Beyond masculinity: a men's group as a partial evolution toward the redefinition and eventual elimination of the concept of masculinity or, is there a right way to be a man?

Barry Norval Ulberg

Iowa State University

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Ulberg, Barry Norval, Ph.D.

Iowa State University, 1994
Beyond masculinity:
A men's group as a partial evolution
toward the redefinition and eventual elimination
of the concept of masculinity
or,
Is there a right way to be a man?

by
Barry Norval Ulberg

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department: Human Development and Family Studies
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(Marriage and Family Therapy)

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In Charge of Major Work
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PREFACE

The recent emergence of what is being called a "men's movement" raises interesting and intriguing questions: who is involved, where did it begin, why did it begin, what is it, how did it come into being, and what does it mean that it exists? It is not my intention to attempt to answer all or even most of these questions through this project, but rather to focus on one or two that seem most salient to me at this point in my life.

By taking this stance I place myself in the camp of the standpoint theorists usually aligned with feminist research (Hartsock, 1983; Ruddick, 1989; Smith, 1987). Hartsock (1983) defines a standpoint as "an engaged vision of the world opposed and superior to dominant ways of thinking" (p. 129). She states it is superior in the sense that it is a voice of oppression, an "outsider within" perspective in the words of Collins (1990), that gives a new look at dominant modes of thinking and experiencing.

Along with Ruddick (1989) I will not say that my vision is necessarily superior to dominant ways of thinking, but it is definitely opposed to much of it. For just as Nietzsche (1885) called for a move Beyond Good and Evil, I believe it is time to move beyond the concept of masculinity, (I would also include femininity and androgyny) leaving it behind as a useless, outmoded, and problematic abstraction.
I will make this argument through a presentation of my research on a men's group of which I was a member for approximately eight months before it disbanded. I will tie this group to a larger men's movement and discuss the impact and meaning of the concept of masculinity in relation to both of them as well as to society in general. And I will support my conclusions with literature from a diverse group of scholars from a variety of fields of investigation. Hopefully, the journey will prove interesting to the reader.
INTRODUCTION

The genesis of the "men's movement," as the groups of men who meet on a regular basis for support, personal growth, and self-reflection are collectively being termed, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Seminal articles and books began showing up in the literature approximately twenty years ago (Farrell, 1974a, 1974b; Goldberg, 1976). But it was the publication of Iron John by Robert Bly (1990) that propelled the movement into the public eye.

At this point much has been written in an attempt to conceptualize what is happening with men, why it is happening, and how whatever is happening might be done in a more organized, systematic and/or formal manner. Other writings point to who men are, how they are socialized, and how they might be different.

But little, if anything, has been written on how these questions and issues pertain to a specific group of men in this so-called movement—on how they came to be where they are in relation to other men, what or who influenced them, and which choices led them down this particular path. This qualitative study is an attempt to shed light on these and other related questions.

As a marital and family therapist, I consider this study to be directly related to a better understanding of the functioning of marriages and families today. Men are
participants in those relationships, therefore any knowledge that can be gained concerning their understanding of themselves, how they came to be who they are, and their role in relationships has the potential to inform and thus change those relationships.

I believed a significant factor influencing men's behavior in their relationships with women was the paucity of their emotional connectedness with other men, which I perceived to be a reflection of their socialization as men. Therefore I determined to investigate the dynamics that led some men to choose to connect with other men in order to discover if there were any themes or patterns in their stories. As you will read, I believe that there are.

Purpose of the Study

The original purpose of this study was to develop an initial ethnographic account of a men's group focusing on what led the men to be open to emotional connection with other men from the perspective of some of the men actually participating in it. It was to be an ethnography of one specific men's group which would include my views and perceptions as a member as well as those of any other members who were willing to be interviewed.

I was not searching for "truth" but rather for what the men felt had been salient experiences, events, information, direction and/or anything else they considered pertinent to
how they got to where they were in relation to other men. I was hoping to find common themes in the men's stories which might lead to some insight into the male experience more generally. I was also interested in the usefulness for the men of meeting together on a regular basis; in essence, what were their expectations for the group, and had they been met.

Actually doing the research led to a shift in my perspective out of which a new, more encompassing purpose emerged: a recognition of the limited and limiting aspects of the concept of masculinity (and femininity) and a concomitant call for a move beyond this restrictive linguistic creation whose reification has led to much damage and unnecessary pain in the lives of men.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study are considered to be the following:

1. The members of this men's group tend to be primarily Caucasian, college educated, and middle class. Their experiences may not be transferable to other populations.

2. Only qualitative data was examined due to the generative nature of the proposed study. While rigor was maintained by using some of the standard methods for doing qualitative research, this does not alleviate the argument that qualitative research methods are subjective by their very nature.
Assumptions of the Study

The methodology and research design carry with them these assumptions:

1. The design was deliberately qualitative and subjective in nature. The men could only answer the questions posed to them from a here-and-now perspective. What "really" happened was not the focus of this study. Rather, the aim was to uncover how the men perceived their lives to have been shaped and influenced in such a way that they are relatively comfortable today meeting together with other men in an intimate setting on a regular basis.

2. The basic nature of this study was to generate new hypotheses, theories, and "knowledge" rather than to validate objective hypotheses.

3. Knowledge is a social construction. This study is an example of the process of knowledge construction. In this sense the readers will largely determine if any new knowledge has been created through this research by their decision to accept the study's conclusions, or not. Therefore it is my role as the researcher to present the data and the conclusions that I draw from it in a clear, concise, and straightforward yet compelling manner.
Questions Posed by the Study

1. What led these men to join a men's group?
2. Who and/or what happened in their lives that influenced them to be interested in connecting with other men in an emotionally intimate way?
3. What did they hope to gain by joining the group?
4. Were their expectations met? Which were and were not?
5. What changes could be made in the group structure, process or membership that could enhance the experience of being in this group?

I was most interested in the first two questions, especially in relation to how the answers related to a possible redefinition of masculinity. But, following Lather (1986), I believe that research should benefit those who have volunteered to participate in it. Therefore I added the last several questions as a means of giving feedback to the group as a whole on how individual members perceived the usefulness of the group as well as providing suggestions based on my analysis of these interviews. Unfortunately, the group disbanded before I was able to present this information; consequently I shared it individually with several members who were interested.
Conclusion

The purpose and significance of this study was presented in this section. A review of the literature is presented in the next segment followed by a description of the methodology used in this study.
LITERATURE REVIEW

In the previous section the purpose, limitations, assumptions, and questions posed by the study were explained. This section provides an overview of the literature pertaining to men's studies, men's groups, and the social construction of gender. It will also contain literature focusing on qualitative research methodology including that focused on the methods applied in this study.

Men's Studies

As noted earlier, the literature of the modern men's movement began approximately twenty years ago, but only recently came into a broader public awareness through Robert Bly (1990). Historically, however, these publications need to be viewed in the context of the larger societal forces that had a great deal to do with the "ripeness" of men in American society for a shift in their focus.

The men's movement was directly preceded by the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the women's liberation movement. The civil rights movement brought to the fore and challenged the belief that white males were somehow special and therefore uniquely qualified to possess the rights to power and wealth. It claimed that "all men are created equal" and that the only difference was access to the institutions of business and government that produced and/or created power and wealth. The women's movement took that one step further
affirming that "all humans are created equal" regardless of sex as well as race, religion, etc.

These two challenges to the status quo had a tremendous impact on American society in general. And, since this society tends to have a white male perspective, it makes sense that these challenges had repercussions in the world of American men as well. Kaufman and Timmers (1983) state, "...that the social ferment of the last twenty-five years, the civil rights, anti-war, and women's liberation movements, has shaken many of our beliefs and assumptions about the nature of maleness" (p. 165). As women and people of color began questioning and redefining their roles and rights in this society, men were, by necessity, faced with the challenge of responding to those changes.

The responses have taken a variety of forms. Several authors (Thorne-Finch, 1992; Clatterbaugh, 1990; Kimmel, 1987) have made attempts to classify these responses by theme or goal. I find their breakdown to be very helpful in understanding the diversity of perspectives that I have been introduced to as a result of my study of this literature. At first I was baffled by the confusing and even contradictory points of view that men who were writing about men's issues appeared to present. It was only when I realized that the men's movement was not a unitary one that it all began to come
into focus for me. I will use this format to organize this portion of the literature review.

The men's movement should more precisely be referred to as the men's movements due to the fact that it is made up of at least three distinct yet interconnected groups each with their own goals, purpose, and agendas. They are the men's rights group, the mythopoetic movement, and the profeminist perspective. There are also other groups of men who would not align themselves with any "movement" but are still pursuing a course of action in response to the women's and civil rights movements. One group could be classified as conservative masculinists (Thorne-Finch, 1992).

**The conservatives**

Conservatives believe in the "natural" order of things. They believe that the traditional sex/gender roles are proper and appropriate for men and women. Their goal is the restoration and extension of the traditional nuclear family with the man as the protector and provider and the woman as the homemaker and nurturer of children. They are against any legislation or policy that could potentially undermine this arrangement, including a woman's right to choose an abortion, and the Equal Rights Amendment. They believe that men are innately dominant and should therefore fill those roles both socially and politically. Conservatives can be split into two
groups: the moral conservatives and the biological conservatives (Thorne-Finch, 1992; Clatterbaugh, 1990).

The conservatives—moral

The moral conservatives believe males are innately violent and aggressive and that the institutions of society are necessary in order to reign in these tendencies. Churches, schools, the family and other institutions have, as part of their purpose, the role of modifying or muting these male "instincts." This role makes these institutions a necessary part of society. Therefore, any attempt to reduce their power or influence would be seen as undermining not only the socialization process, but, quite possibly, civilization itself. Moral conservatives also encourage the belief that women should be defined by their sex role—that motherhood is the highest and noblest role and expectation of being female; it is her function to bear and nurture children (Thorne-Finch, 1992; Clatterbaugh, 1990).

The conservatives—biological

Biological conservatives assert that males are congenitally aggressive and will therefore dominate women due to this biological difference. They believe that the apparent distinction between male and female drives, needs, desires, emotions, and actions are a result of their biology, not of their socialization. The role of hormones as well as the physiological differences in size and strength are cited as
proof of this position. Studies that show that males are more active and physical as early as the first couple years of life are also presented as evidence of the biological conservative's claims (Fisher, 1992; Kaufman and Timmers, 1983; Heesacker and Prichard, 1992). This evidence is then used to place responsibility for men's failings on the women with whom men are in relationships, because the women do not understand or take into account these biological frailties, thereby tempting, confusing, or not being sensitive to the men in their lives (Clatterbaugh, 1990).

**The men's rights movement**

Another segment of the men's movements consists of the men's rights group. The goal of these men is to create an awareness of the hazards of being male in this society and work toward the eradication of this inequity. They speak of the costs and discriminations of the masculine role, such as the fact that an overwhelming percentage of child custody cases are awarded to the mothers due to an unfair assumption that women are "naturally" better parents than men. They also cite statistics that suggest that men hold a huge percentage of jobs that are considered hazardous, that prisons are populated largely by male inmates, that victims of murder are mostly men, that many more men commit suicide than women, that hostages tend to be men, that the vast majority of the street homeless are men, and, most striking, that only men are
afforded the opportunity to kill and die in combat for their country (Goldberg, 1976).

Essentially, the men's rights advocates want to expose the fact that males in our society are discriminated against, especially in the sense of being the disposable sex (Farrell, 1990).

The mythopoetic men's movement

Paralleling the men's rights advocates in focusing on how men have been wounded is the mythopoetic movement. Led by Robert Bly (1990), this group believes that both traditional masculinity and modern masculinity have killed men's souls. It asserts that men have become either corporate machines or so softened in response to feminist critiques of traditional masculinity that they have lost touch with their innate male wildness. It could be interpreted as a call for balance between the aggressiveness of the old hegemonic masculinity and the soft, weak and insecure feminist-informed male.

Bly (1990) believes either extreme is a mistake for men. True masculinity emerges from a recognition of the inner male essence which is strong, powerful and energetic without being violent or abusive (Kaufman and Timmers, 1983; Heesacker and Prichard, 1992). And this recognition is made by men getting back in touch with their feelings, especially those revolving around their longing for, and their wounds due to their lack of, connection with their fathers (Bly, 1990; Farmer, 1991).
These two "F"s, feelings and fathers, are the focus of this group.

Many articles supported this perspective. One by Kaufman and Timmers (1983) focused entirely on the member's "search for the maleness within themselves..." (p. 163) in the language of the mythopoetic men's movement. This group consisted of male helping professionals who felt responsive to feminism but sensed that something was still missing. They determined that the missing piece was their intrinsic male energy and found that their fear of re-owning this energy was tied to their fear of the potential for violence within themselves. Much of their work was finding a way to clear up the confusion between strong energy and violence.

Several themes emerged from this group. There was difficulty in defining maleness, and while no final definition was ever reached, there was agreement that there are some qualities intrinsic to being male and female that are distinct to that sex. One of those male qualities is a form of male "energy." And there was considerable ambivalence among group members about seeking that energy, mostly due to the aforementioned confusion between that energy and violence.

Male-male and male-female relationships were of great concern in relation to this energy. Can a male receive nurturing from another male without feeling dependent and one-down? Can males have intimate relationships without their
homophobia erupting in their faces? Can males be in touch with their male energy and not be too selfish, dominating or aggressive in relationships with females? Discussion of these issues led to the recognition that males no longer have any rituals of initiation which leaves them confused about who they are as males. The conclusion was that it would be helpful for men to begin, again, to initiate each other, as well as their sons, into manhood (Kaufman and Timmers, 1983; Bly 1990).

Heesacker and Prichard's (1992) article on men, women, and emotion was strongly supportive of the mythopoetic perspective. They suggest along the lines of Gilligan's (1982) notion that there are at least two distinct forms of moral development, there may also be two emotional voices or modes. They argue that the male voice has been denigrated and termed dysfunctional especially by the therapy profession. They propose that there is a "male mode of feeling" (Bly, 1990), which suggests that men's emotions and emotional expression are simply different, not inherently better or worse, than women's. From this perspective, men's emotions need to be understood, not corrected" (p. 275).

They believe the profeminist men's movement (which is discussed below) proposes that men have a problem that needs fixing, while the mythopoetic men's movement suggests that men have an experience that needs to be understood. This contrast
of perspectives is further elucidated by painting the profeminist men as perceiving men's emotionality as defective and even evil, which leaves the only alternative to be that of taking on the role of the female gender.

Another significant issue Heesacker and Prichard (1992) raise is the impact of the biological differences between men and women, which they believe have been denied by profeminist men. They suggest this disclaiming of the biological leads to an overstating of the role of socialization.

Like Kaufman and Timmers (1983) they suggest the solution for many emotional concerns of men is found in uncovering and accepting the "essence" of manhood. They make a distinction between what they call immature masculinity or "boy psychology," which is tied to "macho" and hypermasculine behaviors, and mature masculinity, which is tied to Carl Jung's notion of archetypes or "patterns of instinctual behavior" (p. 280). They believe that these archetypes have a basis in biological differences between men and women.

They cite several references as a means of verifying their hypothesis that biology plays an important role in explaining differences in men's and women's emotions and emotional behavior. They discuss hormonal differences, especially those relating to testosterone levels, brain electrical activity patterns in response to emotional stimuli, and research on physiological correlates of emotion as
evidence of the importance of biological effects on emotions. Their conclusion is that "neither nature nor nurture should be viewed as the sole determining factor in behavior" (p. 281).

Then they make a shift. They suggest that there has been a time warp created in the different rates of evolution of biology and culture, stating that culture evolves at a faster rate than biology. Here that they appear to agree with Farrell (1990) when they state that "males’ evolutionary adaptations to the roles of competitor, hunter, and protector result in pressures and responses ill suited to modern life" (p. 282), which creates conflict.

They suspect that some of the historical modes of masculinity are no longer appropriate or functional for a post-civil-rights-and-women’s-movements society, not because they are bad or evil, but because they no longer serve men. Their utility has ended, and men need to recognize that and evolve new and more useful ways of defining masculinity.

Essentially Heesacker and Prichard (1992) want men to be understood and not chastised for their different style of emotional expression. Their main concern is their belief that therapy only validates feminine ways of being. Yet, despite their call for evolving more pragmatic definitions of masculinity, they suggest that retraining men in what they call "feminine" modes of emotionality is the "psychological equivalent of attempts by heterosexuals to retrain homosexuals
into heterosexual attractions and sexual behavior. In both cases, the essence of the person is denied, and the prognosis for this retraining is not very favorable" (p. 283). This is a potent allegation if the analogy is sound; I do not believe that it is.

Farmer (1991) would agree with the need for understanding men's differences but has a dissimilar explanation for the reality of those differences: he believes men have been deeply wounded by their socialization as males, especially in relation to their fathers, and are therefore cut off from and "astoundingly numb to our emotions as a consequence of our woundedness" (p. xiii). He suggests that men need healing as a means of getting back in touch with their cut off emotions and makes no attempt to define those emotions as either masculine or feminine.

