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Searching for a Masculine Model: Missteps Made During Three Decades of the Men's Movement and Why Moderation Is the Key

This article examines contemporary male ethicists' search for a revised masculine ethic by surveying three stages of the Men's Movement—the Feminist-Friendly, Mythopoetic, and Moderate Men's Movements. These first two movements created an ideological and political gulf that blunted their social and political efficacy and undermined this search. The third, however, minded these missteps by chartering a course of moderation and balance and so the Moderate Men's Movement succeeded by offering men what its predecessors could not—namely a more suitable and appealing way of being male in the world today.

Keywords: men's movements, masculine ethics, adolescent masculinity, masculinity, masculine models

> Go wisely and slowly. Those who rush stumble and fall.
> —William Shakespeare (qtd. in Staunton, 1979)

Contemporary male ethicists have sought to reconceptualize masculinity over the past several decades in an effort to offer men more liberating and appealing ways of "being male" in the world today. This search first staged itself in the 1970s and 1980s through the course of two primary movements—referred to respectively as the Feminist-Friendly and Mythopoetic Men's Movements. Highly politicized and contradictory in nature, neither movement succeeded in its efforts to raise consciousness, let alone inspire men to activism and change. What they did succeed in doing, however, was to create an ideological and political gulf that has divided the men's movement, blunted its social and political efficacy, and undermined its search for a revised masculine ethic that would hold universal appeal for

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men. A third men's movement, however, has minded the missteps of these first two and come to understand what they simply could not—namely that moderation and balance are the forces that must drive our collective efforts to provide men a more suitable and appealing way of being male in the world today. Hence, this third movement, referred to as the Moderate Men's Movement, has the potential to achieve what its predecessors could not.

All three movements are examined herein, along with the political and ideological underpinnings that divide them. The first of these movements is oft referred to as the "Feminist-Friendly" Movement because its advocates voiced an early and ardent support of the feminist agenda that continues yet today. It was followed a decade later by the Mythopoetic Men's Movement—its foil in almost every way in its blatant criticisms of feminism and unapologetic and widespread charges of male discrimination. The ideological principles and political realities that separate these two movements could not be more polarizing, and their on-going struggle has hindered male scholars and activists alike in their quest to reconceptualize masculinity and offer men a more progressive and suitable masculine ethic.

The more incremental and progressive model of masculinity advanced by the Moderate Men's Movement has the ability to bridge this gap; however, in doing so, it must accomplish two seemingly contradictory ends. First, it must reject those characteristics of hegemonic masculinity that have afforded men unearned power and prestige and that have disadvantaged women and certain groups of men. Second, it must celebrate those other characteristics of masculinity that have value, that men should rightly take pride in, and that have contributed to our world in a productive and meaningful way. The inherent balance of this model strengthens its appeal, for it allows men to retain those masculine ways of being worth retaining while unilaterally rejecting those that are not, thus making its language, unlike that of its predecessors, universal.

FEMINISM'S FORCE: THE BONDING AND THE BACKLASH

Any serious analysis of the Men's Movement must contextualize itself in feminism, for in their efforts to identify a masculine ethic that is both empowering and enlightening, male ethicists have typically remained mindful of the fact that authentic liberation for men must in no way contribute to the further oppression of women. However, scholars and activists in the field of men's studies have not always agreed about the efficacy of feminism's influence, for even though it has been viewed as a positive and enlightening force by some, it has been unilaterally rejected by others who consider the movement remiss in its refusal to acknowledge men's positioning and its failure to promote the cause of human liberation.

Regardless, feminism has provided us with a radically new way of understanding the way we live our lives; as a political theory and a personal practice, it has forced us to re-examine the way we think, the way we work, and the way we conduct our relationships. Furthermore, its interdisciplinary reach has left its imprint upon multiple disciplines including psychology, philosophy, history, anthropology, literature and education. As a theoretical construct, feminism has also wielded considerable influence in the lives of many men who have resisted the notion of traditional sex roles just as many feminists have. These men have offered their voices to the conversation on gender by calling for a revision of the traditional male role that has restricted their personal, social, and sexual identity, and their scholarship has yielded considerable insight and expanded consciousness in our contem-

porary search for gender equality. However, the arguments offered by these male writers have been varied, complex, and at times contradictory, and male ethicists have clearly struggled in their efforts to reconceptualize masculinity in the context of the feminist paradigm. The result is an emergent discourse that has tended to align itself with one of two polarizing ideologies and thus the establishment of divergent theoretical camps. What follows is an analytical survey of each camp and the overall efficacy it has had upon men today.

