bly goes too far in the direction of blaming and devaluing women when he repeatedly accuses mothers of smothering sons. In Bly's writings and public lectures women are rarely mentioned, and when they are the most frequent comment is that mothers smother their sons. He rarely mentions the mother's role in nurturing and raising the son. Juxtaposing this observation with Bly's emphasis on forgiving the errant father, it seems fair to conclude there is a significant bias against women and against dependency on women.

Then, when asked by Bill Moyers in a television interview if the phenomenon of men's gatherings in the 1980s and 1990s is not an outgrowth of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Bly makes light of Moyers' suggestion and insists the men's movement developed independently of the women's. It is as if he is so concerned lest his masculinity seem reactive to women that he has to devalue women and refuse to acknowledge their

contribution to the evolution of a heightened gender consciousness. Meanwhile, he rarely mentions the fact that men oppress women and says nothing about the need for men and women to join in the struggle to put an end to sexism. In fact, in the Moyers interview, he says that women are unhappy mainly because they, like men, did not get enough of their fathers' attention. What about sexual oppression, exclusion from positions of power, unequal pay, rape, and other forms of sexual oppression? Bly is silent.

There is some danger that men might move on from the stage of supporting women's struggles to evolve a new, more "sensitive" and "spiritual" form of sexism. For instance, with so much focus on avoiding passivity and feeling powerful, too little attention is given to the need for men to admit to weakness, painful emotions, and dependency needs, and to develop the capacity to tolerate these qualities in others and to nurture.

In addition, Bly practically ignores the experience of gay men (the exception is a token reference in the introduction to *Iron John).* Gordon Murray (1991) points out that Bly speaks of Apollo and Hyacinthus without mentioning that they were lovers, and describes in some detail the tribal initiation rites in Papua New Guinea while carefully avoiding mention of the fact that the older men pass their semen to young male initiates (Lidz & Lidz, 1986). Murray asks: "Why does he pick and choose from the mythological and tribal data, excluding references to homosexuality? I think it's Bly's

homophobia. It's a type common among liberals of his generation, a homophobia by making-invisible."

I was in a leaderless men's group for five years in the 1970s at the beginning of what is now called the men's movement, and I readily admit the group I was in and many others like it were formed by men who had a deep respect for the women who were demanding their rights. We not only did not want to be left out, but also we believed we had much to learn from the women's precedent—and we struggled to evolve ways to transcend the male posturing that had kept us apart and isolated us until that time. Men's groups of that era typically began with discussions of men's problems relating to women. The successful groups eventually turned to the problems men have relating to each other, and solutions to those problems often led to improved relationships with women as well. Many of the men at gatherings I have attended come from similar backgrounds, or attend men's events because the women in their lives encourage them to do something about their alienation from their own inner life and from other men.

Let us assume for a moment that the women's movement is generally correct, and a large part of what ails our society is uncontrolled male posturing; for instance, men cannot back down from a fight, not on the street, not in the competitive world of business, and not in the international arena where they regularly challenge each other to wars where many thousands

die. And let us assume for a moment that what is needed is more contact with "the feminine." The popular notion of "the feminine" currently includes the capacity to nurture and care about the fate of others, to respect and protect natural resources including our bodies and our rain forests, to be open about feelings and include feelings in our decision-making process, and so forth. Of course, there is also the "shadow" feminine—the evil witch, the envious mother—but in general, when one speaks of "the feminine" in men as well as in women, since Jung, the reference is to cooperation, nurturing, connectedness, respect for nature, and so forth.

Of course, as soon as I contrast masculine and feminine qualities I am relying on stereotypes, and these imply fixed, universal qualities for each category, and assume little diversity within categories. Stereotypes create an image of a large group of people—a gender, a nationality, a race, a sexual preference—and then all the members of that group are placed in the same cubbyhole, thus denying each his or her individuality and making it unlikely we will ever really get to know any member of that group. Stereotypes keep people apart, and once one group of people are distanced in this way from another there is fertile soil for projection and devaluation, as in the case of homophobia.