The profeminist men's movement

The profeminist men's movement acknowledges and supports many of the beliefs of both the men's rights and the mythopoetic men's groups. Profeminist men speak of the wounds of traditional hegemonic masculinity as well as the costs of being male in our society. Thorne-Finch (1992) suggests that "what sets the pro-feminist male response apart from others, however, is the emphasis on the privileges men receive by adopting hegemonic masculinity and, more important, the harmful effects this has on women" (p. 234).
The profeminist perspective acknowledges the imbalance of power between men and women and actively supports the eradication of this inequality. Profeminists encourage men to join the struggle against male violence towards women, asserting, for example, that because men abuse and rape women, men need to be the ones to work to stop abuse and rape. An awareness of the more subtle forms of wielding and/or access to power and control is promoted as well (Kimmel, 1990; Thorne-Finch, 1992; Clatterbaugh, 1990).

Profeminist men also are openly gay affirmative. They welcome diversity of sexual orientation on the basis that much of traditional masculinity could be perceived as a homophobic reaction to homosexuality. Chodorow's (1978) reinterpretation of Freud's theories of sexuality point to men's need to repudiate anything feminine in order to create a sense of masculinity for themselves. This leaves masculinity defined as non-femininity. Gays are perceived as feminine in their desire to be sexually with a male, therefore they must be ostracized from the male world as inadequate males.

Men's fear of femininity is a regular topic in profeminist men's literature (Wilcox and Forrest, 1992; Rabinowitz, 1991; O'Neil and Egan, 1992). One example is O'Neil and Egan's (1992) article on gender role transitions through which men travel at different points in their lives. They state that "a major inhibitor of adult men's gender role
transitions is the fear of femininity" (p. 319) which they define as "a strong, negative emotion associated with feminine values, attitudes, and behaviors. Implicit in these fears is the devaluation of all that is feminine" (p. 319).

Like Chodorow (1978) they then link this fear of femininity with homophobia. They affirm, "another inhibitor of men's gender role transitions is the relationship between feminine values and homosexuality...homophobia is a form of sexism that inhibits men from exploring their femininity and completing gender role transitions over the life span" (p. 321).

The profeminist men's movement recognizes that this definition of masculinity as non-femininity, as well as other definitions of masculinity (and femininity), are socially constructed and therefore variable and changeable. Men are accepted as men because of their sexual organs, not their sexual orientation (Thorne-Finch, 1992; Farrell, 1990; Keen, 1990).

Other perspectives

Other perspectives on men's issues also exist but have not attracted much of a following at this time. They include socialists, terrorists, and people of color. The socialists believe masculinity was created by the relations of production. They want to end class divisions by breaking down the distinction between owners and workers. Terrorists blame
feminism for the recent upheaval of the social order and practice violence, whether physical or emotional, specifically against feminists who work to empower themselves and other women. This is a particularly abhorrent response to the changes of the last twenty years.

Finally, people of color have generally been excluded from participation in any of these groups who have responded to the aforementioned changes. This fact is a powerful indictment of the men's movements. If men are to make any difference in realm of relationships, they need to find a way to include everyone in the dialogue. Much work needs to be done toward this end (Thorne-Finch, 1992; Clatterbaugh, 1990).

A common ground perspective

An apparent overlap in many of the men's movements is this notion of cut off, lack, or woundedness, whether it be in relation to emotions, fathers, rights, initiation into manhood, or something else. All seem to agree that men need to do something different.

Warren Farrell (1990) has framed the men's movement in a manner that appears helpful in explicating this need to do something different; he seems to find some common ground for most segments of the men's movement.

Farrell (1990) suggests that there are stages to human development that have a fundamental and profound effect on how humans relate to each other, and more specifically, how the
two sexes interact. He believes that humans are at a point of shifting from Stage I relations to those of Stage II which he considers to be an evolutionary shift in the history of human relations.

He proposes that Stage I relations are rooted in biology and consist of the male as protector and the female as protected. Other authors support this contention through their research concerning sex role differentiation, noting that females who were pregnant and/or had infants they were caring for needed someone to protect them from attack by larger creatures (Fisher, 1992; Gilmore, 1990). Survival was the central preoccupation in this stage. Size, strength and the ability to fight were the central requirements for males as protectors.

Along with others (Keen, 1990; Ruddick, 1989; Rubin, 1975; Bem, 1983) Farrell (1990) further suggests that humankind has reached the place in history when these male characteristics and roles no longer make sense. He stated the advent of birth control has freed human sexuality from its natural connection to the propagation of the species, thus allowing females to have sex with males without the concomitant need to expect or demand protection from them. And with the invention of nuclear weapons, not to mention conventional arms, the notion that size and strength have anything to do with protection becomes strained.
Stage II for Farrell (1990) consists of the recognition that men no longer need to protect and women no longer need to be protected in order for the species to survive. Rather, humans need to begin to look toward self-fulfillment in large numbers. Farrell states that, "...for the first time in human history, the qualities it takes to survive as a species are compatible with the qualities it takes to love. Love now requires good communication, not protection..." (p. 3).

Toward this end, Farrell (1990) states that men need to be shifting from Stage I rituals and roles of suppressing their feelings, especially those of pain in order to be a more complete protector, to those required by Stage II issues of self fulfillment, love and equality. Men need to begin to feel--to get in touch with their emotions and fears. And they need to begin to share them with one another as a means of recognizing and accepting their full humanity. Then they need to begin letting the women in their lives know what they feel as well as what they think (Farrell, 1990; Keen, 1990; Farmer, 1991).

Men's Groups

Men's groups take a variety of forms. These include therapy groups, consciousness-raising groups, political action groups, and support groups. Their purposes range from fighting perceived discrimination against men to fighting perceived discrimination against women. Other purposes
involve educating men on relationship issues, teaching men to care for and support each other, and providing an environment wherein men can deal with specific personal issues of importance to them. This review will attempt to present a sample of this diversity. It will also show a remarkable consistency regarding the difficulties inherent in working with men in groups.

Male-only support groups have been researched in the area of caregivers for alzheimer's patients (Davies, Priddy, and Tinklenberg, 1986; and Moseley Jr., Davies and Priddy, 1988). These studies described the initial difficulty the members had in expressing any affect, choosing instead to describe their circumstances in a rather detached manner. But the passage of time and a growing sense of cohesion in the groups tended to dissolve this mode of presentation, and the men began to discuss their feelings and emotions in relation to their situations.

The researchers of these groups made several recommendations following their studies. They suggested that men tend to find it difficult to express emotions in either a mixed or male-only group, but that the single gender group provided a source of support and camaraderie unlike the mixed group that eventually allowed the men to attend to their affective work.
A related concern was that of group size and openness to new members. It was suggested that the groups be kept small—five to seven members—and that new members be added infrequently and only after consultation with the other members. Apparently, the ability to create cohesion and a sense of trust in a group became nearly impossible if this was not the case. The final recommendation was to listen to the members in relation to the level of structure desired or needed. Some structure was almost always necessary during the early phases but became less desirable as the level of trust and cohesion developed (Davies, et al., 1986; and Moseley Jr., et al., 1988).

Along the same line Martin and Shanahan (1983) suggest that "leaders of male growth/discussion groups may...wish to affirm the appropriateness of intimacy, closeness, and self-revelatory norms in the group and to discourage excessive competition, disagreement, and conflict" (p. 30). Their study dealt with the issue of group sex composition and the effects, both positive and negative, of different compositions. They stated that little had been done in terms of research on non-task/work groups, and called for more.

Stein's (1983) article presented rationales and characteristics of men's groups. He affirms, "the fundamental rationale for men's groups is a belief in the need for men as a group to change their behaviors, belief systems and
affective experiences" (p. 150). This need for change is a necessary response to the changing role of women in our society, changes in the fathering and husband roles, different expectations for men in relation to the world of work, and altering patterns of sexual functioning.

Other purposes for men's groups include opening the possibility of learning how to nurture each other; of sharing fears and frailties; of discussing issues of concern to men such as parenting, reactions to divorce, and the need to achieve; of confronting the competitiveness, aggressiveness, and independence that men typically demonstrate in relations with other men; of creating new and different ways to relate to women; and of increasing the awareness of the inequality and sexism in the lives of individual men as well as our society as a whole (Stein, 1983).

Characteristics that tend to be difficulties for men's groups consist of problems with hierarchy and emotionality. Stein (1983) summarizes these characteristics as a tendency to intellectualize and compete either overtly or covertly. He also identified a general lack of willingness by men to commit to participate and a sustained willingness to continue attending as two major problems for all male groups. But he suggests that by taking these difficulties into account, especially in relation to patterns of leadership and an awareness of the general conflict about change that will most
likely arise, these problems may even add to the possibilities for personal growth for the members of men's groups.

Wilcox and Forrest (1992) give further rationale for men meeting in groups. They affirm,

Men's groups provide an environment for addressing the many issues that have interpersonal implications for men. Restrictive emotionality, maintaining control and independence, fears of acting feminine in the presence of other men, and physical contact among men, to name a few of these issues, can be identified and changed within a group. Often men's groups contain political outcomes as well; men are encouraged to increase their awareness of the effects of sexism in society at large. (p. 294)

Rabinowitz (1991) discusses the need for men to gather together in groups as a means of overcoming their limiting socialization. He states,

It has been suggested that the traditional male gender-role orientation that involves restrictive emotionality, a need for control and power, a competitive orientation to life, and a fear of appearing feminine, often precludes men from achieving intimate interpersonal relations with other men. (p. 574)

He believes that it has and suggests that men engage in activities meant to break through the traditional male gender role socialization. He focuses on male-to-male touch in the form of hugs as one means to accomplish this breakthrough, but suggests that meeting in groups can build intimacy without this physical involvement.

He describes his four stage sequence that reflects deepening levels of interpersonal involvement among group members over time. Stage one is characterized by interpersonal anxiety, intellectualizing, and conflict
avoidance. Stage two is marked by resistance to change and ambivalence to self disclosure. Stage three involves more trust and security and therefore a willingness to risk conflict based on differences in style, attitude and cultural background. This paves the way for changing maladaptive patterns of interaction learned from the male gender role. Stage four is indicated by an acceptance of differences, genuine displays of affection, and a generalization of these characteristics to relationships outside of the group.

In support of men's groups O'Neil and Egan (1992) discuss the social support aspect of shifting one's behavior and/or self-definition. They suggest that "support from others may be necessary to complete the transformation, because confirmation is an important component of expanding one's self-definition" (p. 316). Also, "a supportive network of people can be developed to facilitate the transition and confirm the emerging new man" (p. 318). By meeting together in groups men can assist each other in finding salutary ways to be men in this society through their mutual support and acceptance.

Duck's (1983) writing raises the more general issue of the relationship between a lack of significant emotional connection, which, according to the previously reviewed literature, is especially prevalent among men, and how it can lead to a greater number of heart attacks and an increased
level of stress. He notes the importance of relationships along the lines of Beaver's (1983) definition of emotional illness as "a deficiency of satisfying, coherent, self-defining experiences with meaningful others" (p. 7). He states that "the root problem--friendship disorder--is the basis for a wide variety of physical and psychological symptoms that can mislead even skilled diagnosticians" (p. 166).

Duck (1983) stresses the need for self-disclosure as a means of creating meaningful connection with others. Men do not typically self-disclose as a matter of course. But Duck (1983) believes this skill can be taught and affirms that as a society we need to actively promote the learning of social skills both as a means of assisting in the personal happiness of individuals and in the avoidance of many of the social problems that occur as a result of a deficiency of friendships--including violence, suicide, alcoholism and drug abuse, physical and psychological illness, etc. His recommendations are aimed at society as a whole but appear especially relevant for men.

The Social Construction of Gender

The literature focusing on the social construction of gender may be the most intriguing piece of this review. It appears to transcend all that comes before it by affirming that it is not the way men define masculinity, but the fact
that they define it that is problematic. The whole level of abstraction that creates gender, including the concept of masculinity, is brought into question.

Wilcox and Forrest's (1992) article deals with the social construction of gender and suggests that working from this perspective in therapy can possibly lead to more and perhaps better options for clients.

They deal with the stereotypical characteristics of masculinity and men's relationship styles that are thought to be incompatible both with seeking psychological help and with aspects of the counseling relationship such as intimacy and emotional expressiveness. But they submit that relying on these explanations can lead to the belief that either men need changing before they will enter therapy or that the therapeutic milieu needs changing, or both. They suggest looking deeper into how gender is created and understood.

They believe this search will reveal biases toward either exaggerating or minimizing gender differences which, if left unexamined, can lead to "questionable dichotomies such as masculine and feminine or tendencies to completely ignore the social and political implications of gender" (p. 291). They make their recommendation:

Paradoxically, we might make more headway if we turn our focus away from men and masculinity and examine the way in which gender is construed in the first place. Along with others, we propose that gender, as well as formalized relationships such as counseling and therapy, is a socially constructed phenomenon. Turning our inquiry to how gender
is socially constructed, we believe, will provide a different look at our clients and ourselves and, in the process, reveal new avenues for change. (p. 292)

Essentially, those concerned with the social construction of gender are making a distinction between the concepts "sex" and "gender" as well as the roles attached to them. Hartmann (1981) states, "what we need to understand is how sex (a biological fact) becomes gender (a social phenomenon)" (p. 12). And, "we are born female and male, biological sexes, but we are created woman and man, socially recognized genders" (p. 16).

Prince (1985) makes the distinction quite clear when she states that the terms "sex" and "sex role" refer simply to one's biological sex, male or female, and the role one takes in the sexual act of propagating the species, i.e., impregnating (male) or being impregnated, bringing to term, and delivering the new life (female). Alternately, "gender" and "gender role" concern those behaviors and attitudes that are determined by a given culture to be appropriate to one or the other "sex." These are the characteristics that are variable depending on which culture is viewed, thereby demonstrating that they are cultural creations, and not intrinsic to a specific sex.

Sandra Bem (1983), who made the term "androgyny" famous through her research, takes it one step further by questioning how it is that the vast majority of cultures perpetuate the differentiation of the sexes by "genderizing" behavior. She
examines three especially influential theories of sex typing: psychoanalytic theory, social learning theory, and cognitive-developmental theory. Then she adds her own theory, called gender schema theory.

Gender schema theory (GST) begins with the observation that the developing child naturally inculcates his or her society's cultural definitions of maleness and femaleness. But it moves beyond this to a point where these cultural definitions become a schema through which individuals process information on the basis of sex-linked associations. How this happens in relation to sex rather than eye color or foot size becomes the question. Bem answers: "From the perspective of GST, then, gender has come to have cognitive primacy over many other social categories because the culture has made it so" (p. 608). This implies that children would be far less likely to become sex typed if a society were to limit the unnecessary associations between a person's sex and certain behaviors and attitudes, essentially neutralizing gender categorization.

After spending much of her career focusing on androgyny, Bem now also calls for a move beyond masculinity, femininity and even androgyny:

Even more important, however, the concept of androgyny is problematic from the perspective of GST because it is based on the presupposition that there is a feminine and a masculine within us all, that is, that "femininity" and "masculinity" have an independent and palpable reality and are not cognitive constructs derived from gender-schematic processing. Focusing on androgyny thus fails to prompt
serious examination of the extent to which gender organizes both our perceptions and our social world. (p. 616)

This separation of cognitive constructs from palpable reality compliments Piaget's theory which begins by making a fundamental and theoretically significant distinction: it separates content from structure (in Thomas, 1992). By content Piaget means any action or behavior that can be observed and therefore measured, which becomes the data used to validate or invalidate the theory. He contrasts this concept with that of structure, which is a non-observable, hypothetical, inferential concept or label applied to a group of behaviors (content) as a means of correlating them. Structure is always a hypothesis that attempts to make sense of and/or organize content. It is an abstraction.

For example, one could take a set of observable behaviors that a child exhibits like speaking up often in class, preferring to be in the company of others, approaching others often to interact with them, and group them together under the abstraction, "extroversion." "Extroversion" becomes the label applied to those behaviors which all pertain to enjoying being with and around people. But extroversion itself does not exist; it is a hypothetical construct which must be operationalized before it can have scientific and/or research value. Bem affirms that masculinity is one of these hypothetical constructs.
Bateson (1972) too, admonishes those who tend to take any cognitive structure made up of theories and hypotheses too seriously. He asserts that it is important to remember that every theory was created or invented by someone. In his metalogue he gives an example:

Daughter: Daddy, do you mean that Sir Isaac Newton thought that all hypothesis were just made up like stories?
Father: Yes--precisely that.
D: But didn't he discover gravity? With the apple?
F: No, dear. He invented it.
D: Oh.... (p. 39)

In conclusion Bem (1983) suggests that the ubiquitous functional importance of the gender dichotomy in American society needs to be tempered as a means of freeing human behavior from the limiting associations it now has in relation to gender: "In short, human behaviors and personality attributes should no longer be linked with gender, and society should stop projecting gender into situations irrelevant to genitalia" (p. 616).