This first theoretical camp includes male writers who have expressed empathy and allegiance to the feminist movement; in doing so, it has encouraged men to engage in the process of self-reflection, a process that would, these theorists believe, allow men to recognize the unearned gender privilege that patriarchy has bestowed upon them. Consequently, this Feminist-friendly Men's Movement has touted an anti-sexist agenda that directly confronts male supremacy and institutional misogyny. Jon Snodgrass' (ed., 1977) anthology, *A Book of Readings: For Men Against Sexism*, serves an early example of this pro-feminist discourse, for its essays, all authored by men, are committed to the idea of gender equality. This anti-sexist agenda is taken up a decade later by John Stoltenberg (1989) in *Refusing to Be Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*, a powerful text that calls for political activism on the part of men so that both genders might begin to enjoy what Stoltenberg describes as "authentic liberation" (p. 5).

These pro-feminist sentiments invited their own brand of backlash though, prompting a substantial body of scholarship that directly challenged and criticized the feminist agenda. As noted men's studies scholar Michael Messner (1997) points out, feminism ironically laid the foundations for men's rights advocates who claimed that it was now men, and not women, who were suffering from "true oppression" in our society. Aligned with the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, these proponents openly criticized feminism for its "failure" to promote human liberation, a failure they attributed to its monolithic perspective that restricted its interest to the "unilateral liberation" of women while completely ignoring issues of male oppression. Such a claim is made by Warren Farrell (1993) in *The Myth of Male Power*, a publication that catapulted men's rights discourse to a new level. Farrell gained popular appeal with many men, who were perhaps feeling somewhat battered by the feminist movement, by arguing that it is men, and not women, who are rendered powerless in our society. He positions men as the true victims of a host of institutional, cultural and social norms, and thus cites prostitution, pornography, dating rituals, sexist media conventions, divorce settlements, false rape accusations, sexual harassment, and even domestic violence as examples of male bias, discrimination and oppression. This mythopoetic paradigm enjoyed considerable social and political efficacy with many men who were likely feeling somewhat battered by the forces of feminism. Messner (1997) insightfully analyzes its appeal in his *Politics of Masculinity: Men in Movements*, although in doing so he positions it as a somewhat desperate attempt on the part of some men to salvage any remaining vestiges of patriarchal hegemony:

> By the late 1970's and early 1980's, men's rights discourse had all but eliminated the gender symmetry of men's liberation from their discourse in favor of a more overt and angry anti-feminist backlash. Feminism was viewed as a plot to cover up the reality that it is actually women who have the power and men who are most oppressed by current gender arrangements. (p. 42)

The success of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement has been considerable, for what began quietly in the 1980's as a small, grass-roots movement has since evolved into an influential national organization attracting the membership of several thousand men. Messner (1997) credits the movement's appeal to its promise to give back to men what feminism had unjustly taken way, thereby guiding them on "spiritual journeys aimed at rediscovering and reclaiming 'the deep masculine' parts of themselves that they believed had been lost" (p. 17).

Feminism's influence upon the current discourse of masculinity is significant to say the least, yet the contradictory nature of this influence raises an important concern. Has feminism, as an ideological and political movement, effectively involved men in the processes of meaningful gender reform and thereby augmented more enlightened gender awareness on the part of men as well as women? Or has it, as mythopoetic male activists argue (Bly, 1990; Farrell, 1993), forsaken and thus alienated men in its unilateral concern with women's rights and "disregard" for men's? As feminists continue to discuss women's liberation and strive to identify an appropriate female ethic (Card, 1991; Gilligan, 1993; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994), how might men be brought into this conversation so that in their own search for a more progressive masculine ethic, they might identify more suitable ways of "being male" that do not contribute to the further oppression of women or certain groups of men?

This final question raises a serious concern, particularly in the context of mythopoetic activism over the past two decades. The sheer force of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement makes us question whether current efforts to reconceptualize masculinity are in fact leading men to greater gender awareness or simply empowering some to reclaim archetypal patterns of patriarchal hegemony? This concern cannot be ignored by a society committed to the notion of gender equality, for our efforts must encourage men and women to reassess traditional sex roles that have restricted their personal, social and political liberties. Feminists have quite successfully deconstructed the idea of gender as a monolithic ideal (Davies, 1997; Gilligan, 1993), thereby sounding the message to women that there are multiple ways of being female in the world today. Men must hear a similar message, for in recognizing these multiple subject positions they can free themselves from the emotional and psychological constraints that hegemonic masculine ideals have imposed in their lives. To put it simply, we must illustrate to men the need to reconceptualize masculinity so they might identify and eventually embrace a more enlightened and equitable masculine ethic that speaks to them in a language they understand and value. Our first step, then, should be to bridge the ideological gulf that currently exists in the discourse of masculinity. Our second should be to offer men a more progressive and incremental model of masculinity that offers reasonable subject positions that would appeal to men in the world today.

