

# Men's Quest for Identity Leads to the Woods (and Their Therapists)

Richard Weizel

January 19, 1992

FROM wilderness weekends that include drum beating, mask making and tugs-of-war, to meetings where poetry and intimate feelings are shared, the men's movement has arrived in Connecticut.

The movement, spurred by best-selling books like Robert Bly's "Iron John" and Sam Keen's "Fire in the Belly," is leading to a psychological revolution, say psychotherapists of both sexes. In response to a growing demand, the Men's Counseling Centers in Danbury and the Men's Spirituality Group in Westport have developed programs to help men broaden their perspective about who they are and what they want out of life.

"I'm very happy to see this movement taking off," said Bernice Marie-Daly, a therapist in Greenwich, noting that "men are joining groups and talking about feelings that women have been discussing for years." Ms. Marie-Daly, author of the book "Created in Her Image: Models of the Feminine Divine," published in 1990 by Crossroad, said: "In any personal growth program, 99 percent of the participants have traditionally been women. Men need to get out there, too, and this new movement is a very, very positive sign that they are starting to do that."

More than 150 men and women attended a presentation last fall in the Westport Library, led by Dr. Robert Helfand, a psychologist who runs the Danbury Men's Counseling Centers, and Dr. Louis Kopolow, a psychiatrist who heads the Men's Counseling Centers in Washington, D.C. Both spoke about the need to ask questions about men's identity.

"The fact that so many people came out to listen to our presentation is evidence that men are searching, looking for answers about what it really means to be a man," said Dr. Helfand. "Many men have a tremendous amount of sadness and anger that they don't know how to express, that they never learned how to deal with, and so there is a need to explore their feelings more deeply."

Two years ago most of his clients were women, Dr. Helfand said; but now he sees only men. He said men who become involved in the new movement are attempting to reclaim masculinity lost during the feminist movement.

"The soft male of the 60's left a legacy of shame in being a man," said Dr. Helfand. "Of course, men can be sensitive and nurturing but still be masculine and explore what it means to be a man. We're trying to bring the pendulum back to the center." While the feminist movement has had an overall positive impact on society, "men learned during the 60's that in order to make it with a woman, they had to be soft," Dr. Helfand said. "Men left their assertive and masculine nature."

To help men find that masculine nature, Dr. Helfand said, they must experience a rite of passage. Weekends in the woods that include competitive games and encourage learning the skills of independence and survival are among the techniques that he and Dr. Kopolow use in their programs.

"When men use these techniques to begin working through their anger and allow themselves to feel pain and sadness and to examine their childhood wounds, and at the same time celebrate their masculinity, they strengthen their relationship with their

wives, their families, their workplace, the community and the environment,” said Dr. Helfand.

Dr. Kopolow said the men’s movement is “a spontaneous and grass-roots event across the country resulting from an increasing awareness among men that something is just not right.” ‘We’ve Never Gotten It Back’

Men are “searching now like they’ve never searched before,” because of the loss of strong father-son bonds, Dr. Kopolow said. “At the turn of the century, with the onset of the Industrial Revolution that took fathers away from the home to the workplace, the significant father-son bond begins to disintegrate,” he said. “And we’ve never gotten it back. With that loss, critical male values, including respecting and protecting women, have also been lost.”

Gregor Barnum, a therapist with offices in Westport and Greenwich, said the men’s movement is a direct response to feminism that has gone too far. “There is a form of psychological castration that has occurred,” said Mr. Barnum. “The women’s movement was necessary, but women are now trying too hard to define themselves in terms of a man. I think that is hurting women as well as men and hurting relationships between men and women.”

Mr. Barnum said that while the men’s movement is a logical response to the women’s movement, “it is not in retaliation to it.”

Some therapists, however, reject the notion that men were softened by the women’s movement and say that the onset of this new movement 20 years later proves it has just taken men longer to explore their deeper feelings. “I don’t believe the women’s movement has gone too far,” said Rabbi Steven S. Rosman, one of two leaders of the Men’s Spirituality Group in Westport, which is planning to offer an eight-session course on spiritual and personal growth in the spring or next fall.

“Women are ahead of men, because during the past several decades some very courageous and healthy women in the feminist movement have evolved gently and gradually to explore their inner feelings that are necessary for wholeness and well being,” Rabbi Rosman said. “Is it true that some women have gone too far? Yes, of course. But let’s not say that about an entire movement.”

Rabbi Rosman’s partner, Charles S. Simonds, a psychotherapist in Westport, agreed that most women are ahead of most men and said the men’s movement owes its very existence to the women’s example. ‘A Deep Awakening’

“Both movements have allowed men and women to expand our roles as to who we can become,” Mr. Simonds said. But men need to do more than “just go out into the woods, put on a mask and beat on a drum,” he said. “That’s not all there is to being a man, or being a human being.

“I think this populous men’s movement is good, but has not as yet gone deep enough or broad enough. In order to do that, there must be a deep awakening that allows men to connect with sensitivities that have generally been considered feminine.”

Men must also learn to be more compassionate and develop a deeper, more intimate relationship with their children, Mr. Simonds said, adding, “Men need to be more like mothers.”

April Reiss, a psychotherapist who practices in New Haven and Westport, said any movement that encourages men to share their feelings and fears is a positive development for society.

“Men have not been permitted to be as human as women,” said Ms. Reiss. “Men still have more difficulty being vulnerable and expressing their needs. The men’s movement is allowing men to get together with like-minded people to talk, and that’s going to be good for men, for women and will improve the quality of male-female relationships.”

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The New York Times, January 19, 1992, Section 12CN, Page 1.  
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A version of this article appears in print on Jan. 19, 1992, Section 12CN, Page 1 of the National edition with the same headline.

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