Many feminists also propose leaving the restrictive notions of gender behind—for the sake of both sexes. Ruddick (1989) is a feminist writer who believes that living from what she calls the "standpoint of care" in place of the competitive, militaristic perspective of the dominant culture would lead to a safer, more pleasurable and just society. But she does not believe that feminists' aim is to create a female future. Rather, she suggests the move beyond masculinity and femininity to the "fully human community" in which
"institutionalized gender differences of power and property disappear, replaced by inclusive playful, inventive variations on sexual identities" (p. 134).

Rubin (1975) makes a similar proposal. She affirms that while gender roles may have served a useful purpose in the past, their functionality has been lost; in fact not only has the utility of gender roles become antiquated, they have become dysfunctional. They now serve to constrain both men and women from fully expressing their humanity by circumscribing their repertoire of behaviors. She calls this arrangement a "taboo" against the sameness of men and women, "a taboo which exaggerates the biological differences between the sexes and thereby creates gender" (p. 164). She states,

Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of 'feminine' traits; in women, of the local definition of 'masculine' traits. The division of the sexes has the effect of repressing some of the personality characteristics of virtually everyone, men and women. The same social system... oppresses everyone in its insistence upon a rigid division of personality. (p. 165)

She goes further to affirm that the sex/gender system needs to be transcended or eliminated as a means of liberating "human personality from the straightjacket of gender" (p. 168). She asserts that it is the social system that creates gender and sexism and calls for a revolution that would lead not only to the elimination of the oppression of women but to
the more encompassing goal of the elimination of obligatory
gender roles.

Margaret Mead (1935) came to remarkably similar
conclusions sixty years ago. She affirmed that human beings
appear to have some form of innate temperament that, if
nourished, would blossom into full maturity according to its
nature. This would include a range of talents and abilities
intrinsic to its being while excluding others that were not
inherent. This means of allowing nature to take its course
would create a natural diversity in a given population which
would be beneficial to any society, while granting its
individual members the freedom to be whatever type of person
they discover themselves to be (within certain interpersonal/
societal limits) regardless of race, sex, orientation, etc.

Unfortunately, she noted that in American society (as
with most other societies) there is an artificial means of
creating that diversity, one which limits the natural
expression of a good part of the population: behavior gets
tied to a person's sex. And because of this system, she
believes American society pays a huge cost. Mead (1935)
affirmed,

Thus the existence in a given society of a dichotomy of
social personality, of a sex-determined, sex-limited
personality, penalizes in greater or less degree every
individual born within it. Those whose temperaments are
indubitably aberrant fail to adjust to the accepted
standards, and by their very presence, by the anomalousness
of their responses, confuse those whose temperaments are
the expected ones for their sex. (p. 208)
With the exception of Keen (1990) and Wilcox and Forrest (1992) it appears the men's movement has not recognized or written from this point of view at this time (or I missed it). Yet it is significant that feminists, who have been working toward liberation for a longer period of time, are making this argument—and including men in it. After a discussion of the women's liberation movement as fighting against the gender role, not the sex role, assigned to them, Prince (1985) makes a poignant comment regarding the liberation of men:

In the interest of real equality let me also note that men too need liberation at least as much and probably more than women. However, having run society for so long, they do not realize that they are locked into their own prison of masculinity just as much as women have, in the past, been locked into femininity. (p. 96)

These authors affirm that it is time for men to recognize that it is not enough to redefine masculinity; it needs to be eliminated right along with the rest of the gender system that constrains human behavior by linking it to a person's sex.

Qualitative Research Literature

Despite the general criticisms of subjectivity and a concern for rigor, qualitative research methodologies seem to have found a place in the research community. Therefore I will not attempt to reproduce the debate between the qualitative and quantitative camps. Instead I will present a brief overview of qualitative literature salient to this study.
In describing qualitative research Moon, Dillon and Sprenkle (1990) noted that these researchers:

...attempt to understand the meaning of naturally occurring complex events and actions, and interactions in context, from the point of view of the participants involved. These researchers look for universal principles by examining a small number of cases intensively. Further, they are concerned with a holistic understanding of phenomena. (p. 358)

Ethnography is a traditional form of qualitative research, widely used in anthropology, that is being utilized more recently by many fields of study, especially the social sciences. Agar (1980) suggested that "ethnography can be translated as becoming part of a group...(the) process of understanding another human group" (p. 71).

Understanding another group by becoming part of that group requires the building of relationships. This requirement adds another dimension to the research process, one that Smith (1985) calls a dilemma: "The dilemma? That the research process itself is a relationship. Hence whatever we observe about the relationships of the groups and people we research may be just as relevant to our relationship with them" (p. 123).

Smith's (1985) dilemma introduces the notion of the researcher being part of the system/group being researched. One of the criticisms of early ethnographic accounts was that they tended to "...suppress the presence and person of the observer as an active, relevant force in recounted events or
incidents" (Emerson, 1987, p. 80). Emerson further noted that "the encounter between researcher and researched, then, is not simply one in which a reality is merely observed and noted: It is also an occasion in which reality is created" (p. 78).

An ethnographer is not an external, objective observer; he or she is intimately involved and subjectively present in the entire process of ethnography.

Pollner (1991) mourns the decline of, what he calls, "radical reflexivity" in recent ethnomethodology. He is concerned that researchers are leaving out a necessary, though subversive, recognition that research is not simply reflective of "reality" but that it is a constitutive process as well. This follows two of Eichler's (1985) epistemological propositions for feminist research: that all knowledge is socially constructed and that there is no such thing as value-free science.

An ethnography is the creation of knowledge through a dialogue between the researcher and those being researched, all of whom are a combination of the influences of their histories, values, and beliefs, both conscious and non-conscious, which pervade everything they think and do. All of this impacts the research process, especially in relation to the investigator. And, as Dorothy Smith (1987) affirms in concert with the Copernican revolution in astronomy, it is important to remember that the point of view of the observer
is not static, but is continually in flux. Also with the introduction of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle the realization that the research instrument has an impact on the researched became manifest. Therefore, the position of the observer can no longer be ignored when interpreting observations. It must be taken into account—continually and always.

Oral history is one form of ethnomethodology, and inherent in this methodology is the aforementioned concern involving the position of the observer/interviewer. At least two divergent views of this position have emerged in the literature. Grele (1991) affirms that "...if we fail to see our interviewees as bearers of a culture and thus people with their own view of the past...we will, because the information must be structured, infuse our own vision of the past into the interview. Such a situation is exactly what we do not want to do" (p. 142).

Borland (1991) approaches this problem somewhat differently. While recognizing the "interpretive conflict" over the meaning of any text as well as potential damage a reinterpretation of a narrative could have on the narrator's constructed sense of self, she suggests that researchers open up an exchange of ideas with their collaborators as a means of deepening and enriching the final product. Stacy (1990) takes a similar position in reporting her interpretation of events,
then letting her collaborators respond in a separate section. In her book, she let them have the final word.

In this study I followed the perspective of Borland and Stacy. In contrast to Grele I do not believe I can separate myself from my perceptions of my respondents views of their history. I openly infused my own vision into the interviews in an attempt to bring new meaning to the material revealed. But, like Borland and Stacy, I allowed all who were interested the right to dispute my perceptions by writing a response to anything I had written. Though none of the men interviewed had any concerns about my view of their lives or the group process in general, this approach had the potential to add to the richness and depth of the research.

**Conclusion**

In this section a review of the literature related to this study has been presented. The following segment will describe the participants, the procedures, and the method of data analysis that were employed.
METHODS

This section delineates the participants, the procedures, and the method of data collection and analysis that were involved and employed in the study.

Participants

The participants in this study were ten members of a men's group who were willing to be interviewed. The group met in a mid-sized midwestern city. It was an open ended group in that the membership was somewhat limited, but any member could invite others to join the group. It was also open in terms of continuity: from one week to the next no one knew who would be in attendance. There were several regular members, but rarely, if ever, did all the same members gather two weeks in a row.

In terms of the demographics of the ten interviewees, there were eight Caucasians, one Black and one Jew. Occupations ranged from the medical field, therapists, ministers and other professionals to plumbers and landscape architects. Ages ranged from late twenties to sixties with the majority being in their forties and fifties. There was a mix of sexual orientations including a majority of heterosexuals, several homosexuals, and one member who identified as bisexual. Six of the men were married, three were divorced, and one was single.
Investigator

The researcher/interviewer/investigator for this project is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies with a Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy at Iowa State University. He was also a member of the men's group that was the focus of the study.

Procedure

Qualitative research typically has an emergent design, that is, initial structure may be proposed, but it is always open to change once the process of investigation has begun. This study certainly had an emergent quality.

Qualitative researchers have responded to critiques of their lack of rigor with attempts to create methods of legitimization. Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) have introduced a variety of methods as means to this end. Despite Guba's (1981) warning that he did not want his proposals to "be reconstituted into an orthodoxy" (p. 90), it appears that his concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability have become the standard criteria for judging the appropriateness, quality and legitimacy of this method of research. Because of this socially constructed "reality" in research, it was important that I include these methods in my approach to this project.

But before I get into the specifics of my procedure, I want to present some alternative perspectives regarding
legitimization of qualitative research that had an impact on this study. Atkinson, Heath, and Chenail (1991) assert that the goal of qualitative research should be exploration and creation of realities, and theories concerning those realities, that are new and different from the ones already in play. They suggest that research should be about creating a context in which "flashes of insight" are most likely to occur, which would include methods like prolonged engagement, participant observation—anything that would allow the observer a unique perspective or unusual vantage point. They assert that concern with rigor or systematization of the process of observation is in no way related to the legitimacy or usefulness of insights resulting from this process. In fact they are two separate processes: research is about getting new insights into possible perspectives and/or meanings; legitimation is the responsibility of the consumers of the research—the stakeholders or users of the "knowledge."

Atkinson et al. (1991) do not believe any researcher or group of researchers can ever legitimize their research regardless of the methods used. It is those who will actually test the new "knowledge" by "trying it out" that will eventually decide if it is useful or not. In this way knowledge is socially constructed or confirmed by those who use it.
Gergen and Gergen (1991) mirror Atkinson et al.'s (1991) argument when they state that "the confirmations (or disconfirmations) of hypotheses through research findings are achieved through social consensus, not through observation of the 'facts'" (p. 81). They propose an overtly social constructionist approach to research which they believe opens up many new possibilities for study. They suggest that the aim of such an approach to research "is to realize more fully the linguistic implications of preferred positions, and to invite the expression of alternative voices or perspectives into one's activities" (p. 79).

Gergen and Gergan (1991) use what they call social-dialogic procedures in which "subjects" become participants in the process of construction of meanings and the number of interpretations is expanded rather than contracted—a sort of sharing of power between researchers and respondents as a means of co-construction or collaboration similar to the ideas of Stacy (1990) and Borland (1991). They believe that "by allowing the participants to share in the development of theoretical conceptions, more useful and significant results emerged, for the members of the dialogic circle, and the broader community as well" (p. 87). This is reminiscent of Lather's (1986) conception of research as praxis, which proposes making the research process one through which
respondents are empowered to change the oppressive situations in which they struggle.

Gergen and Gergen (1991) suggest some interesting and radical ideas about what research could look like if their perspective should be adopted. Their conceptions dovetail with Atkinson, et al.'s (1991) in their assertion that the methods used in research do not, in and of themselves, make it more or less legitimate, because the ultimate legitimizer of all research is the group that "tries it out" in order to see if it "fits" their context or sitz em leben (life situation). Then, when enough of them agree that a particular insight or theory is useful, it gets added to their stock of knowledge and passed on to others—a clear example of the social construction of knowledge.

The distinction I am attempting to draw is between having a good, rigorous methodology which a reader can follow and make judgements about, and using that rigor as a measure or legitimization of the outcomes or findings of that study. Following Atkinson, et al. (1991) and Gergan and Gergan (1991) I believe the outcomes must stand on their own and be judged based on their usefulness and not the rigor of the study from which they were drawn.

This does not, however, in any way deny the necessity of rigor in a research methodology. Rigor is important both to the research process itself, especially one with an emergent
design, and to the consumers of that research. A good methodology provides a structure within which a researcher organizes the vast amount of information being gathered throughout the process, documents what is happening each step of the way, and clearly identifies how decisions that determine what meaning and significance are put to the material are made. A rigorous methodology is also useful as a means of allowing readers to follow the trail of investigation, seeing how the data gets infused with meaning, so they can then make their own determinations about the usefulness for them of the findings of the study.

Due to this need to have a rigorous methodology, I attempted to address the concerns of rigor through a utilization of Guba's (1981) criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility is concerned with whether the constructed realities of the respondents are being fairly represented by the researchers. This is ascertained by using triangulation, peer review of findings, and member checks. Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of the study within the confines of an emergent and changing design, and uses multiple researchers and methods as well as process auditing to keep tabs on those issues.

Transferability applies to the usefulness of the findings of a study to other contexts and uses prolonged engagement,
in-depth interviews, and the resulting thick descriptions that allow others to get a solid sense of the context of the study in order to decide for themselves if transferability is appropriate. Finally, confirmability refers to the results of the study and uses an outside auditor to assess whether the findings truly emerged from the data available.

To address these indicators of rigor I used multiple methods in pursuing this study. Participant observation was the initial resource. Throughout this entire process I kept field notes on every conversation that I had in relation to this group, including a personal journal. I recorded my personal reflections on the group content, process, and my overall perception of the effects of, and the benefits to the group members—including myself.

In this study being a participant observer was at times an enigmatic role. Many times it was difficult to decide how involved I wanted to get in a particular discussion or decision in the group. I did not know how much I wanted to influence the group process with my observations and input. In those situations I tended to ask process questions rather than voice my personal agenda for the group.

Participant observation in this context was somewhat more ambiguous than that of a clear outsider attempting to get a sense of a culture; I was a full member of this group with no apparent differences from the other members. I just happened
to be doing research while being a full member. This situation made wearing two different "hats" a somewhat more cryptic task.

Also employed were in depth interviews of ten men in the group aimed at gaining an oral history focused on the experiences, people, and/or other influences that led them to be interested in having close relationships with other men. I was hoping to find some common themes in their stories which might then be used to understand what keeps men apart from each other and how they go about getting close when they do.

I then presented my insights, perceptions, and interpretations to these men as a form of member check in order to receive their feedback. I did this in the form of a written narrative of their lives distilled from their interview which included the themes that appeared to be most salient. They were asked to respond in written form to their narrative in terms of any concerns, corrections, or additions that they felt might improve the accuracy and/or add to the depth of their story.

In lieu of multiple researchers and an outside auditor I presented my insights, perceptions, and tentative results to my major professor and other interested committee members. I was open to feedback and critique both of my method and any potential undiscovered or unacknowledged bias. In addition I asked for feedback from interested colleagues regarding their
perceptions of this study and the insights I gained through my involvement in it as a form of peer debriefing.

Prolonged engagement was a powerful resource as well. I was a member of the group for approximately eight months prior to its disbanding. In addition, an unexpected form of prolonged engagement occurred as a result of the vagaries of writing a dissertation while living life. I was initially planning to be finished by the summer of 1993 but was quite obviously optimistic in my projections. And I am very pleased that I was not able to cram it into that time frame. I firmly believe the extra year of "fermentation" of the raw materials of this study led to fuller, richer results. The extra time allowed a broader scope of reading material to be investigated, a wider variety of interpretations to be examined, and a more profound sense of the issues involved to be integrated. It is an example of a positive outcome of the randomness of human life.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted and analyzed according to a slightly modified version of Spradley's (1979) Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) which approaches the data of the interviews from the perspective of domain analysis. There are four distinct orders of this analysis. The first is the most general order of the raw transcription of the interview. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed after getting
approval by the Iowa State University Human Subjects Committee and written authorization from those interviewed. From this text the second order of analysis drew key words and phrases. (The modification of this step is explained below.) These synthesized groups of words of individual informants were then collapsed into categories of meaning or themes based on their similarities. In the final order of analysis, these categories of meaning from individuals were then merged by similarities into more general domains of meaning across all informants and included the added data of my field notes and personal journal.

This inductive strategy of domain analysis is a generative method of data analysis that attempts to discover similarities and/or patterns in the multiplicity of responses from different informants (Moon, Dillon, and Sprenkle, 1990; Burawoy, 1991). The researcher is the primary data analysis instrument; the material is always viewed through the lens of that individual. This is the reason that the data analyzed also included my field notes and personal journal relating to the process of researching the group. Finally, my experience of being a man who is interested in closer relationships with other men, including the influences in my life that directed my path toward this end, were also a part of the data analyzed using DRS. I therefore included my responses to the interview questions as if I had been an eleventh interviewee. Thus the
study came full circle: the researcher was a part of the researched.

The last paragraph is also the rationale for using the first person voice in the writing of this dissertation. Since I was the primary data analysis instrument, the lens through which all of the material was viewed, I needed to make that fact overt rather than attempting to submerge it in the more objective sounding third person voice. I understood my stance to be a legitimate one in that I was attempting to expose as much of my bias as I could, including how I chose my subject and why I was interested in it. These issues are rarely up for discussion in most research that I have read, yet I consider them to be of great value in judging the legitimacy of the conclusions.