This charge has been taken up by male ethicists Larry May, Robert Strikwerda and Patrick Hopkins (1992) who argue that more diverse and moderate views of masculinity are needed to revise our understanding of men and their positioning in the world today. Their anthology *Rethinking Masculinity: Philosophical Explorations in the Light of Feminism* (1992), offers men a "variety of reappraisals of traditional roles and constructive explorations of alternatives available to men today" (p. xv). May continues this search in his text *Masculinity and Morality* (1998); his model of masculinity offers considerable promise in its ability to speak with clarity and offer respect to a wider and more diverse masculine audience. However, in offering this model, May delivers two important mandates to his male readers—one, that they must recognize their own gender privilege and two, that they must

acknowledge their own possible complicity in the processes of gender discrimination and oppression. Men must, he argues, acknowledge the wrongs, both past and present, which they have done and assume both collective and individual responsibility for them. However, also implicit in this process is the need to acknowledge the "good" that men have done, for May champions what he identifies as the male need for gender identity. Hence, his argument is premised upon the belief that men should not be forced to forsake their "maleness" when envisioning a more progressive male perspective that embraces the notion of gender equality.

These three decades of male activism sanction Messner's (1997) assertion that the fundamental question to be asked then is not, *"Can or will men change"* but rather "*How are men changing?"* Messner (1997) contends that in the wake of feminism and the women's movement, men are indeed changing, even though the avenues for this change have been ambiguous and sometimes even subversive of feminist progress. Despite this fact, he considers it significant that the "problem with masculinity" has taken place within a society that has been partially transformed by feminism, perhaps explaining why we are left with so many competing and contradictory conceptions of masculinity. Messner (1997) provides an insightful overview of contemporary efforts to reconceptualize masculinity; he surveys much of the current research on men and masculinity and offers a sociological framework to better understand and contextualize "men's organized responses to changes, challenges, and crises in the social organization of gender" (p. 3). By attending to the political discourse and various social movements currently emanating from the politics of masculinity, he provides a detailed examination of the traditional masculine model, addressing issues of men's institutional privileges, the costs of masculinity, and the differences and inequalities among men.

Although Messner (1997) stops short of offering his own version of a revised masculine ethic, he contextualizes the men's movement within the feminist framework to offer insight into the polarizing discourses emerging from the study of masculinity and the political theories that inform its activism. He clearly details the discourse offered by men's rights activists by providing an overview of their basic claims:

1. They claim to have been early and ardent supporters of liberal feminism in the hopes that it would free women and men from sexism.
2. They now claim a sense of hurt and outrage when women don't agree that men's issues are symmetrical with those faced by women.
3. Consequently, they have enthusiastically embraced an angry and aggressive anti-feminist men's right discourse and practice. (p. 44)

Messner (1997) points out that even though critics have accused these men's rights advocates of harboring anti-feminist sympathies, they claimed no such sympathies. Nor did they seem to have any desire to restore patriarchal hegemony. Ironically, many were openly critical of the ways in which masculinity has entrapped, limited and harmed men, and so they were, they claimed, eager to reconstruct masculinity in a more healthful, peaceful and nurturing way. However, in their quest to do so, they outwardly rejected feminism as the route to improving men's lives. They both resented and refuted its contention that men today enjoy institutionalized privileges, for they believed that hegemonic constructions of mas-

culinity continued to oppress men in very real and damaging ways. It is for this reason, then, that these activists were unapologetic in their fight for the rights to which they believe men were entitled.

This way of thinking soon gave birth to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement popularized in the 1980s and 1990s. Michael Schwalbe (1996) credits the movement's appeal to its ability to provide an ideological defense against the biting criticisms of feminism.

> Such a defense was necessary against feminist criticisms of men. The men were aware of generic feminist criticisms of men as brutish, insensitive, power hungry, and so on. However, the men did not see these criticisms as aimed at social arrangements that produced a lot of genuinely bad men. Rather they interpreted these ... as criticisms of the essential nature of men. Feminist criticism of men was thus experienced as indicting the morality of all men. A defense had to respond in kind; it had to somehow redeem the category. (p. 64)