It should be quite clear to the reader by now that I believe there is nothing "natural" about the assignment of certain qualities and capacities to

women. I do not believe that all women display the qualities I mentioned, nor that all men lack them. Still, the stereotypes reflect an aspect of reality. "Male" proclivities—including competition, concern about status in hierarchies, isolation, obsessional steadiness of pace and the use of women to enlarge one's ego—have led to our current political predicament; and a shift in the balance so that there is more "feminine" energy does seem a part of the antidote. I believe that, if we want to change our social priorities, not only must we shift the balance of energies in the direction we now stereotypically conceive of as "feminine," hut we must also transcend the stereotypes in the process.

In this context, calling men Mama's boys, soft males, and pussy-whipped because they listen too much to women is quite counterproductive—the wrong male qualities are being stigmatized. It is precisely the men who admit to the strong influence of women—the men who do not feel a strong need to "dis-identify" with women at every opportunity—who can contribute most to changing gender relations. According to Bob Blauner (1991):

> Men in the movement are likely to have grown up closer to their mothers than to their fathers. Therefore there are a sizable number of "Mama's Boys," and the denial of this reality contributes to the movements's flight from mother—this is because we accept the male prescription and want to fulfill the criteria of adequacy in the new men's movement, (p. 28)

Bly leads us down a false path when he stigmatizes feminine qualities in

men; at the same time, he has a point. What does he mean by "soft men?" On the one hand, he seems to be referring to men who have a highly developed feminine side, who have a deep respect for women and their power, who prefer connectedness and nurturing over combat and competition, and who eschew traditional male pursuits that involve cruelty, misogyny and homophobia. To the extent Bly devalues these qualities in men, he is leading us down a false path. On the other hand, he seems to be referring to men who are passive, unformed as individuals, entirely reactive to others' wishes and demands, and so frightened of anger and combat that they tend to back down and disavow what they stand for in the face of strong opposition. Here is where Bly has a point, this kind of "softness" is very limiting. Sam Keen (1991) offers an alternative to this kind of softness: "The historical challenge for modem men is clear—to discover a peaceful form of virility and to create an ecological commonwealth, to become fierce gentlemen" (p. 121).

But why should we apply the point exclusively to men? Women who are passive, unformed as individuals, entirely reactive, and afraid of their anger and strength are also quite limited human beings. This kind of "softness" is not good for either gender. When Bly links "softness" in men with excessive or prolonged connection to women, he makes two errors. First, he stigmatizes certain feminine, nurturing qualities in men. And second, he assumes that passivity and an inability to stand up for oneself are only problematic in men. In other words, it is more acceptable for women to be passive and not entirely

formed as human beings.

There is another way that Bly's link between closeness with women and softness in men misses the mark. Bly implies that, if men would stop being "soft," they would stand up to the women who have gained so much power in recent years, and doing so would make men feel powerful again. This message appeals to many men who feel inadequate while they perceive women gaining power in our society. But this is a message of backlash (Faludi, 1991). The reason men feel powerless and inadequate is not that women have taken their power away. Shifts in the economy, high unemployment, plant closures and massive layoffs, higher taxes for the middle and lower classes with fewer social services, racism, a crisis in health care, inflated insurance premiums and other unfortunate social developments over the last fifteen years have made it more difficult for men to feel adequate and powerful. Bly allies with ultraconservative forces when he blames the plight of the American male on the emergence of powerful women in the public arena.

Finally, Bly's use of the term "soft" reflects another underlying assumption: that men's ways are strong and powerful while women's ways are "softer" and powerless. I do not accept that assumption! Cooperation, concern about the plight of others, respect for nature, and a host of other qualities we associate with women today are the ingredients for a greater power than men now have. For instance there is the power to make the

personal political, the power to save the environment by rationally disposing of our waste products, and the power to avert nuclear annihilation.

I have discussed the need for men to stand up to the women in their lives in order to be able to resolve some of the tensions that regularly arise in heterosexual couples, and sometimes men must work through unresolved conflicts regarding their mothers in order to develop their capacity to stand toe-to-toe with women as adults. But this is not the same as saying women are to blame for men's feelings of inadequacy. If there is to be social progress, men and women must stand together against the wrongs of a patriarchal culture. Otherwise, power would be left to those who are more competitive, greedy, and ruthless. Men and women must be anything but "soft" (in the sense of passive, reactive, and unwilling to stand up for their interests) if we are to redraw the lines that constrict gendered behavior. But the toughness that is required will not come from stigmatizing men who are deeply connected with women and the feminine within.