I am aware that writing from the first person perspective sounds much less certain and authoritative than does the voice of the third person. And that was precisely my point. I was not searching for the "truth" in this project; I was attempting to create, in dialogue with the respondents, some meaningful and/or useful ideas, theories, thoughts, understandings, or concepts that may help those who are interested to better comprehend what separates men from each other by looking directly at what the respondents believed brought them together. If the results of this research, however tentative and limited, can serve to open or continue
dialogue regarding these issues, I will be satisfied that my efforts have been worthwhile.

Of course the application of the procedure was not as simple as it might sound. There was a continual recursive interaction between all of the variables of this study. These included the data collection process, all of the data itself, the constant flow of new information from further reading, the inherent biases and mental categories of the researcher, the chosen lens of social constructionism as the organizing framework of the study, and the influence of the flow of time. All of these factors had an impact on the outcome of this study.

But it was the ongoing process of recursion that was most salient—a continual reflexivity of information and structure (matter and form) that exemplifies how the mind of the researcher is the real instrument of analysis. Therefore, rather than just leaving the processes of that instrument unexamined and explained away as a "black box," I will attempt to expose at least some of those mental processes as a further means of assessing the legitimacy of the findings of this research.

Many decisions had to be made during the process of investigation. Initially I was very excited to be a member of the group and curious about how it functioned, i.e., what role it played in the men's lives and how it would fit into my
life. It did not take long for that initial excitement to wane and a state of confusion and ambiguity to replace it. Within three months my field notes showed a clear indication that the group was not meeting my expectations:

For this group the metaphor of a river is apt in that sometimes the meeting runs deep in a powerful way and at others it seems like a shallow creek just babbling along making noise. I tend to judge these times as less significant in the sense of building intimacy, but perhaps my assessment is premature.

At this point I had to make a decision concerning how much impact I wanted to have on the group process. I was in the role of "participant observer" and did not know which piece of that title should take preference. I struggled with that question continually even as it became clear that I was more regularly choosing the observer role over that of the participant. And that choice was a combination of my personal inclination to remain somewhat apart in group settings and my thoughts that I wanted to study the group as it would be without my involvement. I knew I was planning to give the group as a whole my feedback at some point anyway so chose to make the role of observer the predominant one.

At five months my field notes manifested a growing personal frustration with the group. Part of my participation had included several times commenting, by means of questions, as to the purpose of the group. Universally the answer was building intimacy and connection through self-disclosure and honesty. Yet the group appeared to avoid that intimacy more
often than not from my perspective. My notes reflected my increasing sense of discouragement:

I missed the last two meetings. The second one was by choice on my part. I noticed I have been feeling lately that I am not getting from the group that I had hoped to get. My expectations were that we would be continually challenging ourselves and each other to go deeper into ourselves—that we would share our fears and weaknesses as a way of healing them in the context of support for our openness and courage. What I experience is much storytelling, topical discussion and sharing about our daily lives. Perhaps I have a misperception of what is possible and/or desired in this group.

It is important to note that there were times of great intensity and connection at the gatherings but that they happened infrequently from my point of view. What surprised me most was that no one made any comment about it, and I began to wonder if I was the only one who had these perceptions. I responded with discouragement and began to miss the gatherings more regularly because of that; I started attending every second or third week more as a way of keeping in touch with the group for the purposes of this study than out of any personal rationale.

One of my committee members questioned whether this choice might have been a fatal flaw in my methodology. I responded that I felt like I had a pretty good sense of the group and its process by this time and that missing these meetings, while perhaps a misjudgement, did not hurt the study in that attending those meetings would most likely have produced redundant data—essentially more of the same. It is
similar to making the arbitrary decision to stop gathering data and move more heavily into the analysis phase. I felt I had enough data on the process of the group by that time, though my decision to slow down was as much a personal one as it was professional.

It was also at this point that I decided to begin interviewing those members who were willing. I knew it had to be done at some point but had not felt ready previously. The coincidence of my personal disappointment with the group and a strong curiosity about how the other members were experiencing it made the shift a natural one. I really wanted to know what the others were experiencing, and that was the primary motivator for the shift into the interviews.

The interviewing process went fairly smoothly. There were some problems with arranging for a confidential environment with few distractions as well as with the recorder during one interview, but they were minor. Only one member refused to be interviewed though several others had some concerns about confidentiality. In the end ten men agreed to and found the time for the interviews which were done over a period of four and a half months.

After each interview I made notes about the content and my response to it. Ideas for possible themes emerged almost immediately and were placed in those notes. After the third interview I had the first three transcribed so I could begin
working on the raw data in order to see if my initial themes still fit. This process continued until all of the interviews were completed.

There were several phases of this process. Early on I believed that there would be some overarching themes that would occur in each man's story. The group had discussed possible ones during some of the gatherings, so I had a framework of expectations through which I viewed the data. But as the interviews progressed I began to feel that there were no similarities across all of the stories and wondered if I was going to have to come to the conclusion that the study had produced nothing meaningful. This phase lasted for several months.

Once all of the interviews were finished and transcribed I continued to read and reread them as a means of really immersing myself in the data so that it could "simmer" within my mind. I spoke to colleagues about my frustration at the lack of apparent significant themes. I continued to read new literature relevant to men's issues. I tried very hard to find something meaningful. And I got discouraged.

Then came an important shift: I sort of gave up. I began to focus on other things in my life and did not do much on this project for quite a few months. I read material irrelevant to the topic, had some fun, and essentially put the research on hold. Colleagues told me that discouragement was
part of the process and that it would eventually come together. I wondered.

What finally motivated me to get back to work was an incipient understanding of how it was that so many Ph.D. candidates never get beyond that status: I began to wonder if the degree was worth finishing this paper. That scared me. I decided I had better employ some of the behavioral techniques that I used in therapy—but this time on myself—so I set up a series of rewards and consequences. It worked.

But the hiatus had beneficial effects. I returned to the material with renewed vigor. And I immediately began to see patterns in the men's stories that I had not noticed before. My list of possible themes expanded. They were placed on note cards and reviewed and updated regularly. It was at this point that I decided to write up the men's stories in narrative form rather than taking words and phrases out of their context and using them to support the themes that emerged from the interviews. The narrative form simply made more sense; it seemed to be more holistic, contextual, rich and vibrant.

I decided that it would be important to tell each man's story as I understood it. I felt it would allow the reader to get a sense of the men as I saw them through my interviews with them. Obviously these narratives are but a brief glimpse of the men's understandings of how their lives were shaped by
events and people, and they are seen through the lens of this researcher. But it was necessary to introduce the reader to the men as means of creating context and adding some texture and depth to the analysis.

In order to confirm that I was not seeing what was not there I sent each interviewee the narrative that I had written about him for his feedback in terms of comments or any additions he would like to make. I had originally planned to hold some form of a focus group in order to receive a more general feedback from the group as a whole, but the dissolution of the group during my hiatus precluded this option.

I sent these narratives to the respective interviewees with a stamped self-addressed envelope and a note asking them to respond in any way to anything they found inaccurate or uncomfortable. I also asked them to include any additions to their story that might have been overlooked or left out.

Of the ten men who were interviewed two had moved away and could not be reached for comment. Eight others received the narrative, and six of those eight men responded as asked. All six affirmed that they were pleased with their narrative as I had written it. One stated that he was a bit concerned about who this would be available to as there were pieces of his story that he preferred to keep relatively private and thought that others might recognize him in the narrative and
learn more about his life than he wanted them to know. I assured him that I planned to change significant portions of each narrative in order to disguise those interviewed from just that possibility but needed to be sure initially that I had been true to each man's story as he told it to me. I promised him that I would get his approval of the final version of his story before I turned in the paper. I did so, and he approved it.

The two men who did not respond to my letter were contacted by phone for their feedback. One approved what I had written. The other did not return my calls and was never home when I tried to reach him. Therefore I decided to consider him to be a third unreachable person and move on with seven of ten approving my narrative based on their interviews.

Serendipity also played a significant part in the process. A colleague at one of my offices decided to give away a portion of the books he had collected over many years. He invited his coworkers to look through them and take whatever we found that interested us. One of the books I took from his shelf was Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* published in 1935. I was truly amazed to find that she came to conclusions sixty years ago that were remarkably similar to those I was coming to as a result of this study.
That recognition put me over the top; it seemed to coalesce everything into a comprehensible whole. I had read quite a few articles on the social construction of gender and the limitations of the masculine and feminine roles and had even written from that perspective as early as the month before I began this study, but in some way the significance of stumbling upon essentially similar conclusions in a 1935 work by Margaret Mead was the catalyst that clarified and focused my vision in this research.

The remainder of the project consisted of putting all the pieces together in a way that was both acceptable to my committee members and compelling enough to be worth reading. I hope that I have accomplished both parts of that task.

Conclusions

In this section the participants, the procedures, and the method of data collection and analysis employed in the study were delineated. In the following segment the findings are presented.
FINDINGS

The original purpose of this study was to develop an initial ethnographic account of a men's group focusing on what led the men to be open to emotional connection with other men from the perspective of some of the men actually participating in it. It was to be an ethnography of one specific men's group which would include my views and perceptions as a member as well as those of any other members who were willing to be interviewed.

It was not a search for "truth" but rather for what the men felt had been salient experiences, events, information, direction and/or anything else they considered pertinent to how they got to where they were in relation to other men. I was hoping to find common themes in the men's stories which might lead to some insight into the male experience more generally.

How the results were to be presented was a major concern. After much thought and internal debate I decided to keep to the personal tone of the rest of the paper and present the interviews in narrative form. In this way the readers could get a sense of each man in the context of his story before any further analysis was done. Some themes are denoted within the narratives themselves; others were less clearly stated. Therefore the themes that emerged from each interview are also formally listed following each narrative.
In the ensuing section the more general domains of meaning that emerged from an analysis across all of the narratives are displayed. These are then tied in with the analysis of my field notes and personal journal and the themes that emerged from those sources.

The Narratives

In order to keep the identities of the interviewees confidential several methods were employed: 1) each man was given a pseudonym, 2) some changes were made within each individual story, and 3) pieces of one man's story were placed in that of another's at random so that each narrative has at least one significant piece of another.

Art's Story

Note: The transcripts of this interview were slightly abbreviated due to a mishap with the recorder. Approximately the first ten to fifteen minutes did not record and so were lost.

Several themes seem to dominate Art's life according to his interview. One was his bisexuality and the concomitant concerns, fears, self-doubts and guilt that he carried as a result of it. Another was his relationship with his father. A third was his overall sense of not measuring up to what it is a man is supposed to be.
My initial impressions of Art following several intense readings of his transcript were of a man who was troubled. His major concern was his bisexuality; he was having difficulty integrating this aspect of himself into his definition of himself as a man, as a husband, and as a moral human being. He was deeply concerned, on the one hand, that it proved he was somehow a bad person: "I mean, I'm not an all bad person, I guess. I think, I really deep down think that that's bad, that that's bad. Deep down inside I feel like that's bad...what I have done, is really kind of bad."

Conversely, he also recognized that he had many good qualities and that this one part of himself was not his choice anyway: "There are a lot of things here that are good...and I think I've gotten to the point in life where I don't feel like I'm a bad person because I know I didn't ask for this. You know, I didn't say, 'Ooh, I would just love to have these feelings.'"

But the overall sense that I got from Art was that he was still struggling hard with this issue. Several times he asked me to turn off the recorder when he spoke of what he called his "complexity" issue due to his discomfort with it being on tape. Part of his concern was the fact that his wife was considering pursuing a divorce after her discovery of his behavior, and if it were made public, he was afraid that she would feel compelled to follow through on her threat. Also,
he did not want his children to know of his bisexuality which both parents have kept from them at this point. His religious faith was another factor; he wondered how God would deal with him around this issue. Then there were all the messages he received, and continues to get, from his family, friends and the larger society about what is proper and acceptable in terms of sexual conduct. All of these influences seemed to add up to a heavy burden that Art carried with him continually.

Other powerful issues also played a part in how Art perceived himself as a man. From early on in his life he did not feel like he measured up. He did not feel that he was good in sports, particularly baseball and football which were the major sports that boys and men seemed interested in, and that left him questioning his level of confidence and feeling inferior and deficient in some respect. He remembered he was afraid he would not come through at the right time and would be humiliated for it, so he chose not to participate in the major sports. He did go out for one of the less macho sports, but that did not count for much.

His dad was also a part of this equation. Art never felt much connection with his dad. He noted wishing his dad had been more available, especially in relation to showing an interest in making sure Art was proficient in sports, encouraging him to practice, and being proud of him when he
did play. Art believed neither of his parents cared much about sports, and that fact interfered with his level of confidence in himself as a male because of the importance that is placed on participating in the major sports in high school.

Art also began to question his level of competitiveness and wondered if his lack of participation in sports may have been due in part because he did not have that "internal drive to be better, or to be first." He had an awareness of his own internal standard but never remembered being competitive in the sense of wanting to do better than someone else. Yet he got the impression that other guys were competitive, which led him to believe, once again, that there was something wrong or defective about him.

Art described his father as a man who is a "typical male chauvinist type" and believed his dad liked his older brother better than him because his brother was a lot more like his dad. He defined this "type" as having a real big ego, boasting a lot, and having a certain attitude toward women that carried the message that a woman's place was to be there to serve men. Art did not believe he displayed any of these characteristics, which, especially in adolescence, led him to feel something was wrong with him.

At the time of this interview Art believed that his father was proud of him but not because he thought a lot of him as a man. He was proud because Art had "done all the
right things" which included being successful in business, getting married, buying a house, and having kids. But Art knew that his dad did not understand Art's more egalitarian relationship with his wife and probably thought less of him as a man because of it. He could not conceive of what his father would think of his bisexuality.

Other ways that Art believed he didn't fit the traditional definition of masculinity included believing his penis was too small, having creative desires to do things stereotypically considered to be more feminine, and being concerned that he even behaved in a feminine way at times. But his bisexuality colored all that he did and thought from quite early on in his life. He remembered feeling different as a boy because of his attraction to others of the same sex which led to internal valuations of himself as odd, queer, and inadequate, as well as bad. For Art, his bisexuality has been and continues to be the central influence on how he defines himself in the many roles he plays.

Art was introduced to the men's group by his therapist whom he had gone to see due to his issues around being bisexual. He was looking for a supportive group in which he could discuss his lifestyle openly and get feedback that showed concern and caring. He wanted to "get in touch with enlightened men who are about more than, you know, drinking beers, ballgames,...just talking about their careers,...how
much money you're getting, who you're screwing, etc...[get in touch with guys] who accepted the feminine side of themselves."

Themes:
1) bisexuality and the concomitant self-doubt, fear, pain and guilt around that issue.
2) relationship with his father—little emotional connection/support/understanding.
3) not measuring up to what a boy/man was supposed to be:
   a) not good at sports,
   b) no internal drive to be the best/lack of competitiveness,
   c) desired egalitarian relationships with women,
   d) small penis,
   e) "feminine" aspects.
4) joined group for support, understanding, emotional connection with other men (what he did not get from his dad).

Bill's Story

After reading the transcripts of Bill's interview, I was, once again, struck with the power of his story. This is a quote from my field notes written the day after the interview: "Did my second interview yesterday. He was the youngest member of the group and is leaving next week to take a job elsewhere. The interview was powerful. He cried through much of it due to the intensity of the issues and how real they still are to him."

Bill's story began with a description of himself as a survivor of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse at the hands of his father for a period of 11 years, from age 3 to 14. He was one of thirteen children and considered the birth order to have played a significant role in his life. The birth order was three boys, four girls, Bill, five more girls and his
younger brother. He felt like the only male child much of his life because his older brothers were eight, nine and ten years older than Bill and his younger brother was ten years in the other direction.

Bill described his family as very "sexist" or traditional in structure and expectations. His dad played the dominant and dominating role in the family. He was an abusive bully who expected very different things from his sons and daughters. Bill said he found himself surrounded by female siblings on both sides, feeling he had to act and be different from them, but having no role model close to his age who could show him how he was to behave.

To complicate matters there was his father's expectation that he would behave like his older brothers, including their level of maturity, despite being significantly younger. Bill said, "That led to a lot of challenges... there was a lot of pain involved." When asked what kind of pain, he noted, "That I would never live up to his expectations, and he regularly let me know I was a failure and things like that." When it became apparent that Bill could not behave like his older brothers, his dad seemed to give up having any expectations for him at all, which hurt even more.

Bill talked fondly of his mother and how she tried to take care of him when his father was in a rage. Then he described how confused and betrayed he felt when, upon being
diagnosed with a debilitating disease when he was about 8, his mother shifted from being his defender in relation to his father to actually instigating some of the abuse. He recognized more recently that she was probably frightened by her loss of herself due to the disease and could no longer afford to have her husband against her, but said, "I was old enough to understand the rejection but not the reason for it at the time. And I guess I still haven't really sorted out what all that means. But I understand a lot of the impact; I'm still sensitive about getting into commitments [with women]."