The Mythopoetic Men's Movement provided this defense and, even more importantly, offered men gender redemption by allowing them to assert "This is what I am as a man—take it or leave it. I won't feel guilty about it. I won't apologize for my gender" (Schwalbe, 1996, p. 65). Schwalbe refers to this process as "loose essentialism" and considers it important because it affords men agency and flexibility in constructing their masculine identity. Essentially, mythopoetic men's work offers a collective ritual structure through which men might explore, discover, and reconstruct their inner selves. Schwalbe (1996) explains that loose essentialism allowed mythopoetic activists to have it both ways because it gave them "the moral license for possessing the feminine and masculine traits they already had" and the "theoretical possibility of changing what they wanted to change" (p. 65). Although Schwalbe considers loose essentialism empowering for men and thus culturally justified, Messner (1997) takes issue with it. He attended several gatherings of the Promise Keepers, a Christian Men's Organization began by Bill McCartney in 1995. While at these meetings, Messner concluded that the majority of the men were acutely aware of the problems, limits, and costs that accompany a narrow conception of masculinity; in fact, a recurrent theme focused upon the "poverty of men's relationships," particularly with fathers and other men in the workplace. A primary goal of these mythopoetic male initiation rituals seemed therapeutic in nature as men sought to heal and reconstruct these weakened masculine bonds. Although Messner considered this goal noteworthy, he problematized its singular focus because it rendered the meetings, at least in his estimation, largely irrelevant to women in that they exclusively dealt with men's relationships with other men. In this sense, they failed to address a central point of feminist critique—namely, that men, as a group, benefit from a structure of power that collectively oppresses women. Thus whereas Schwalbe (1996) views the loose essentialism that underlies mythopoetic thought and that allows men to "have it both ways" prerequisite to any meaningful revision of masculinity, Messner (1997) disagrees because it justifies the defensiveness men feel when feminism criticizes their institutional power and privilege. He is further troubled by the fact that loose essentialism affords men the ability to "construct practices that confront their own major preoccupation with 'the costs of masculinity,' or, in mythopoetic terms, with 'men's wounds'" (p. 19).

> Unlike feminism, it does not confront men with the reality of how their own privileges are based on the continued subordination of women and other men. In short, the Mythopoetic men's movement may be seen as facilitating the reconstruction of a new form of hegemonic masculinity-a masculinity that is less self-destructive, that has revalued and reconstructed men's emotional bonds with each other, and that has learned to feel good about its own "Zeus power." (Messner, 1997, pp. 23-24)

In the end, Messner sees the movement as self-serving and of little value to men's rights discourse. He is particularly troubled by the movement's refusal to address the social structure of power, for this refusal has allowed mythopoetic leaders to manipulate the discourse and institute a false symmetry between the feminist movement and their own.

Iron John: Reclaiming Masculinity

Perhaps the most powerful example of this false symmetry is evidenced in Robert Bly's (1990) best-selling mythopoetic text, *Iron John: A Book About Men.* Although it reached a wide reading audience, selling over 500,000 hardback copies, the book's mythopoetic paradigm has invoked harsh criticism from many male scholars who consider it regressive in tone (May, 1998; May et al., eds., 1992; Messner, 1997). Bly contends that men's current situation has been cast as a reaction to feminism's critique of contemporary masculinity, which has, in his view, been so harsh that "men no longer feel that they have the inner strength and self-assurance necessary to assume the leadership roles in society they traditionally played" (p. 3). Men have rejected the traditional role of the strong, aggressive male, thus causing them an unhappiness they are at a loss to name; as a result, they suffer daily anguish, uncertainty and indecision, thus rendering them incapable of taking the lead on matters they consider important. Bly argues that the women's movement must assume some of the blame for this current state of emasculated manhood endured by so many men today, for the picture he paints is one where the radical, combative, and destructive forces of feminism smear the canvas of men's lives. Men can counter this state of inner confusion and despair, however, by refusing feminism's call to reject their masculinity; men must, he argues, reclaim all that was positive within the masculine model—namely the images of men as heroes, warriors, and lords, images that have contributed to our world in a meaningful way and that give men hope and inspiration.

May et al. (eds., 1992) problematize Bly's image of masculinity for two reasons: 1) it does not envision new ways for men and women to interact with each other and 2) it offers no advice whatsoever in terms of how the very problems he discusses might be resolved. They accuse him of returning uncritically to the past, thus setting the stage for yet "another round of blaming women for the problems in men's lives" (p. xv). Messner (1997) problemetizes Bly's dichotomization of "male" and "female" values. He also finds it ironic that Bly applauds feminism for its reassertion of "the feminine voice" that has been suppressed, because he later indicts it for its political activism that has, in his view, resulted in the muting of the "masculine voice," and a negative transformation of men as "passive, tamed ... domesticated" (p. 20). Hence, we should suspect Bly's call for a men's movement that would connect men with the "Zeus energy" they have lost, for this "Zeus energy" is an archetypally cloaked call for "male authority that is accepted for the good of the community" (p. 20).

REFUSING TO BE A MAN: WILL IT WORK???