Redrawing the Lines: Envisioning Different Gender Relations

I have described some of the lines we are constantly drawing, for instance the lines that delineate sex roles and psychopathology. I have pointed out that we too seldom examine the assumptions underlying the drawing of those lines, for instance, the assumption that the emotional cycles

of women are pathological while the almost obsessive steadiness of men is normal even if it causes ulcers and heart attacks. It is time to consider another question: On what model do we think through the lines we deem worth crossing? In other words, if we were to be given the responsibility of rewriting the roles, redesigning the categories of psychopathology, and redefining masculinity, what normative standard would we employ in drawing new lines?

Some might protest at this point that no standard is acceptable, that as soon as we create a new standard there will be a new stigmatization. I believe there will always be deviants, no matter how progressive one's viewpoint— for instance, I will always consider racism and sexism to be undesirable deviations from proper human pursuits— but the things one stigmatizes reflect the vision one has for society. The reason I am concerned about the tendency in the men's movement to stigmatize softness and connection with mother is that the stigmatization contradicts my vision of a gender-equitable society. I do not believe it is possible to practice psychotherapy or to write about gender without having a normative model in mind. Since there will always be a process of socialization and there will always be qualities that we stigmatize, it is far better to be aware of the biases inherent in our implicit normative models than to deny there are any implicit norms in our judgments and thus become blind to our biases.

I certainly do not mean to imply we should cross all lines, nor that breaking barriers, or doing the unexpected, is always the thing to do. The result would be anarchy, chaos, and confusion. Nor do I mean we will eventually construct one proper form of masculinity; Brod's (1987) notion of a multiplicity of masculinities coexisting in an atmosphere of tolerance can be part of the redrawing. Rather, I am using the image of crossing lines as a metaphor to describe the constrictions that dwell in our gendered sensibility. The metaphor should not be taken too literally. We need to consider the merit of crossing those lines in one spot or another, and then we need to move on to the difficult task of collectively redrawing the lines. We will not always agree.

I propose we proceed by first envisioning a better society, and then extrapolating backward from that vision in order to decide which qualities in men we would like to reinforce and which we would like to change. Cooperation and concern about others are high on the list for reinforcement; racism, the urge to rape, and brutality are on the list for extinction. There is less consensus on other items; consider the debate on pornography. This is not a new idea—progressive social theorists have been utilizing this logic since Marx and the early socialists engaged in debates about values and politics. Imagine a Utopia or a better society, figure out what qualities would help to build such a place, and then begin to encourage the development of those qualities now, among ourselves and our children.

Women have had to take the lead here. Men, like the Master in Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic, know something is wrong and things must change, but are ambivalent about giving up their dominant status in order to bring about change. Attributing their current pains and discontents to losses in status they have suffered in recent times—for instance, because women have become too powerful—men yearn for the good old days when "a man was a man, a woman a woman, and they both knew their places." I have given several examples of ways in which traditional psychiatry, because of its inclination to voice male ideas and maintain men in power, reinforces yesterday's gender norms by diagnosing pathology whenever men or women fail to satisfy society's traditional roles and expectations. The best example is Freud's theory of penis envy.

Women, like Hegel's Slave, are not only willing and eager to give up their subordinate status, but also are compelled by their situation to see precisely what the Master has a very hard time seeing; that only by ending domination can anyone hope to be free. Because of the way their oppression as women unites their gender, and because they have only oppression to look back on, women are compelled to move forward collectively. Where male psychiatry traditionally looks backward in establishing models of normal gender behavior, women and gays are redrawing the lines and redirecting the therapeutic process to prepare people to cope in a better world, for instance, a world where men and women are viewed as equals and where

connectedness, nurturance, sharing, and humility are valued as highly as ambition, status, and power over others.