Bill did not go into much detail about the abuse; he stated that there were regular beatings that he believed were a result of his dad's job stress, that he was continually put down and told he was useless and worthless, and that there was inappropriate sexual contact on a semi-regular basis. At age 13 or 14 he was big enough to stop the physical and sexual abuse but the emotional abuse and the pain of the betrayal of his mother led him to live his life in what he saw as a form of slow suicide.

At age 18 Bill decided that either he was going to change things or move toward a more active suicide. He said, "I was living in a lot of pain with things. At the time I didn't realize how deep it was or didn't even realize it was pain that was behind it pretty much--just that nothing was working
the way I wanted it to be." He chose the first option, moved away from home and started to rebuild his life.

The telling of his story was a painful experience for Bill; even in the telling he broke out of the stereotype of masculinity by crying regularly—though it was with some difficulty that he was able to do so. One part of his story was particularly grievous for him to discuss. He told of becoming a perpetrator at age 13 when he sexually abused some children while he was babysitting them. He said he did not fully understand why he did what he did, but that it only happened that one time. Still, he carried with him a deep emotional anguish and regret for his behavior.

At 29 Bill was still dealing with the effects of the years of abuse through his discomfort with physical touch, his fear of intimacy, and his difficulty with trusting others. He did work through some of his pain in individual and group therapy and learned to trust and respect others through his involvement with the martial arts. The martial arts also allowed him to feel a sense of safety, knowing that no one could ever again physically do anything to him that he did not want to happen. He hoped to use his skill some day to open a martial arts studio to work with survivors of sexual abuse in regaining a sense of trust and self esteem.

Bill spoke of joining the men's group as a natural progression in his growth process. He wanted to meet with
other men who were willing to share their lives on a more intimate level than is usual for men. He wanted and needed to talk of issues that were deeper and possibly more profound than other men he knew were willing or interested in getting into. He also wanted to work on healing the wounds inflicted by his father and believed that sharing his pain with other like-minded men might be helpful. He seemed to see being different from other men in a positive light--like it added something special to his life rather than feeling odd or left out from membership in manhood.

His is a journey of self-healing, and he was hoping to find some positive male role models after which he could fashion himself. He actively pursued this end in the group and, in doing so, became a role model to others.

Bill was quite fascinated with this research project, and when he found out I was attempting to discern themes in the men’s stories, he ventured to make a guess as to what those themes might be. He believed the members of the group were probably similar in several ways:

1) They were willing to feel and deal with their emotions,
2) They were capable of and willing to be open and honest about what they felt,
3) Someone significant had pushed them down at some point in their lives--they either had been victims, or had deep hurt and pain from some source,
4) Because of their pain, they were driven to understand why, and in the process came to a deeper awareness of people and feelings in general,

5) They became aware of the societal messages and molding about what it is to be a man due to being different from that molding, thereby "bumping" into it regularly.

I thought his perceptions were valuable and decided to incorporate them into the study. They also had an impact on me because they were very similar to the ones I had been forming following the first interview. It was interesting to see which ones seemed to "fit" at the conclusion of the study.

Themes:
1) abuse survivor—a great deal of pain around that issue.
2) relationship with his father—physical, emotional and sexual abuse for many years.
3) relationship with his mother—support, then betrayal/abandonment.
4) felt different as a boy/man:
   a) did not know what was expected of him as a boy,
   b) desires discussion and intimacy at deeper levels with other males than is typical.
5) journey of healing his pain—therapy, martial arts.

Chris' Story

The main theme of Chris' interview was his sense of being different from other males. Many factors attributed to this feeling. He was raised in a conservative Christian environment which defined itself as different by its use of language. For example, people of this faith described those outside the faith as worldly and themselves as other-worldly.
This purposely distinguished and separated them from those with a different viewpoint.

Chris' religion also believed in nonresistance—they did not go to war. He wondered if this aspect may have contributed to his feeling unlike other men in the sense of not feeling or acting tough nor being ready and willing to fight at all times. He said he did not "fit into the traditional macho or manly male model;" he was "just not the bravo, bravado, loud, and, you know, spit tobacco juice and kicking butt kind of guy."

He described himself as someone who enjoyed being with people, who had many friends, including some close ones, but still felt isolated and lonely much of his growing up years. He was not active in sports and was more comfortable in the company of girls than boys. He said, "I found it more difficult to understand and be with boys than with girls" and only later connected it with the fact that he had attractions for other boys back then.

It makes sense that Chris' homosexual tendencies had a great deal to do with his sense of being different from other males. He spoke of being in the men's group presently and still having to deal with his own and other members' homophobic reactions to talking about gay issues. He said,

It's just that I get in touch with pain and a lot of grief when I see how much education still needs to be done or how much explaining I need to do, or how alienated I feel at times, because I have--I've absorbed so much sense in our
culture that being heterosexual is more acceptable than being homosexual.

How much more powerful these messages must have been when Chris was younger and was first dealing with his awareness of being attracted to boys, especially coming from the conservative environment in which he was raised.

Another factor was Chris' relationship with his father. His dad was a minister who kept his son at a distance. Chris believed that his dad's own upbringing had a lot to do with his parenting, and Chris felt the need to try and relate differently with his sons, because he did not want to repeat what he had grown up with. However, he followed his father into the ministry, got married, and had children. During this time he struggled with his sexual orientation but was able to keep it in check.

At some point Chris chose to face up to the realization that his primary sexual attraction was toward men. His marriage ended and he began to openly pursue relationships with men. This was about the time of the anti-war, civil rights, and feminist movements which helped Chris to see that others also felt outside of the mainstream. He began to meet other men who had similar kinds of interests—men who were interested in community and spiritual concerns—and this recognition helped him to feel less alone and isolated. He said with that came "a sense of bonding that I think helped me to begin to bridge to other men and find that there were ways
of becoming more personal and open. And as I did that I found that I wasn’t nearly so odd, so different as I had feared.” And it was this newfound connectedness that he said propelled him into men’s issues, men’s concerns, and men’s groups.

The majority of Chris’ interview dealt with his perception of the group and how his role there seemed to be consistent with some of his personal struggles; he saw his interactions in the group mirroring his life and believed these issues could be seen as male issues. He said,

My experience of the group also has included a struggle for inclusion: how do I fit, can I fit, how vulnerable can I be, how do I deal with guys that I have difficulty liking or feeling good about especially when they are talking about many things and not being very personal--how do I deal with that? Do I confront, and if I do, how do I confront? I feel uncomfortable because I’m not sure that I want to take the energy to confront them or to say I want some air time. Some of these experiences I think are very similar to experiences that we as men have in general.

He saw the group as a microcosm of the larger world, seeing the same dynamics there as he saw in men’s lives in general. He cited examples: the group struggled with structure and how much to impose it on each other, with how much to interrupt and confront each other, with talking in the third person and topically rather than from personal struggles, with avoiding the issue of whether the group was meeting needs or not, and with levels of commitment to the group and each other in terms of being on time and having regular attendance.
Chris believed all of these examples showed a remarkable relation to the issues that men are constantly confronted with outside of the group, including the fact that the group chose to avoid most of them most of the time. He saw the avoidance as the classic example of how men deal with difficult issues—they do not deal with them, choosing instead to let them fester and eventually lead to a breakdown of what connection there once was. He suggested that this scenario is exactly what happened to this group, which has temporarily disbanded after a long period of malaise.

Themes:
1) homosexuality and the confusion and pain involved.
2) relationship with his father—distant.
3) felt different from other males:
   a) separatist church,
   b) nonviolent commitment,
   c) non-macho,
   d) not into sports,
   e) more comfortable with girls than boys,
   f) sexual attraction to males early in life.
4) awareness of "male" issues: vulnerability, confrontation, commitment, avoidance.
5) able to redefine self so as not to feel so odd or different.

Dan's Story

The overall sense of Dan that I get from reading the transcripts of our interview consists of the significance of two very powerful influences in his life: his father, and his continual involvement in what he agreed could be called the radical edge of social and political groups—this second influence being further proof of the power of the first.
Dan's father seems to have had a prodigious impact on his life. He was an eminent scholar who founded his own school of thought in his field. He was also a Quaker and almost a Communist who wanted to transform American society. And he was abusive, authoritarian, and patriarchal as a father, though Dan did not expand much on these issues. His influence led Dan to choose a specific university whose perspective, he later discovered, was quite different from his own, which made pursuing his Ph.D. that much more difficult and eventually moved him to forgo finishing that degree.

Dan followed his father into teaching at the university level and said he really enjoyed it. Then a radical political group caught his attention, and he chose to leave the university for communal living. Interestingly, two of his blood sisters chose to live in the same commune, which shows an openness to alternative lifestyles and politics was a family trait. At some point Dan noted taking LSD and seeing himself as his father—authoritarian and patriarchal—an experience which led him to spend the next ten years trying to overcome his father's imprint on his life. He said he only realized later that as long as he was reacting to his father in the sense of using him as a standard for what he did not want to be, his father was still in control. He feels he has now constructed and accepted who he is.
As mentioned above, being involved in radical politics and social groups seems to further support the theme of the influence of Dan's father in his life. He went to what he called a Feminist college and has been deeply influenced by Feminism ever since. He remains a Quaker—a group known for their political activeness, lived in a commune, joined a socialist political group, and was the only male member of a NOW "coven." He was also intimately involved with a woman who later informed him that it was her last heterosexual relationship, and today is married to a woman active in working for gay issues—an area with which he is also involved. Based on this history, it is not surprising that Dan became engaged in the men's movement almost at its incipience. It seemed a natural place for him to be.

Another theme that emerged from Dan's interview was a sense of feeling different from other men. Dan said he identified more with women than men. For example, he struggled vocationally, not knowing what he was supposed to do with his life. So, he thought that a way out was to be a woman, so he wouldn't have to have a vocation; he could play the mother and be a caretaker, roles with which he said he would feel very comfortable.

Other senses of difference were that he never felt very competitive which was especially noticeable in graduate school, and that his dad never taught him any physical
abilities like sports which left him out of that arena. Being a Quaker was also a cause for feeling different. He said the only time he felt like he was in the mainstream was in the late sixties when radical politics was "in" and the sexual revolution allowed him to pursue the stereotypical male thirst for sexual variety and adventure.

My sense of Dan was that he approached life from an intellectual perspective first. He was well educated and came from a family deeply involved in higher education. When asked what improvements he would suggest for the group, he said, "We need to get out of our heads, though, I realize that may be more my issue than theirs." He wanted to take walks together or give back rubs as a means of limiting the purely verbal interactions that are the focus of most group gatherings.

Themes:
1) relationship with his father--huge impact; eminent scholar yet abusive.
2) involvement in the "radical edge:"
   a) lived in a commune for several years,
   b) into drugs at some point,
   c) socialist politics,
   d) advocate of feminism and gay issues.
3) felt different from other men:
   a) identified more with women,
   b) vocational troubles--did not know what he wanted to do for vocation,
   c) not competitive,
   d) not involved in sports.
4) Learned to redefine self toward greater self acceptance.

Earl's Story

"A lot of my life was directed toward gaining affirmation, acceptance, and camaraderie with men." This
statement aptly summarized Earl's story, including his desire to be a part of a group of men whose stated goal was intimacy and connection with one another.

Earl's father died when he was eight years old, and he was left as the "man" of the household whose membership consisted of himself, his older sister, his mother and his aunt. He said he took on that responsibility quite consciously, defining the role as taking care of mom both emotionally and financially (she made substandard wages as a teacher, so he took jobs as early as 9 years old in order to take care of his own needs so at least he wouldn't be a burden to her), and putting on a tough exterior as a means of showing he could handle it.

Because his father was much older than his mother, Earl saw his mother as the senior parent even while his father was alive. Therefore he saw women as superior, almost as goddesses, without whom he would die. Yet he felt the concomitant need to please and impress them by showing he could take care of them. This was done partly by showing prowess in sports, something at which Earl considered himself to be better than average. He said he felt adequate as a male because of these abilities.

He got interested in men's issues through living with women. His mother was a particularly potent influence. He described her as sort of masculine in her manner and in what
she did. She was a sports fan, worked full time, and served on committees, many times as the only woman. He became aware of the discrimination against women when he saw his mother receiving less pay than male teachers for the same job simply because it was assumed that she was not the main breadwinner of the family. Earl said his cognizance of this reality "served to limit my sense of machismo and helped me see the other side." He considers himself to be quite sensitive to women's issues.

Two other major influences in Earl's life were being raised in a conservative Christian environment and having two of his four children come out as homosexual. Earl was a minister of his church for several years when he began to suspect that his son was gay. This, along with a general disillusionment as to the effectiveness of the church led him to wonder at his future there.

At this point Earl shifted his interests to psychology, saw the Bill Moyer interview with Robert Bly on PBS and resonated with that, particularly with the issue of not knowing his dad. He got interested in men's issues, pursued a Ph.D. in psychology and found a way to focus on men's issues toward that end. During his studies he became aware of feminist issues and read extensively in both fields. He became interested in the experiential aspect of the men's
movement, found out about the group meeting locally, was invited to join and has been a member ever since.

At that point his son came out as gay, so this group was appropriate and important for him due to his own crisis around his son’s issue. Since then his older daughter has also come out as lesbian. The group has had a powerful effect on him as he has gotten to know the gay men in particular. It has also been healing to be able to share his own journey in getting comfortable with his kid’s issues.

Letting the secret out about his kids was a powerful release for him. "Secrets have a lot of power, so being able to talk about that publicly has been helpful." He said he is not completely "out" yet as a father of gay children, but sharing it in the group and getting affirmation for doing so has helped. One of the gay men told him it affirmed him in his gayness to hear Earl’s story. Earl was surprised to discover that gay men want the affirmation of straight men.

The group has become his place of intimacy, his church, where he can be honest about his life and be heard and accepted. Part of his struggle was reconciling his Christian beliefs with that fact that his kids are gay, though he never felt responsible for their orientation. He feels he is just now getting to know who he really is—discovering his real self. He doesn't know that his is any different than most people's journey through life, but noted that leaving church
work has been a radical turn of events for him, emotionally, spiritually, and occupationally.

Earl said that most of this work has been happening in the last four years. He calls his old self the "false" self, and distinguishes it from the real self by its need to hide such things as weakness, doubt, vulnerability, and fear. He sees the group as a spiritual place and a safe place to allow his real side to emerge and experience other men who are working toward the same thing—facilitating their transformation. He feels the struggle for authenticity is very spiritual, the struggle to be willing to quit hiding the weaknesses, doubts, and fears, and to share them openly. He believes this makes the authentic self stronger, when the whole self is presented and gets received and affirmed. He wants to integrate all sides of himself, and sees the group is a place to practice that.

Themes:
1) became "man" of house at early age--became tough, protector, provider for self.
2) relationship with father--minimal due to early death.
3) relationship with mother--big impact:
   a) she was strong, "masculine" and a sports fan,
   b) he learned about discrimination against women through her example which made him sensitive to women's issues and limited his "machismo,"
   c) through her influence he saw women as superior.
4) raised conservative Christian and remained involved.
5) felt adequate as a male, partly through being big and good at sports.
6) big shift recently: two children come out as homosexual. Forces a shift in religious involvement, also fear of disclosure to others.
7) group a place where he can be his "real" self:
   a) share his "secret" of homosexual children
b) reveal his "weaknesses:" fear, uncertainty, self-doubt thereby integrating them into who he is,
c) last four years redefining self.

Frank's Story

Frank was the first real enigma I ran into in this study; his story did not seem to fit into most of the themes or categories that had emerged from the previous five interviews.

Frank noted there probably were not any specific events that led him to the men's group, but more of a cumulative effect. He had always been able to have pretty good relationships with men on a basis other than business or networking and felt comfortable with that. But the idea of getting involved in a support or discussion group to talk about men's issues excited him.

Upon getting involved he recognized there were many things that men were having a hard time dealing with in their lives, like establishing relationships, that he realized he had not had. Having relationships with men was not foreign to him; in fact, it came quite naturally. And he did not know what to attribute this characteristic to, whether it was the influence of his parents, due to his being a spiritual person, or some other possibility.

He did not feel unique or different from his peers though. He was raised Jewish in mostly Christian communities, so found life to be a matter of fitting in. He did not know if he was even perceived as different by his peers therefore he felt no sense of pressure to be more similar. He always
felt like he fit in his world. It was only after participating in the men's group that he got a sense of being different: "I know that I am not your typical man, but I learned it through the group."

Frank joined the group at its inception. He had never known anything about men's groups or issues before that time but once involved realized that this was something he had always wanted to be a part of; he said the group "just felt right for me."