Might greater hope be found, then, in John Stoltenberg's (1989) *Refusing to Be a Man,* in the midst of the theoretical debates about masculinity? Stoltenberg explains that "refusing to be a man means learning a radical new ethic" that requires them to evaluate their actions and their impact upon others—essentially to understand that "everybody else is absolutely as real as oneself" (p. 15). Stoltenberg (1989) reaffirms the need to recognize the subjectivity of the distant Other, in this case primarily women, a call that has been voiced by many feminist ethicists as well (Card, 1991; Gilligan, 1993; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). He acknowledges the misogynistic tradition that has systematically disempowered women to the benefit of men and thus inextricably links male sexual identity to male supremacy. He explains that the male sex role, as it is currently constructed, requires injustice to survive, and so men learn an ethic of sexual injustice early on that enables them to marginalize others and rationale their actions. However, because this masculine ethic is socially-constructed, it is within men's power to refuse it, act against it, and, most importantly, actively change it. Simply put, men must refuse this masculine ethic by refusing to be a man according to existing social constructions of masculinity, so that they can gain "authentic liberation" (p. 5).

Similar to other post-structuralist scholars (Connell, 1989, 1995, 1996; Davies, 1997; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1999), Stoltenberg (1998) rejects the notion of gender as a metaphysically fixed entity and repositions it as a social and political construct amenable to change: "My point is that sexuality does not have a gender; it creates a gender" (p. 33). He problematizes the notion of gender as natural or inherent because this binary construction defines men and women in oppositional terms:

> A fully realized male sexual identity also requires *nonidentification with* that which is perceived to be non-male, or female. A male must not identify with females; he must not associate with females in feeling, interest or action. His identity as a member of the sex class men absolutely depends on the extent to which he repudiates the values and interests of the sex class of "women." (p. 34)

> Since sex class determines who we fundamentally are, men who disavow the interests of their sex class are made to feel inferior because tangible membership in it is something men are socialized with from birth onward: "It's a familiar story. You grow up to become a boy and you are terrorized into acting like a boy and you are rewarded for being a boy … by adopting a whole range of fears and hatreds of women and you learn what you need to learn to be accepted into the company of other men (p. 194).

As Doyle (1983) points out, this process of socialization is fueled by fear which becomes the driving force early on in boys' lives:

> Little boys are told from their early years onward that they are not supposed to fear, not supposed to be scared of things that they have little or no control over. As the years go by and the boys become men, the "not-supposed-to fear" becomes em-

> bedded in men's minds as "men do not fear …" and so an image of self-reliance becomes a kind of ruse to hide behind. (p. 216)

Both Doyle (1983) and Stoltenberg (1989) highlight the role that fear plays in the making of masculinities, for the dual fears of not measuring up to society's masculine ideals and expectations and of being associated with anything constructed as feminine are daunting ones that first dawn in early childhood and that proliferate in adulthood. Although Stoltenberg places blame squarely on the shoulders of men because they are the ones who actively perpetuate this cycle of internalized oppression, he considers women complicit in the process as well, for men look to women to shore up and affirm this identity. However, he argues that in the end it is primarily men who function as the "arbiters of sex-class identity," the keepers of the gate so to speak, because it is the idea of "letting go that it scares us to death" (p. 194).

The socially constructed world of masculinity starkly depicted by Stoltenberg (1989) and Doyle (1983) is an emotionally and psychologically dangerous place where men feel enormous pressure to measure up to the expectations of other men, a world where they are measured, judged and sometimes threatened by other men; it is a world where the forces of hegemonic masculinity restrict men's well-being, and so it is a world they must actively work to change. However, Stoltenberg also questions men's ability to disavow allegiance to a system predicated upon male supremacy without suffering an identity crisis in the process. The only viable solution then is collective resistance where men come together to embrace an anti-sexist agenda that openly confronts male supremacy. Hence for Stoltenberg, anti-sexist activism is the primary means by which men might "refuse to be a man," still keep their moral identity and transform their world in the process. Such collective resistance will never materialize, however, if the message itself fails to resonate with men, and it is likely that Stoltenberg's mandate that one must "refuse to be a man" may simply ask too much.