In this tradition, Adrienne Rich (1976) discusses what mothers might wish to instill in their sons:

> What do we want for our sons? Women who have begun to challenge the values of patriarchy are haunted by this question. We want them to remain, in the deepest sense, sons of the mother, yet also to grow into themselves, to discover new ways of being men even as we are discovering new ways of being women. We could wish that there were more fathers— not one, but many—to whom they could also be sons, fathers with the sensitivity and commitment to help them into a manhood in which they would not perceive women as the sole sources of nourishment and solace. (p. 210)

A new twist has been added to the envisioning process by feminists who have uncovered early, nonpatriarchal societies and have been asking the question why, if gender equality was once the rule, it cannot be again. Maria Gimbutas (1974, 1989), Riane Eisler (1987), Elinor Gadon (1989), and others point out that certain neolithic cultures—in Turkey, Eastern Europe, and the Near East (Crete's culture is one of the last survivors)—were based on pervasive gender equality, and natural cycles were an important part of cultural life. Women were venerated and served as priestesses in religious rites. Archeological evidence suggests this veneration was based on women's role in procreation. Eisler insists women did not rule—that would merely be a reversal of patriarchal rule while retaining its basic form—rather they were

given equal place in society and their contributions were honored. Interestingly, archeologists have also discovered that these neolithic societies had relatively advanced technology for their time—indoor plumbing, for instance—and that there was much less class stratification than there is in modem societies. According to these feminists, even if patriarchal hunting and warrior peoples conquered and laid waste to the agrarian societies that venerated women and their natural cycles, what once was might be again.

The question has been raised in academic circles whether Gimbutas' evidence is too preliminary and sketchy to support the sweeping generalizations she makes (Barnett, 1992). Clearly, as soon as we begin to speculate on the basis of archeological evidence about the details of everyday life in an age prior to recorded history we are merely projecting our modern assumptions backward through time. Feminist theories about neolithic Goddess/ Priestess cultures have this built-in bias and, as history, are necessarily tentative. But this is not the main point. These feminists, in their speculations about the distant past, are saying something important about what is today and what might be in the future. Their speculations, like Freud's about the "primal horde," serve merely as metaphor. Like Ruth Benedict (1934), Margaret Mead (1949), and other "cultural relativists" in anthropology, these feminists are debunking the notion that gender roles are innate, universal, and unchanging. They are providing a speculative interpretation of the distant past so that we can envision a very different

future.

Contrast the work of Gimbutas, Eisler, and other feminists with the tendency among some men to idealize a preindustrial past when drumming, rituals, and mentorship provided a conduit for the male quest. There is a dramatic difference between these men's and women's references to the distant past. For Gimbutas and Eisler, gender relations in our historical past provide hope for improvement, while men's nostalgia tends to focus instead on what they see as proof of their view of what it means to be a man.

Other men have different interpretations. Mark Gerzon (1982), for example, offers a study of heroes. Gerzon describes five traditional men's hero images: the frontiersman, the soldier, the expert, the breadwinner, and the man of God. Then he ponders the transition to a new kind of society where there will be different male heroes, including the healer, the companion, the mediator, and the nurturer. Gerzon interviews a man he feels fits the description of the hero as healer, Tom Mossmiller, a founder of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) who was working at that time at a shelter for battered women and children, counseling the men who do the battering. Gerzon quotes Mossmiller:

> A lot of people think I work for a feminist counseling center only because I want to protect women. And I do. I do not want them to get beaten up. But I also work with abusive men because I care about them. They may not have any scars showing, but inside they're just as tom up as the women

they hurt. I want to help them get in touch with the gentle, caring, sensitive person inside them.

They do not like the kind of men they have become. My commitment is to help them change, (p. 241)

What if men were to look forward to a world where competition and domination no longer reign, where men as well as women strive to stay in touch with "the gentle, caring, sensitive person inside them?" Would men who, according to traditional definitions of the gender norm, fit in now, fit in then? Would PMS still be viewed as a category of mental disorder or would men more likely question their obsessive quest for steadiness? Would the men's movement stigmatize softness and homosexuality in men, or would there be a concerted effort to transcend homophobia, sexual compulsivity, and an obsession with pornography? Who would be viewed as the oddball, the man who values personal relationships and childrearing responsibilities or the one who ignores family life in order to concentrate on excelling at work and climbing higher in the hierarchy? How would we define power? These are the kinds of questions we must ask if we are to succeed, collectively, at redrawing the lines that presently constrict men's lives.

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