Frank said he has been approached by gay men, so recognized that something was perhaps unusual about his manner or affect: "I think I was always a more receptive person as opposed to an action oriented person, as I define that now as an adult. I have been in touch with the feminine side of myself as a being as much as the masculine side, and I have been able to define that as reception and action." He noted feeling uncomfortable with the approaches, but was able to let them know that he was straight in a nonconfrontive manner. He described himself as still having a streak of homophobia but wondered if his responses to the approaches of gay men may be a clue to his openness to being in a men's group: rather than intense reactions of anger and confusion, he simply told them he was straight. It did not seem to confront his definition of himself as a man.
Frank did mention that in some ways he was taken in by the cultural stereotype of what it means to be a man. He never considered himself to be physically masculine to the extent that he wanted to be when he compared himself to male peers. It carried over to some extent as an adult, but he has learned to accept himself. He considers his body to have "more of an aesthetic rather than a muscle-bound look. That's part of the media, what's put up there by society as being ultimately male, and after talking in the group I realized that a lot of us had dealt with that."

Even in the arena of sports, and despite his parent's unwillingness to allow him to participate in contact sports, Frank seemed to emerge unaffected. He did feel he "never got a sense of being able to prove myself. But I didn't lose respect or I wasn't ostracized because of it. I was physically active in more individual sports, so I had a sense of keeping up."

When asked to describe the stereotype of what it was to be a male, his response was: "tall, muscular, confident, could do anything, didn't need anybody's help but could do it himself, who was capable of using the language skillfully and with confidence, well read, almost superhuman--having the best of everything." Yet apparently Frank was able to see himself as mostly adequate as a man despite not fitting some of the
cultural definitions. How he did this would be an interesting study in itself.

Themes:
1) no difficulties with relationships with men.
2) did not feel different from other men (see note below).
3) aware of and in touch with both "feminine" and "masculine" aspects of himself.
4) was somewhat affected by the social definition of "masculinity"
   a) some body issues due to being slight of build,
   b) some sports issues--not into the "macho" sports.
5) got involved in group as the next step in his evolution -- a natural step for him.

Note: Frank's feedback regarding this narrative included his wife's comment that he had talked about feeling different from other men before he joined the men's group. He agreed that her comment was most likely accurate and that he had forgotten feeling that way before becoming a member of the group.

Gary's Story

Gary was the focus of the seventh interview. Several themes emerged from reading the transcripts: the impact of his faith in God and the spiritual aspect of life, the influence of his father especially in relation to the sharing of emotions, his "coming home" experience, and the need for a community of people with a common goal and desire.

Gary's dad worked a lot, but when he was around, he wasn't afraid to show his feelings. "I saw my dad cry often over different life events... That was my first clue that men and boys have other privileges of life--in essence we have emotions, and it is up to us to recognize that and to exercise
those emotions." He lived this belief by participating in a religious community in which the members were open to nurturing each other while not being afraid of sharing emotions and the search for who they were as people.

About the time he was involved in this community Gary and his wife decided to make some role changes. His wife began to work full time and Gary cut back to part time and became the primary caretaker of his son and a neighbor's child during the first half of the day. He described this transition as one of the most meaningful times of his life, one which he would never trade away. It allowed him to get in touch with the more emotional, tender, nurturing side of himself.

Once the reality of the responsibility he had taken on settled in, Gary at first wasn't sure he could handle the job. The thought of these kids being totally dependent on him to pick up their verbal and nonverbal cues sort of scared him. His wife had always been the one who had been tuned into the kid's needs, and he wondered if he was capable of being that sensitive and aware. But as he took the time to slow down and be with the kids, he realized that he was able to develop a rhythm with them. He now believes "it is within any man if they allow it to come out...I am so much more sensitive to the needs of my kids than I would have ever been...it was one of the greatest things I could have done both for myself and my children."
This "coming home" experience, as Gary called it, also gave him the opportunity to experience the contrasting stereotypical roles of men and women in our society. He got ribbed continually by his work associates who did not understand why a man would choose to stay home and take care of his kids. While he was home he also took over the social coordinating of the family. He got on a committee to get a playground completed and became the director of it. He was the only father coming to social events, bringing cookies and punch. And he was president of the PTA—all very female dominated activities. He said he felt quite alone during much of this experience. So, while it was a highlight of his life, it was also a draining time whose conclusion led him to seek some time for self renewal.

Two other significant experiences occurred during this coming home period: Gary's father was diagnosed with cancer, and the spiritual community he had relied on for continual renewal began to disappear. His father's cancer was bittersweet: during the next year and a half before his death Gary was able to spend much quality time with him so that at the time of his death Gary felt closer to him than he ever had. The loss of the spiritual community had no positive side other than it led Gary to seek out other forums for the connection he desired, which eventually led him to the men's group.
Like several other interviewees Gary was a founding member of the men's group. He heard it was a place for men to tell their stories, was initially scared due to not knowing what to expect, but chose to attend because he wanted to share his story of being a nurturing man and hoped to run into others with similar experiences. He said,

Initially, I found great strength meeting with the group of men who were coming on a regular basis. There were real stories of life struggles, listening to men discover themselves for the first time in their lives—that they do have emotions and it is ok to express them. This was a real strength of male spirit shared together, and I really grew. That was my shot in the arm on a weekly basis.

Last year, however, Gary began to feel a sense of restlessness with the interaction of the group. He said there were several reasons for this, one of which was the coming out of two of his siblings as being gay. This made him wonder about who he was in relation to his family. He hoped meeting with the group would help him be more understanding to his siblings. But he found the content of the meetings to be overly homosexually focused and said he would like to see more heterosexual men involved in the group. When asked, he stated that he believed the group to be a three or four to one gay/straight mix and simply wanted it to be more balanced. (My understanding of this ratio is that it is just the opposite of Gary's assessment.)

One final comment Gary made regarding why he is involved in a men's group was quite poignant and is a fitting end to
his narrative. Due to the disjointedness of the statement I will paraphrase it, keeping it as close to the original as possible.

One of the other key important reasons that I am involved in men's gathering was my own son. We have a bond of connection that doesn't need to be spoken, but is more felt. Therefore I want to be comfortable with myself, so that he can always feel comfortable around me. I encourage him in all his endeavors but I can only say so much. The other part must be sent nonverbally--almost unconsciously. So that is the other reason I am in this group, because I believe other men have pieces of the puzzle that I am attempting to put together right now in a somewhat hurried fashion. I am concerned about what I am communicating and not communicating to my son, including my fear of homosexuality...I think men's gathering is a opportune time for any man who has the courage to explore his own identity as a man and learn that he is more than just a man with biceps--that he has muscles in other areas like his heart and his head. It is a place for me to learn more about myself.

Themes:
1) spiritual aspect woven through his story.
2) relationship with his father--he was not around much, but when he was he showed emotion openly. Also was able to get close to him before he died recently.
3) "coming home" experience--both profoundly positive and difficult due to being different from the norm.
4) strong desire and need for a sense of community wherein he can get in touch with nurturing, emotional side of self.
5) homosexuality an issue due to conflict with religious issues and having two siblings come out as gay. Felt group was too focused on those issues.

Henry's Story

Henry's sense of being different appears to be a major theme in his story. Even early on he knew he was attracted to both sexes and suspected that this was not true of most other boys. He also felt like he had a lot more feminine characteristics and was willing to let them show: "I was
sometimes called 'sissy' by some of my peers... I was raised in a time when feminine men were certainly considered quite queer, and I didn't know how to—I guess I didn't try very hard to hide that part of me."

Looking back now he believes he was always bisexual. However, because at that time he was very committed to wanting to be a father and wanting to be married and fitting into society, he worked very hard to make that incipient awareness not an issue, and as a result stifled most of his contact with males.

His relationship with his father was mostly a negative influence. He was afraid of his father due to being kicked by him several times as well as being subjected to emotional abuse. Henry described a turning point at an early age when his father had no more physical contact with him—no more hugging, touching, or sitting on his lap. He remembered it being around the time he was becoming aware of his sexuality and made a connection between the two events, suspecting that his father may have picked up on Henry's newfound sense of sexuality and, whether out of fear or his own discomfort, made it very clear that men do not touch each other.

Other ways Henry defined what a male was supposed to be came from watching his friends try so hard to be tough and macho. This included playing sports, especially football, and having the killer instinct while playing. Also involved were
a lack of avoidance of pain, not showing any emotions, and a general shunning of anything that could be even remotely considered feminine or female.

Henry was aware of these feelings in himself but, for whatever reasons, did not do as good of a job of hiding them. Only later did he discover that many of his male friends had had the same interests and fears that he did, but because of these homophobic definitions of what it was to be a man, they did not let those interests and fears be known.

In college Henry found a completely different environment, one committed to equality between the sexes. He described the men he met there as being different from any men he had ever known other than some in the clergy or teachers. "I had a new kind of contact with men who were intelligent, artistic, nonmacho, nonathletic, and sensitive. Using your head and your creativity was rewarded there. The football players were not the campus heros."

After college Henry got involved in the civil rights movement. He also got married to a woman who was a feminist. Both of these influences awakened him to his own kind of issues of not feeling free. He was just then beginning to deal with questions of his sexuality and his attractions to other men. He described his marriage as an excellent relationship but believed that the civil rights and feminist movements created some issues for him and his wife that
eventually led to their divorce. And this divorce was what moved Henry to form a men's group consisting of some divorced men and others who were still struggling with the tensions and crises developing as a result of their attempts to create new kinds of relationships with the women in their lives.

That group was Henry's first experience with a men's group. The focus was on divorce, grief, pain and loss issues as well as those around fathering. But within a year or two several of the members came out as gay or bisexual. Henry was beginning to deal with those issues then but did not come out until several years later. It was at that point that he had a shift in his awareness of himself: "I think I was always bi, and within two or three years after divorce identified myself as gay though I was still dating both men and women and having sex with both. My primary attraction was growing stronger and I felt more comfortable to address and see myself as a gay and bisexual man."

By the time the men's group that is the focus of this study was created Henry had been heavily involved in the men's movement for many years. He had a network of friends with whom he had intellectual, emotional, and sexual connection both locally and nationally who he relied on for support. He joined this group as a consultant to the students who created it for their research project but then stayed involved for several reasons. He said,
I liked being in a group that was primarily heterosexual. It also felt to me important that I and some other gay men be in the group for hetero men to help them have some interaction with gay men. At that point there were only two gay men in the group. We wanted to work on those barriers that men ought to be able to relate at an open, trusting level regardless of their orientation. It was an energizing time for me.

Themes:
1) homosexuality/bisexuality with early recognition and all that is involved with that--fear, taunting by peers, confusion, etc.
2) felt different from other men:
   a) gay/bisexual issues,
   b) "feminine" characteristics,
   c) did not fit "masculine" definition: tough, killer instinct, indifferent to pain.
3) relationship with his father--physical and emotional abuse.
4) a shift in awareness of not being so alone, different and isolated.
5) political ramifications:
   a) identifying self as gay as a form of political statement,
   b) being deeply involved in civil rights, women's, and men's movements,
   c) remaining in men's group as a gay man at least partly for benefit of heterosexual members.

Jack's Story

Jack's ongoing involvement with his college fraternity was a major theme in his story. It was his first experience with developing a depth of friendship beyond what had become the norm for him. He said, "I gained and developed a level of friendship that I had never had before and that became very important to me and has continued to be--to have deep and intimate relationships with other men." He recognized that this is not the stereotype of what people think of when they imagine a fraternity experience, but it was his, and it had a profound effect on his life.
In fact it was through his fraternity that he got involved in the men's group. The fraternity does annual leadership programs around the country and several years ago invited a man to speak who was a member of the men's group. The focus was on issues of sexual abuse, harassment, rape, alcohol abuse and their interconnectedness—topics about which the organization had great concerns. Following the presentation Jack and the other man got together to discuss the program, hit it off, and Jack was invited to join the men's group.

Jack's involvement in social concerns was brought about by his participation in his fraternity, but he had a hard time delineating how he came to be open to those issues in the first place. He said he was raised in a very religiously conservative family and remembered that many of the issues he is now active in, and could be considered liberal, were never spoken of in his home. He wondered if his parents had ever even conceived of the possibility of people being sexually interested in the same sex. But since issues of that kind were not discussed, he got the message that whatever was not proscribed was open to consideration.

His conclusion and another key theme in Jack's life was the importance of privacy. He places great emphasis on respecting other's privacy and expects that others will respect his. Issues like who someone has sex with, what kind
of sex they want to have, and what medical procedures they wish to undergo, e.g. abortion, all come under the umbrella of Jack's privacy theme:

I guess it's never seemed to me that it's anybody's business. It's a private issue, any part of your life that doesn't involve me is just none of my concern unless you choose to make it my concern. Same with my life and interactions with others; I just want to be left alone. To me that just makes sense.

He applied this sense of what was fair to homosexuality. He had always known men who were gay and it had never been an issue to him. He believed it was their business and no one else's. But coming to the group was still a pleasant surprise for him. He liked the gay members' openness and relative comfort in being gay. He said, "...it's nice to be around men who are proud of where they're coming from. I've had friends from the fraternity that were ashamed, so this is a nice difference."

Jack seems to enjoy diversity—whether it be in opinions, perspectives, or cultures; he is always open to hearing and learning from another point of view. He discussed incidents at a group meeting where he did not agree with the apparent majority opinion but found it good to be exposed to a different angle even if he still found his own to be more compelling. He mentioned wanting more racial diversity in the group as a means of expanding his awareness: "I think we're missing perspectives on issues that would be interesting to
incorporate. I'd like another take on things. I think it's really important to hear as many voices as possible."

Yet he does not want a Rush Limbaugh as a member, because he feels that it is too easy to find that opinion out in the world. He believed that a group of men who are generally liberal and pro-women will be perceived as sissies by the world at large but did not seem concerned about it: "That's how we would be defined. A bunch of guys who sit around, talk about personal things and hug each other at the end of the day. A bunch of freaks. This group helps me to naysay that stuff." He seemed to be for the notion of defining what it is to be male as anything a male does or wants to do.

Jack liked the group and wanted it to stay essentially the way it was.

Themes:
1) college fraternity big impact:
   a) introduced him to awareness of social issues,
   b) first experience of deep friendships with other men,
   c) became aware of men's group through it,
   d) first gay friends.
2) conservative religious upbringing.
3) issue of privacy very important.
4) diversity, multiple perspectives sought out and relished.

Kirk's Story

Kirk's themes seem to be around a sense of abandonment, a lack of connection and intimacy with his father, and a lifelong connection with other males that was not very significant in terms of depth of intimacy. Also included would be a strong interest in sexuality issues.
Kirk's father was an alcoholic who was not there for him in a way that he needed him to be. He mentioned as a boy seeing his older sister get run over by a car and killed and not being able to go to his father with his pain because his father did not seem to know how to deal with his own feelings. Kirk knew his father loved him, and he saw him as a caring man who was affectionate in ways, but still felt emotionally distant and even abandoned by him. He put it this way:

I think my need for connection with men really goes back to that time, and the more things that I have done to develop intimacy with men...time and again images of my dad come up--the nurturing, affection and acceptance that I wanted from him, I didn't get. That's the earliest need for that that I experienced.

Kirk went to a boys' high school as well as a men's college and seminary, so he spent a lot of time with other males as he went through school but did not feel a real sense of connection in any of those settings. He was amazed at how little closeness or real intimacy there was, particularly in the four years of seminary after college. He remembered having friends, but said they never seemed to talk very seriously about what they really felt like or who they were. He suspected some of it was a form of self protection but also believed that teachers and administrators supported the distancing in ways or at least questioned any friendships that appeared to move beyond just friendship. He said,

You weren't supposed to have 'particular' friendships, and I think that a lot of that was for protection against erotic stuff which was fairly predictable in that kind of
setting. So in order to keep us away from that we were encouraged not to get too close to any one person. Here we were, a bunch of guys who were somewhat homogeneous being encouraged not to connect.

Being from an alcoholic family Kirk was afraid that if anyone found out about it he would get kicked out of the seminary. So he protected that secret, only later finding out that many others hid their own secrets as well. But due to this fear, he and his classmates were not able to open up their lives to each other, thereby leading Kirk to feel that he was around men a lot and had male friendships, but never had any that were very significant.

Kirk went on to become a minister and teacher. At some point in his career he attended a seminar focusing on men's issues; it was a real eye-opener for him. He said, "It must have touched a real significant core, because I began to teach a course incorporating those issues in college." He taught the course for five semesters and found it very enjoyable and meaningful.

At this point in Kirk's life he developed a relationship with a woman whom he eventually married. He had not dated much before this time, so developing his sexuality and building an intimate relationship became the major focus in his life. Due to this his interest in men's issues began to wane which was reflected in his priorities. At times he felt a real conflict between his relationship with his male friends and the one he had with his wife, which resulted in his giving
up those friends. Over the years he came to miss that male connection, and when his wife chose to leave their marriage, he realized he didn’t have many friends at all. So he started rebuilding some friendships. It was then his connections with men became more intimate and meaningful for Kirk.

It was also around that time that Kirk got involved in the men's group. He considered it to be an important support group for him. It provided him with the opportunity to push himself to do more self exposing with men. While he didn't socialize with any members of the group, other than at group activities, just the opportunity to get together with them was a very important thing for him.