A Revised Masculine Ethic: "All Things in Moderation"

The likelihood of Bly and Stoltenberg, along with the polarizing theoretical camps they represent, ever reconciling their ideological perspectives on masculinity is slim at best, for their models of masculinity offer divergent yet equally unsatisfactory options for men today. Stoltenberg (1989), Snodgrass (ed., 1977) and others who have aligned themselves with pro-feminist discourse have demanded that men forfeit entirely the traditional model of masculinity upon which they were reared. This mandate may simply ask too much of those men who responded with hostility or confusion to the women's liberation movement in its early years, for as Messner (1998) points out, "Men's liberation discourse walked a tightrope from the very beginning" (p. 256). Jourard argues that their tactical mistake was to draw men to feminism by "constructing a discourse that stressed how the 'male role' was 'impoverished, unhealthy," and 'even lethal' for men" (1971, quoted in Messner, 1998, p. 256). Understandably, their relentless focus on the power of patriarchy and continued indictments against men for the unearned power and prestige they enjoyed at its hands did much to strain the movement and even less to attract men who resided outside the halls of academia. Mythopoeticism, however, has been equally unsuccessful in its efforts to speak to and in-

fluence men in a universal way. Its open hostility to the feminist agenda, reluctance to recognize the privileges that patriarchy has granted to some men at the expense of others, and continued cries of contemporary male oppression have not resonated with the majority of American men. The truth is that neither movement has been able to sing its song to the tastes of a collective American male audience, and so if the past three decades serve at the litmus test, there seems little hope of reconciling these two competing theoretical camps.

The gulf might be bridged, however, through moderation, and so our best chance of unravelling this Gordian Knot is to find a masculine ethic that speaks to men in a moderate and balanced way, that offers them a way of being male they are willing to live by, and that does not contribute to the continued oppression of women or certain groups of men. Balance and moderation are the forces that might cut through this seemingly complex knot just as easily as Alexander the Great did over 2,000 years ago. They are the forces that can reconceptualize masculinity and identify a masculine ethic that speaks to men in a language they understand and value. They are the forces that can accomplish two seemingly competing needs in that they give men permission to celebrate those characteristics of masculinity that have value while unilaterally rejecting those that do not. Such moderate models are being thoughtfully articulated by contemporary male ethicists such as May, Strikwerda and Hopkins (1992) who offer a framework for understanding masculinity as it should and could be enacted today. While they agree with Stoltenberg's (1989) assertion that we must recognize and combat the powerful forces of socialization that have shaped gender, they object to the "radical" nature of his approach because it "leaves men with very little to grasp hold of once we have refused to be a man" (May et al., 1992, p. xiii). They deem Stoltenberg's masculine model, so indicative of feminist-friendly discourse, too radical in tone and thus ill-equipped to speak to the majority of men in our society. In the end, they outwardly reject his argument that one "must refuse to be a man" because he either ignores or blatantly rejects man positive aspects of masculinity.

Bly's (1990) model, in contrast, resonates with men in a way that Stoltenberg's does not, mainly because it encourages men to celebrate their masculinity rather than experience shame because of it; however, May et al. (1992) consider it equally problematic because it fails to envision new ways for men and women to interact and offers no practical solutions whatsoever to resolve the complex problems Bly himself discusses. Most troubling, in their opinion, is Bly's tendency to turn "uncritically to the past," a theoretical technique that simply sets the "stage for another round of blaming women for the problems in men's lives" (p. xv). Although he treads carefully in this terrain, Bly indicts the women's movement for much of men's current suffering, arguing that it must assume some of the blame for the current state of emasculated manhood from which men are suffering, and so May et al (1992) consider his model just as one-sided and hopeless as Stoltenberg's. Their solution is to offer a more incremental masculine model that advocates change but in a more temperate and measured fashion. Far from the radicalism so inherent in both feminist-friendly and mythopoetic discourse and activism, their model bases itself upon three foundational beliefs: 1) It does not force men to reject their masculinity altogether; 2) It sets intermediate goals that allow moderate change to be regarded as a "success"; and 3) It offers men multiple subject positions and thus choice in the way they wish to live their lives (p. xiii).

May (1998) continues to sculpt the subtleties of this model in his text *Masculinity and Morality* by championing what he calls the need for gender identity. The theoretical model

he offers is both salient and appealing, for in its efforts to identity the many positive aspects of masculinity, it affords men the opportunity to celebrate their "maleness" while simultaneously endorsing a more progressive male perspective that embraces the notion of gender equality. However, to realize this progressive standpoint, men must first understand how their participation in certain social arrangements might contribute to oppression and inequality. In terms of gender, then, both men and women must come to understand their roles in the process of gender inequality. However, May points out that whereas progressive feminist standpoints have proliferated, male ones have not and so an inevitable question must be asked: "Can men distance themselves enough from their position of privilege to asses it critically and thus create a more egalitarian model of masculinity?"

May's answer to this question is "yes" but only if a careful balance is struck. He admits that past attempts to do so have been fraught with difficulties, mainly because the message has been delivered too harshly: "Purists who insist in providing a thorough-going critique of the male experience and traditional roles will find that their message will not be taken as seriously by the very people they most want to affect, namely other men" (May, 1998, p. 148). The indictments delivered to men by those who have sought to reconceptualize masculinity have simply been too harsh and single-minded; what is needed, then, in his view, is balance: "Just the right balance needs to be struck between searchingly critical inquiry and sympathetic attempts to understand a person's or group's point of view" (p. 149). Yet May contends that a masculine model that is both progressive and morally-responsive is attainable if this model builds upon some of the strengths of the traditional male role. The model that he proposes involves three reasonable yet non-negotiable mandates: 1) Men must be willing to observe the male experience and traditional male roles with a critical eye; 2) They must be willing to change certain traditional ways of thinking; and 3) They must construct practical proposals for change they themselves consider reasonable. The inherent balance of this masculine model produces reasonable critiques of male roles, and, even more importantly, the plausibility needed to motivate men to change their lives. However, May is concerned that it will not augment meaningful change if it insists upon offering negative criticisms of the male experience and traditional conceptions of masculinity without equal regard for its strengths. Certainly, there are many masculine dispositions that are of great value to our society, that have shaped the world in positive ways, and that should, for the benefit of all, be retained. Among these are leadership, courage, self-sacrifice, and the ability to work on a team to realize a collective goal. May (1998) points out how even the notion of competition, although sometimes problematic because it has led to aggression and violence, can be an empowering force if channeled properly: "Aggression can be channeled in many ways which lead to socially useful results" (p. 133). Competition, he contends, prompts men to an "intense pursuit of protection and support for family," and so the breadwinner role, appropriated by so many men in our society, funnels male aggression in a socially productive direction.

May also address the notion of male strength, pointing out that men have successfully defended "nation, city, and family from aggression" in times of need (1998, p. 125). Although this strength has sometimes been used against the weak and defenseless, it has also been employed to save them, often at the expense of men's lives. Historically, men have sacrificed much to protect family and country, and so the need to celebrate and preserve male strength becomes a compelling one in any society concerned about its own sustainability.

The search for a revised masculine model, one that promises characterizations of masculinity that are both empowering and enlightening for men, without contributing to the continued oppression of women, is best realized through a course of moderation. The Moderate Men's Movement offers a progressive and enlightened model that will not only free men from social constructions of masculinity that are both limiting and unhealthy but that will also speak to them in a powerful way. May et al. (1992) validate criticisms that have been voiced by feminist ethicists (Card, 1991; Gilligan, 1993; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994) that philosophy has systematically ignored the voices and experiences of women; however, they cogently point out that men have been marginalized as well by not always having their experiences taken seriously. They pay homage to feminism, applauding its influence and efficacy among male philosophers, yet they also question this efficacy by arguing that feminist scholarship has augmented very little "real" change in the way most men "do philosophy" because it "has been viewed as being for, and about, women" (p. xii). What they call for is a paradigmatic shift on the part of male philosophers that sincerely embraces and institutionally privileges gender as a valid analytic category: "...we believe gender is a valuable analytic category. We look to the experience of men in our culture not to uncover the 'essence' of maleness, but because we believe that good social philosophy needs to take gender fully into account" (p. xii). With this purpose in mind, Stikwerda and May offer insightful essays written from diverse philosophical perspectives that survey in comprehensive fashion many of the conceptual and political issues writers are currently struggling with in the search for a more progressive masculine ethic. They contend that gender equality can only be realized by providing "characterizations of masculinity that are empowering, or at least enlightening, for men, without contributing to the further oppression of women" (p. xix). They cogently speaks to both men and women in a voice that is sincere, intelligent, and hopeful and thus satisfies their dual editorial hope of providing readers "reasonable analyses of what is wrong with the traditional model of masculinity" and "plausible suggestions for change that will benefit both men and women today" (p. xix).

BRINGING BOYS INTO THE CONVERSATION

Perhaps it is for the adolescent male that this search has the greatest urgency, for even though the debate continues to rage in the field of Men's Studies as researchers struggle to conceptualize a more progressive masculine model that might appeal to the majority of American men, adolescent males remain disturbingly distanced from these conversations that have such direct relevancy to their lives as young men. However, boys must be brought into this conversation if we hope to provide them the insight and direction they need to explore issues of masculinity that directly impact their lives. Feminist scholars have successfully reached out to adolescent girls over the past several decades and in doing so have afforded them voice and agency (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Gilligan, 1993; Noddings, 1984; Pipher, 1994; Shmurak, 1998) Scholars in the field of men's studies would do well to follow feminism's lead, for research has shown (Connell, 1989, 1995, 1996; Pasco, 2007; Pollack, 1998) that boys typically remain mired in traditional notions of masculinity that negatively impact their lives. Even more troubling are the emotional, psychological and physical hardships they suffer at the hands of hegemonic masculinity. Pollack's (1998) qualitative study highlights the pressures that adolescent boys experience because of the mixed