Kirk's most recent influence was attending a workshop on "celebrating the body erotic." He noted that he had been interested in sexuality issues for some time, but that this workshop was a different experience for him--like a breath of fresh air. There was very little talking, more looking into each other's eyes and hugging. They talked about early childhood sexual experiences. He said it was a very different way for men to be together and to acknowledge their sexuality but in a ritualized way so there was no sense of a group grope. He was amazed at the level of caring and tenderness that occurred as well as the depth of emotional connection that was established in a short period of time.
He spoke of a couple of other similar workshops that he attended, one of which included women and men, and summed up his learning this way:

There was a lot of caring and tenderness that was kind of mind blowing...[You learn to] get into your own erotic response, get to know yourself, allowing you to relax with yourself... This was a real intense and intimate experience of a different kind... It was nice learning ways to pleasure myself and to be pleased... It confirmed for me that I can be erotically involved with men too. But I discovered that I'm much more interested in emotional intimacy with men than sexual.

When asked if the so-called stereotype of masculinity had any impact on his life, Kirk said that it had. He talked about the "jock" model in particular that he felt he never was. He noted back in high school feeling a sense of inadequacy and some shame that he wasn't more athletic, and wasn't even interested in a lot of it. Of course, he believed he wasn't interested at least in part because he didn't compete well in sports. He wondered if he hadn't missed out on some bonding experiences as a kid due to his lack of involvement in sports and noted some envy of those men who are athletic today. On the other hand he seemed to realize that he and his friends at high school who also weren't jocks "did a different sort of hanging around together." It was their way of bonding.

Themes:
1) relationship with his father--emotionally distant, little nurturing, affection, or acceptance. Father was alcoholic.
2) strong religious influence--became a minister.
3) lack of deep emotional connection with other males most of his life.
4) interest in sexuality issues.
5) did not fit definition of masculine especially in area of athletics.

My Story

It was after hearing Bill's story that I began to wonder how I might respond to an interview of this kind—what story I would tell. So I decided to write about it at that point. I thought it would be valuable for the reader to get a clear understanding of my standpoint. I also believed I could use my story as one more perspective on par with the others. I wrote most of this after the second interview with Bill, but am placing it last so as not to disrupt the flow of the other men's narratives.

Early on I felt that I didn't fit the appropriate mold, both as a boy and as a man. Society's definition never seemed to fit me very well. I was small and skinny from the beginning. I took "growth shots" so I wouldn't be a runt, because somehow I knew that being small was not what I was supposed to be. I played sports but my size hindered me. I was actually pretty good at most of them, but didn't play any of the truly "masculine" sports like football and baseball in high school.

I was scared of the ball in baseball, an ultimately unmanly thing to be. I was smart which wasn't cool in the least. I was shy, especially with pretty girls, which didn't fit the "studly, confident with the chicks" image of a guy. I was scared to death of fighting another guy—once again, not
too cool. I remember knowing that it was best not to show any emotions, especially in junior high where I attempted to create an appropriate enough scowl and sneer to get by. How foolish I must have looked to others: a sweet, caring, deeply emotional kid trying his best not to be, or at least not to let it show, because it was not ok to be that way.

The next real memory of relevance to this view of my journey was meeting Tracy. My relationship with her proved to impact my life in profound ways. She introduced me to feminism, gender issues, and oppression. I had been going through life somewhat like a sponge, soaking up all that I could, completely unaware of the "reality" of oppression or "white male culture" or "patriarchy." I was the typical white male who felt a woman's place was at the side of her man supporting him in his endeavors to make it in the world.

Even though my mom was a strong woman and my dad a pretty mellow guy, my family was still rather traditional in the sense of at least the appearance of the man being the head of the household and the woman the supporter/nurturer. I could talk to my mom like I never could with my dad. We talked about things that mattered to me, and she was quite open to and good at it.

My dad was distant and gruff most of my growing up years, even though today I would describe him as shy and friendly, soft-spoken, and conflict avoidant. He was the disciplinarian
of the family, a role I suspect was very difficult for him; I think he is a very sensitive man who dealt with this role by becoming a tough guy, because he had to. He grew up the oldest in a family of five who had to deal with problems like drowning kittens in the river because there wasn't enough milk to go around. I don't think it was easy for him.

I found the men's movement through my interest in feminism. I was writing a paper on how men sometimes seem to have no understanding as to what went wrong when their partners chose to leave the relationship. An article led me to more articles and finally to a meeting of a men's group where I met the members of the men's group of which I am now a member. I read Bly (1990) and Keen (1991) and found that there was an entire group of literature devoted to men's issues.

At first I was very confused by the apparent contradictions in the literature. There seemed to be feminist supporters and woman bashers in this movement. I did not understand. Then I attended a conference in Chicago put on by the National Organization of Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) and found out that there are conflicts even within that organization as to the appropriate concerns and focus. Some I believe to be personality conflicts, power struggles and control issues. Others I believe are legitimate differences of opinion and preference.
Further reading led to more questioning which led to some clarity around the recognition that the men's movement is not unitary but multiple. That recognition shifted my vision from being clouded by confusion to an openness to the diversity of views and an acceptance of the lack of solidarity.

One of my professors then encouraged me to begin from my own standpoint--from where I was in my life, what interested me, concerned me, what questions I had, etc. I knew that I wondered what had led me to be interested in connecting with other men. I knew that my relationship with my dad was not what I wanted it to be and that I felt sadness because of that. I also recognized the lack of close male friends that I had in my life as well as the difficulty I had in creating those kind of friendships.

There was also the issue of competition that I had seen between two male friends, and the competition I felt with another male friend which distanced me from him. Then there was the way another long time male friend described me as supportive but odd in my desire for emotional intimacy with him. His perception had an impact on me. Finally there was the growing relationship I had with my younger brother both in terms of desiring depth and connection and being able to talk openly about how uncomfortable and difficult it was to push through whatever barriers there were in order to pursue that intimacy, including saying I love you and hugging each other.
Why is it so difficult I wondered. And what led some men to choose to do it anyway? What did they push through and what allowed them to do so? All important questions. And, of course, the most important ones involved why and how I had wanted this in my life. This led me to the men's group. I was curious what happened there and how it impacted the member's lives. I was also interested in how it would affect my life. Duck (1992) suggests that the personal relevance of a topic of research leads the researcher to do better work. In this study I had a great deal of personal investment.

Themes:
1) relationship with father--distant.
2) relationship with mother--close, able to communicate openly.
3) felt different from the masculine stereotype:
   a) small physically,
   b) not involved in the "important" sports in high school,
   c) not tough, not a fighter, emotional, caring.
4) intimate relationship with feminist woman.
5) issue of competition between males.
6) desire for emotional intimacy with other males.

The Domains of Meaning

Four major domains of meaning emerged from the interviews themselves. Three others originated in the combination of the transcripts, my field notes and my personal journal.

Domain One: A Sense of Being Different from Other Males.

This was one of the universal themes found in this study. All of the men noted some sense of not fitting what they perceived to be the stereotypical definition of masculinity at
some point in their life. One area in which this issue manifested itself was through the men's relation to sports, especially in high school. Eight of the men mentioned the topic, only one of which was in a positive sense. Further evidence of this domain is seen in several of the other domains. This sense of difference from the stereotype is the overarching theme in this study.

**Domain Two: Homosexuality/Bisexuality/Homophobia.**

If broadened enough, this issue could also be considered a universal one among these eleven men. It dovetails to a great extent with the first domain but seems to also be a significant enough issue to be a separate domain.

Five of the men were directly affected by this issue, three who were either gay or bisexual themselves and two who had homosexual siblings or children. Of the other six, one had been sexually molested by his father, one had been involved in homosexual experiences but did not consider himself to be gay or bisexual, and the other four mentioned being aware of the impact this issue had on their lives in one way or another. It was also a recurrent focus of discussion in the group meetings.

**Domain Three: Father Connectedness.**

All but two of the men spoke in some depth about their father and/or their relationship with their father. Five described that relationship as distant, three as abusive, and
one man's father died when he was young. Of those nine, three also spoke of some positive aspects of their relationship with their father.

**Domain Four: Institutional Religion.**

The significance of this theme can only be guessed at, but five of the eleven men were either present or former ministers or priests. A total of nine spoke of the impact of being from either a Catholic or a conservative Christian background. Several still considered their faith to be an important part of their lives; others had left those teachings behind. The other two, a Quaker and a Jew, also noted an impact of their beliefs on their lives, with the Quaker's being the more pervasive one.

**Domain Five: A Shift in Self-definition--A Search for Self.**

A salient characteristic of this group is the age range: only one man was less than 35 years of age with the majority being in their forties and fifties. Several spoke in their interviews about a shift in how they perceived themselves in relation to their world, one as recently as the last four years. Others spoke in the gatherings in a similar vein. Bly (1990) affirmed that in some cultures men were not allowed into the council meetings until middle age and suggested that the men's movement is not for younger men but for those who have experienced living and have come to a time of
reassessment and redefining who they are and who they want to be. It appears to be the case in this group.

**Domain Six: A Desire for Emotional Intimacy with Other Men.**

This desire was articulated by all the members of the men's group in one form or another. It was the reason two of the men gave for experiencing themselves as different from the stereotype of what a man is supposed to be. In this sense it could be placed under the first domain, but in this fifth domain the tone is different: it is considered to be a positive expression of being divergent from that stereotype.

Over and over again this desire for intimacy was the theme of the gatherings: how to create it, deepen it, plan for it, and get past or through fears of it. It was also the most often leveled criticism of the group process in the second part of the interviews--that the group, despite all its rhetoric concerning its desire for intimacy, did not seem to reach that goal very often.

Many suggestions were made in the second part of the interviews on how to assist the group in its quest for intimacy: more structure, use of a "talking stick," utilization of rituals, less verbal and more physical interaction, a strong commitment to confidentiality, restriction of the size of the group, more consistency in membership and attendance, and others. Everyone wanted it to
Occur, yet struggled with how to bring it about, and, once
developed, how to keep it from dissipating.

**Domain Seven: Unwillingness to Voice Dissatisfaction.**

This domain is related to the last one in that the
unwillingness to voice dissatisfaction may have been a
contributing factor to the lack of consistent intimacy in the
group. Eight of the men either strongly alluded or clearly
stated that they had not been willing, each for his own
reasons, to openly state their discontent with the process or
the content of the group. They talked about not wanting to
invest that much energy, take that much risk, or possibly
invoke some dissention within the group. All eight had
opinions about how it could have been improved but chose not
to confront that issue.

This issue was discussed in some depth in at least one of
the narratives as a sign of what that man called the "male
disease." His discussion of the group as a microcosm of men's
struggles in the larger society appears to be fitting in the
context of all the data gathered for this study.

As mentioned earlier, this choice not to challenge the
group was a part of my experience as well. My personal
journal contained several references to my unwillingness to
either confront the process of the group or another member
regarding what they had said or done. Of course I was able to
use the excuse that I did not want to impact the process too
much or alienate a member so that he would choose not to be interviewed. But it was clear that I was personally struggling with this issue along with the others.

**Conclusion**

In this segment the findings of this study were presented in the form of narratives of the men's interviews and the domains of meaning that emerged from those interviews in combination with my field notes and personal journal. In the following section some ways of interpreting the possible significance and/or meaning of these domains as well as that of the study as a whole are entertained and discussed.
DISCUSSION

There are many possible lenses through which the data of this project might be viewed, including psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical, political and/or economic. And within each lens or field of investigation are even more possible ways of perceiving information (e.g., in family studies there are structural-functional, systemic, developmental, exchange, social constructionist, etc.). But, is there a "right" way to view this material? Or, is there a "best" way?

I believe I could support almost any position in regards to this study with articles of rigorous research. I could show that men are the way they are because of their biology. I could also "prove" that men's behaviors and attitudes are almost totally a matter of socialization. Then there is Fisher's (1992) contention that masculine and feminine roles may have been naturally selected in the Darwinian sense and so have become a part of our "innate" nature. Which one of these three or the many other numerous possible interpretations is "true?" It depends on where you stand.

Krull (1987) affirmed that all reasoning is tautological in that a person must have the openness and capacity to think within a specific framework in order to come to any conclusions supported by that framework. For example, in order for someone to be a systemic or constructionist thinker
there needs to be an inherent ethics of tolerance. She states, "Whoever adopts systemic thinking in all that it entails, cannot avoid to also accept its fundamental ethics. But only a person who has already adopted such an ethics of tolerance will be willing to follow systemic thinking" (p. 255). Hers is an example of a sort of circular causality.

Bateson (1972) stated that conclusions are always resident in presuppositions. Piaget's (in Thomas, 1992) notion of adaptation which includes both assimilation and accommodation makes a similar point. More prosaically, it sounds like what all of these authors are saying is that we are inclined to find what it is that we are looking for. This is because we are looking through a particular lens or with a specific cognitive structure of organization that tends to filter out all that does not make sense or fit within that framework.

I have quite openly embraced this social constructionist, postmodernist paradigm for my lense in this study. From this perspective there is no "right" or "true" way to view this research; rather there are multiple viewpoints each with its own alleged vantage. But this does not necessarily lead to a valueless relativity. Some constructionists use the concept of "usefulness" or von Glasersfeld's (1984) notion of "fit" as their means of judging research, information, perceptions,
etc. It comes from the epistemological school that states that "knowledge is functional."

I will attempt to approach the discussion of the findings of this study from this pragmatic perspective. It will essentially be my construction but will be in dialogue with both the literature already presented and the domains of meaning discovered in stories of the men interviewed.

In terms of the literature of men's studies this group would probably be categorized as a combination of the mythopoetic and profeminist men's movements. Utilization of Native American rituals such as sweat lodges and a talking stick were an accepted part of this group's coming together. A great deal of focus on fathers and the feelings of disconnection with them was also a fundamental and regular issue of discussion. These are common in the mythopoetic wing of the men's movement.

Combined with these issues in this group was a strong commitment to being gay affirmative--a characteristic of the profeminist men's movement. At least twenty-five percent of the members were gay, and having a mix of gay and straight men was intentional. As one member put it, he stayed in the group partly with the purpose of allowing the straights to be closely involved with a gay man. Another member who was straight told a story of an acquaintance telling him that the group was perceived in the community as a gay group. Rather
than clarifying the issue with that person, he chose to leave it open and ambiguous. And as he reported the story at one of the gatherings the response of the other members was one of pride. My sense was that this group tended to wear that label as a badge of honor; they were a group of men, both gay and straight, who desired closer relations with other men and recognized that their homophobia was one of the major issues that kept them from that closeness, so they were choosing, in the face of charges that they must all be gay, to confront that fear head on.

This is not to say that homophobia was not extant in this group; it clearly was. Another time, a new member shared that he was not gay and that he was uncomfortable with the fact that the group was a gay group, and was attempting to deal with his discomfort by speaking it out loud. It was remarkable how quickly the straight men began making it clear, whether overtly or covertly, that they were not gay. I remember feeling concerned myself that this man perceived me as a gay man and wanting significantly to inform him that it was not the case. It was perhaps a brief and limited experience of how traumatic it must be for men who are gay in this culture, first to admit it to themselves and later to deal with all the messages of shame and humiliation, both internalized and external, of that reality.
How reminiscent this was of younger days when the greatest insult that could be hurled at another boy was that he did something "like a girl." Henry spoke quite openly about the verbal abuse and taunting he endured throughout his growing up years for displaying feminine characteristics. I believe, in concert with Chodorow, (1978), Wilcox and Forrest (1992), Rabinowitz (1991) and O'Neil and Egan (1992), that this fear of appearing feminine and the actual debasing of anything female is a tragic result of the gender system in our society in which being masculine is defined as anything that is nonfeminine (and vice versa). It is such a limiting vision of what a man (woman) can be.

As was already stated, being gay affirmative is part of the profeminist men's movement. Much of the rest of this discussion will include other components of that wing of the men's movement. And these segments are closely aligned with the domains of meaning that emerged from the data of this study. Therefore I will turn to those domains and discuss each in relation to the rest of the literature. The domain of homosexuality has already been discussed; the remainder follow, not necessarily in the order they were presented in the previous section.

The second domain that I tie to the definition of masculinity in our culture is the lack of connection, both emotional and physical, that most of the men had with their
fathers. Based on the definition of maleness as being independent, autonomous, strong, non emotional, and averse to physical touch with another male due to fears of homosexuality, is it any wonder that sons did not feel a sense of connection with their fathers? Fathers follow this script both as a means of keeping themselves defined appropriately and of inculcating their sons with the same appropriate beliefs and behaviors.

My own father recently told me that, although he loved his boys very much, physical and emotional displays of affection were just not done after children reached a certain age, and especially not with boys. And this lack of affection in my life was a minor outcome compared to some of the other men's experiences with their fathers. There does not appear to be a biological component to this lack of connection between men and their fathers. So it would seem that men in this culture have been socialized, simply because they have a penis and not a vagina, to castrate some of their emotions, especially in relation to their sons, as a means of assuring their acceptance as men.

This dysfunction around how masculinity is defined in this culture was also an essential aspect of the other findings in this study. It could be used to interpret the large number of ministerial types and social service workers in the group: men who do not fit the "norm" may tend towards
work that includes establishing relationships and assisting others in the more personal and intimate parts of their lives. And that connects with the men's desire for intimacy in this group. This is a "deviant" characteristic for men in this society and forces them to find a place wherein they can pursue this goal in a supportive environment without the accompanying hassles that they might get from others for their difference.