messages society sends them about "what's expected of them as boys, and later as men," and that cause them to feel a "sadness and disconnection they cannot even name" (p. xxii). Boys are, he argues, in "serious trouble," even when they seem "normal and to be doing just fine" (p. xxii). He attributes this disconnection to the "gender straight-jacket" society forces upon them, a psychologically-confining device that unfairly judge adolescent male behavior against antiquated notions of masculinity that simply have no relevance in today's world. Pollack locates a harsh irony in the fact that society finds ways of shaming boys into com- pliance when they fail to conform to these outdated ideas because they are ideas that limit their emotional range, ability to think and behave as freely and openly as they could, and to succeed in the complex transient world in which we live. Although perhaps less dis- cernable, adolescent boys suffer from crises of self-confidence and identity just as adoles- cent girls do, but Pollack identifies a fundamental difference in the fact that boys rarely feel the liberty or ease to share their vulnerabilities. Hence, even though they may exhibit acts of "bravado and braggadocio," boys, in reality, find it much more difficult to express who they really are, even in the company of intimate friends and family because their behavior is regulated by an unwritten yet hopelessly stringent "Boy Code":

> All of this gets absorbed by boys and promulgated by a society at large as an unwritten Boy Code, which is the sum total of this disturbing cycle. The code is a set of behaviors, rules of conduct, cultural shibboleths, and even a lexicon, that is inculcated into boys by our society from the very beginning of a boy's life." (Pollack, p. xxv)

The Boy Code forces young boys to assume a mask that disguises their true feelings. It is left to parents, teachers and society to discover ways to get behind this mask, for only then will we be able to reach those boys who have a genuine need to speak to us and who have much to say and much to teach.

Psychological and sociological in focus, Pollack's study of masculinity offers a unique blend of the theoretical and practical in its plausible diagnosis of the cultural and peer pressures boys face in our society; more importantly, it offers insightful guidance for those who want to provide support and direction to young boys as they negotiate the difficult and oft times precarious path through adolescence. Adult men are strategically positioned to offer this support. Whether they function as fathers, brothers, teachers, coaches or friends, men are, by nature, mentors to young boys who are figuring out "how to be male"; as they direct them along their journey, then, men have two choices. They can impose upon them, as society has traditionally done, the Boy Code, thereby intimating to them that they must measure up to the hegemonic masculine ideals that will afford them power and privilege and that will insulate them from ridicule and shame. They can shame them into doing so, not out of malice but rather because they care, and because they care, they hope to equip them with the skills they need to survive in what is all too often the harsh and unforgiving world of masculinity. This is the course that men, and many women for that matter, have traditionally taken when mentoring those in their charge; whether these boys offered themselves as students, younger brothers, sons or even friends, men have quite understandably taught those they cared about, even loved, as they had been taught, the result being the perpetuation of what Pollack describes as an "unending and disturbing cycle."

Men have the power to break this cycle though and mentor boys in a liberating and empowering way that will transform boys' lives and the society in which they live. If our aim is to bring men and women together in the spirit of open communication and sincere cooperation, we must begin the conversation by engaging boys in these critical processes of gender reflection and reform. We must quite simply give boys permission to speak honestly and without fear about the issues that inform their lives, and then once spoken, listen carefully to what was said.

CONCLUSION

The divisiveness that has plagued and fragmented the Men's Movement over the past three decades has likely augmented a certain amount of laxity concerning the positioning of adolescent boys and certainly thwarted its efforts to offer men a more appealing way of being male in the world today. However, the more incremental and progressive model of masculinity advanced by the Moderate Men's Movement effectively bridges the ideological and political gulfs that have fractured the contemporary Men's Movement. It does so by achieving two seemingly contradictory ends: it rejects those characteristics of hegemonic masculinity that have afforded men unearned power and prestige and disadvantaged women and certain groups of men while simultaneously celebrating those that have value and that have contributed to our world in a productive and meaningful way. Its appeal, then, lies in its inherent balance, for it allows men to retain those masculine ways of being worth retaining, ways that have value and that they should rightly take pride in, while rejecting those that do not, ways that have restricted men's emotional, physical and psychological well-being. Its language is universal, its appeal alluring, and its potential for success considerable. What remains then is to sound its message to men in a clear and compelling way so that they will count their voices among those who call for meaningful gender reform and equality in our society. However, words must be followed by actions, and so in setting upon our course, we should heed the counsel of the great political pacifist and activist Mahatma Gandhi who reminds us that "Manliness consists not in bluff, bravado or loneliness..." but rather in "daring to do the right thing and facing consequences whether it is in matters social, political or other. It consists in deeds not words" (quoted in Tarrant, 2009, p. 87).

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