Discovering ways for men to become emotionally intimate with each other was the most commonly cited goal for men who were meeting in groups (Martin and Shanahan, 1983; Stein, 1983; Keen, 1990; Rabinowitz, 1991). And it was the ubiquitous answer in this men's group to any question about the goal of the group. Unfortunately it was also the most difficult to create due, in my opinion, to the powerful proscriptions against it inherent in this society's constructed definition of masculinity.

The domain involving an unwillingness to express dissatisfaction with the group is a clear example of what Stein (1983) and Rabinowitz (1991) spoke of when they cited a general lack of commitment on the part of men in groups. Conversely it may have been an expression of the member's sensitivity to both Martin and Shanahan's (1983) and Stein's (1983) concerns that men tend to be overly competitive, conflict oriented, and aggressive in groups.
Rabinowitz's (1991) discussion of the four stages of group process appears to combine both of these perspectives. According to his hypothesis, this group was somewhere between the first and third stages depending on the week it was judged. There were times of self-disclosure but much ambivalence to it (Stage 2). There was also much intellectualization and conflict avoidance (Stage 1). What never occurred was a general willingness to risk conflict (Stage 3) though it did happen on rare occasions.

These are natural phases through which men's groups proceed. While all of these explanations probably apply, I believe at least part of the reason this group did not get beyond this issue was an attempt not to be typically masculine (competitive and aggressive) which unfortunately fed into another piece of stereotypical masculinity (lack of commitment and involvement which equals a sense of independence and autonomy) and hurt the group process.

The major outcome of this study was that all of the men in the group were aware of and, to a greater or lesser extent, responsive to the socially constructed definition of masculinity in American society. And each in his own way felt or believed that he did not measure up to that definition in some way, shape, or form—that he was different from other males. This led to a sense of inadequacy, self-criticism, self-doubt and/or an undermined sense of self as a male.
Mead's (1935) study of several cultures that did not differentiate behavior by sex shows that this distinction is not a necessary part of the human experience. While those cultures certainly had their deviants whose behavior or beliefs did not fit the "normal" definition of what it was to be human, they did not have any incidences of individuals who questioned their sex. How different that reality is from American culture in which there is even a designation of mental disorder--gender identity disorder--around that issue.

This "mental" disorder is a clear example of the confusion induced by the construction of gender in this society. With the possible exception of transsexuals who believe they are one sex in the body of the other sex and other rare forms of mutated sexuality, there can be no difficulty in distinguishing whether a person is male or female--his or her sex. One simply has to look at one's genitalia. Confusion around sex is not possible for the vast majority. It is the ambiguity around gender including the socially constructed definition of what it is to be male that is problematic.

It is important at this point to affirm that I am in no way stating that men should not be stereotypically masculine; I am not out to eradicate the macho male. Some men, maybe a lot of them, by natural inclination or inculturation do fit the current stereotype of masculine. But so do some women.
Some men, maybe just a few of them, fit the current definition of feminine. And so do a proportion of women. But most people have personalities that are somewhere on the continuum between those extremes. The key appears to lie in not limiting a person's expression of his or her combined innate\learned personality by linking it to his or her sex.

The issue that is of concern is the promulgation of the belief that all members of either sex are, or should be, alike. Even if it is "proven" to be the case that "on average" or "in general" or "the majority of" men tend toward a given behavior, role, set of beliefs, pattern of thinking, etc., does it necessarily follow that all men must conform to that tendency? The problem lies in this insistence on finding the "true" definition of masculinity and the concomitant rigidity in enforcing that "truth" on all men once it has been found and established. This seems to be such an obviously limiting notion that it would be dismissed outright at first glance. Yet it persists.

Taking Fisher's (1992) notion that traditional masculinity has been naturally selected is an interesting way to view this matter. From this perspective, how masculinity is defined is determined by the environment. If this is the case, the way the world shifts will determine which behaviors will continue to be functional. Will traditional masculinity continue to benefit those who fit that definition? Or will a
new definition of what it means to be male replace it? Probably a co-existence of both will be the case.

Fisher's (1992) hypothesis is complicated today by the move into the postmodern era in which the coexistence of multiple environments is the reality. There may no longer be one right or functional masculinity; perhaps different ways of being a man will be necessary in different circumstances. For example, it would probably not be wise for a young man who lives in an area full of gangs to promulgate the profeminist definition of masculinity. Likewise, using collaborative techniques during a "hardball" negotiation might end in disaster. Similarly, manifesting a poker face while listening to an intimate friend in order not to betray one's feelings also seems inappropriate. It appears the ability to diversify responses in a way that fits the situation may be the way of survival in the postmodern world.

Once again, if this is the case, then what is the use of concepts such as "masculinity" and "femininity?" Do they really serve a functional purpose in a society that requires a person or a community to be able to respond to a multiplicity of possible situations in their environment? It would appear that survival might require this society of rapid changeability to follow the suggestions of Mead (1935), Bem (1983), Hartmann (1981), and Ruddick (1989) that it is time to move beyond these limiting notions and categorizations of
gender and allow people to be simply who they are based on their personalities rather than their sex.

The final domain to be discussed involves the ongoing process of self definition that several of the men mentioned. Vaughan (1986) describes the concept of changing self definition as one which requires time. The idea is that the more time one has to try to make sense of what has happened in one's life, the more likely one is to be able to create a definition of those experiences and one's participation in them that explains one's behaviors in a way that is understandable to one's self. It is a process of redefining the self. The notion of the male mid-life crisis which is a time of shifting priorities is an example of this process.

The members of the group were "middle aged" men who were able to "tell their story" in a way that made sense of all the experiences they had gone through in their lives. Several spoke of coming to terms with particularly painful or difficult parts of their lives through this process, thus finding a way to acknowledge and accept those pieces of who they were. Others were still in that process and found the group a good place to do some of that work. O'Neil and Egan (1992), Beavers (1983), Duck (1983), and Yalom (1985) all discuss the importance of a supportive community for the shifting of self concept. Being able to speak of things that mattered, especially in relation to how they experienced
themselves as men, was an important aspect of this group's gatherings.

In order to succeed at the difficult task of defining the self in a coherent way, certain parts of a story tend to be highlighted while others get overlooked or excluded. Even in these interviews I am certain that I only got a small piece of these men's lives. I became more aware of this reality after I "interviewed" myself.

As I read through my story for the umpteenth time, I realized that I had left out big chunks of my life—some that had direct relevance to the questions under discussion. My fundamental religious upbringing and the awesome impact it had on my beliefs about maleness and femaleness, my male mentors whom I routinely discarded when they failed to live up to the image I created of them, my mother's mixed messages and how they influenced how I relate to women, and my somewhat unique Master's program which focused experientially on issues of oppression including racism, sexism and homophobia.

All of these experiences had a profound effect on my life and my thinking which culminated in the Ph.D. program in Marriage and Family Therapy. Here much of my random thinking found a structure in which to make sense of the chaos. I wholeheartedly adopted the social constructionist/postmodern perspective wherein truth and reality are a function of language and community, and the distinction between
"believing" and "having beliefs" (Anderson, 1990) opens up our "reality" to multiple interpretations and valuations.

This recognition that in my own story I had neglected to mention many significant influences on how I came to be interested in emotional connectedness with other men revealed some of the limitations of this research. How much did the other men leave out? I began to think about what I might have done differently. I could have interviewed each man several times rather than once as a means of addressing this concern. But then, I could have interviewed double or triple the number of men in the same amount of time it would have taken to follow up on the original ones. How one chooses what is important, is important information in itself. And, I believe that regardless of the amount of rigor involved, there will always be significant factors left out. This is but one example of what was missed in this research.

Another example was uncovered during my defense of this paper. Several members of my committee stated that they did not think I was as open about my own life in my self-interview as the other members appeared to be. They noted this particularly in terms of the dearth of material on my relationships with women. I had not been aware of this possible internal censoring before that time and still struggle with the idea that I edited myself. It shows the significance of peer review and how the feedback from it can
assist in the research process. It also indicates that research is always a human endeavor with inherent flaws that are part of the human equation.

Thomas Kuhn (1970) wrote about science not being a series of incremental steps but one of paradigmatic shifts in which new cognitive patterns are seen and new worldviews are entertained. And while these revolutions may start with a shift by one scientist, in Kuhn's (1970) account they are always social in that they require a community. Atkinson, Heath, and Chenail's (1991) notion of the social construction of scientific knowledge parallels Kuhn's (1970) account. They seek that "flash of insight" that leads to a paradigm shift while recognizing that it will be the surveyors of their insights that will judge their value or usefulness thereby determining if it becomes new knowledge.

That "flash of insight" occurred for me late in this study when I read Mead's (1935) book. It seemed to solidify my rather tentative conclusions. But it is important to mention that Mead's 1935 conclusions came at a time in history in which recognizing the cultural influences on beliefs and behavior became the latest intellectual fascination (Degler, 1991). There was an attempt to show that differences between sexes and races were more a result of socialization than biology. This period tended to focus on the sameness of the
sexes as well as that of the races. Commonalities were emphasized and mutual humanness affirmed.

Fisher (1992) suggests that there is a swing back to recognizing the differences between the sexes. She believes that most of these explanations tend to focus on how those differences are related to hormones and other body chemistry--essentially the more biological explanation. But there are also recent books that affirm that men and women come from different cultures and even planets (Tannen, 1992; Gray, 1992), once again emphasizing the cultural distinctions between the sexes.

Which position one takes concerning these two issues of nature/nurture and sameness/difference, appears to revolve around the issue of punctuation (Keeney, 1985). An example would be the sentence, "John said Bill is a jerk." Punctuated in this way the message is quite apparent. But its meaning would be altered quite dramatically by changing the punctuation slightly: "John, said Bill, is a jerk." It is a matter of emphasis that, once again, seems to be determined by the author of the sentence. Since I am the author of this research paper, the emphasis will therefore reflect my choice of punctuation. But at least it is open to scrutiny.

My position on this issue is one that does not minimize the differences between the sexes, whether predominantly social or biological in origin. In fact I strongly support
the recent efforts to assist men and women in understanding and bridging the gender gaps that do presently exist and tend to lead to gender wars. But I emphasize and punctuate this issue firmly on the side of sameness in the sense that we are all human with similar emotions, thoughts, and needs. People are different from each other, but not just because they are separate sexes. Some of the differences may be related to sex, but others come from a variety of sources including innate personalities, racial differences, family of origin issues, etc., and these need to be taken into account as well.

I believe the confusion regarding these issues could also be viewed as one revolving around different orders of abstraction. At one level we are similar, at another different. It is also a political issue. Which part gets emphasized is a matter of what the agenda of the presenter is. This brings it back to me, the researcher, once again. Because I saw the pain in the faces and lives of the men with whom I struggled in the group and experienced some of that pain in my own life as I grew up, I want to support the cause of moving beyond the constraining concept of gender and masculinity in this culture.

I was, and still am in some ways, a deviant according to that concept as it is defined by social consensus. This is not a comfortable position to occupy, therefore I want to change it. Perhaps others do not take social rules and
definitions quite as seriously as I do, along with the other members of this group, and therefore do not wrestle with these issues with the same level of intensity. But I have met many who do and am saddened by the difficulties they had to endure due to feeling different from other males.

I saw what I believed was a significant issue in my life. I chose to do research on that issue. The personal then became political when I affirmed that I believe the socially constructed notion of masculinity in American society deeply wounds many men and limits the repertoire of behaviors of the rest of them. And I have suggested that the reason for this problematic situation is that the entire level of abstraction in which the concept of masculinity exists has been reified, thereby giving an abstract concept concrete existence. I have also proposed a move beyond this concept of masculinity to a place where people can be who they are—whether it be powerful, aggressive leader types; soft-spoken, shy, reclusive types; or anywhere on the continuum in between—based on their innate and learned characteristics, and having no relation to their sex. Androgyny is not the goal either; a natural diversity is. I believe this would be in keeping with von Foerster's (1984) affirmation that moral action is always taken so as to increase the number of choices.

What difference does this study make? What are the implications of these findings? This research is essentially
a philosophical/theoretical approach to a subject that is highly significant and could have a profound impact on society as a whole if its conclusions were to be implemented. It is not unlike other studies of other kinds of oppression of those who do not fit mainstream culture. But this particular study focuses on the cultural messages that men get in relation to how they are to behave, think, and feel in order to be "real" men. If men could begin to recognize how limited and constraining these messages are and begin to break free from them in large numbers, the impact on divorce, wife battering, child abuse, rape, and other issues of aggression might be significant. Marriages, too, could improve, thus providing a healthier environment in which children would grow up, leaving them more able to continue the cycle of positive interactions.

Conversely, as men continue to have to "prove" their masculinity by being non-feminine, there continues the inherent hierarchy wherein females are by necessity perceived as one-down, and men must compete and battle for supremacy in that hierarchy thereby closing off the possibility of intimacy and connection between them. This leaves men dependent on women for their intimacy needs, which places them in a double bind in that, by definition, men are not supposed to be dependent, especially on women. This option would lead to a continuation of the many forms of oppression and oppressive behaviors by men toward women.
I recognize that these messages are pervasive in our culture, that they are deeply embedded in every aspect of our lives. And I realize that changing something that inculcated into the fabric of living will be difficult if not impossible to do. Still, I want to place the message of the limitations and concomitant dysfunctions of our genderized culture on the table for discussion as a means of beginning and/or continuing the dialogue which might eventually have an impact on how we think, feel, and behave as men. And I want men to see this call for a move beyond masculinity as something which benefits them. Males have been accused of being the true oppressors, particularly white males; it is time to see that we also oppress ourselves.

What the world would look like if men actually freed themselves from this oppressive system of definitions is unknowable. But the possibilities are endless and seem uniformly positive. Further research might include assessing how these messages get passed on--through schools, churches, advertising, classes on parenting, etc.--as a means of discovering ways to deconstruct, transcend, or eliminate those messages. This paper is just a beginning; much more needs to be done.
CONCLUSION

What emerged from this research project was a recognition that the notions of masculinity and femininity, and the concomitant confusion they engender, undergirded much of the distress and concern that brought the men who participated in this research to the men's group. They had come, in a sense hoping to define or redefine what masculinity was, that is, what it meant to be male, thinking it might somehow free them from some of the struggles in their lives, when, in actuality, the very attempt was misguided.

It reminds me of the distinction once made in regards to defining "Christian" music: Was it music that had a Christian message? Or was it any music written by a Christian irrespective of the meaning or message? Similarly, should men's behavior be defined by some predetermined parameters, i.e. "masculinity" (that may have made sense in a different context) or by, simply, whatever a man does, thus reducing the very notion of masculinity to redundancy and superfluity? I have proposed that the concept of masculinity is an unnecessary level of abstraction, which, if eliminated, could lead to greater emotional health for men, for men's relationships with each other and with women, and for this society in general.

This group essentially consisted of men who either did not fit, or no longer wanted to be constrained by, the common
definition of masculinity. Gathering together and talking about their lives seemed to be a good way to affirm that they were acceptable as men despite this difference. The group was a place to belong and to heal. It was also a place where they could attempt to move beyond stereotypical masculine behavior and create a level of emotional and physical connection with other like-minded men that would be proscribed outside of that context.

They were a bunch of "deviants" according to Mead (1935), attempting to solidify their sense of themselves in the face of a hostile society. In this sense the men's group was no different from the myriad other groups consisting of subcultures who do not fit the mainstream culture. They were a group of men living within an oppressive system that allows little divergence from a norm, and that perpetuates itself through all manner of propaganda, advertisements, rewards for following the norm, and punishments for deviating from it.

Is there a right way to be a man? My conclusion is that there are as many ways to be a man as there are men. And I believe it would be beneficial to our society if we would quit trying to define what a man is or ought to be and let them be the diverse group of human beings that they are.

Finale

The aim of my presentation of this research was to take the reader through the process that I went through in making
the discoveries that I made, laying bare my presuppositions, thought processes, beliefs, assumptions, and anything else that might have had an impact on the way I went about assessing, valuing, choosing to highlight or ignore, etc. the data that I gathered. This allows the reader to then make his or her own assessment as to the usefulness of the information garnered from the research.

Some would say that this is unscientific. I do not think so. The scientific method is a social construction (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Keeney, 1985; Anderson, 1990). And it is a very useful one. But it does not generally tend to be self-reflexive (Pollner, 1991) which is what I have endeavored to be in my approach to this research project. I attempted to follow the more standard indicators of rigor to make this research acceptable and useful as qualitative research. I also attempted to rigorously apply the criteria of self-reflexivity, an openness to "flashes of insight" (Atkinson, Heath, and Chenail, 1991), and making the research process useful to those who chose to participate in it (Lather, 1986; Gergan and Gergan, 1991). By doing so I hoped to further stretch and expand the constructed definition of what is acceptable research. It now lies in the readers' hands to make that determination.
REFERENCES


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