

Toronto Men's Clearinghouse Newsletter

October 1990 — issue 18

ANGER IS NOT THE PROBLEM

When looking at men's lives and the effects of our actions on those around us, it can look as if anger is the problem. Anger is a natural human emotion, a response to situations which are threatening or out of balance.

We have been trained to express our anger (and all the other feelings of pain, hurt, sadness, shame and vulnerability) by killing, physically assaulting, verbally abusing, dominating and controlling ourselves, each other, the women around us, and the children in our lives.

It is a tragedy that we have been trained to turn pain into anger and anger into violence. We destroy our own lives through suicide, drugs and alcohol, single car accidents, overwork, and shorter lives. We destroy other men through homicide, competition, fighting and abuse of power. With women we use sexual assault, physical assault, sexual harassment, intimidation and discrimination. And children are easy targets of our anger, suffering physical and sexual abuse, degradation, emotional neglect and belittlement.

Misdirected violence and self-destructive anger need to be harnessed, controlled, worked with and used to guide our constructive efforts to rebuild our lives and change our community.

Anger can be a guide to injustice, a clue to powerlessness. Anger can excite, mobilize and bring us together. Anger keeps us clear, keeps us moving from where we are towards our visions of what

we can be. Anger is a touchstone for our deepest sense of truth and rightness. It lets us know when we're getting ripped off or when we've compromised too much. It tells us when we hurt or abuse someone else. Anger is unleashed in revolution, as in China, or consciousness raising and organizing, as for women in this country, or in pride and community building and armed struggle for justice as for Black people in South Africa.

We have been taught to fear anger because we associate it with violence. Most of us have experienced someone harassing, intimidating or threatening us with their anger. It is scary. Therefore, when we feel angry ourselves, we get scared. We stop it, stuff it, laugh it off and pretend we don't care.

We like to think of ourselves as nice guys. We want people to like us. We often say yes to requests and demands when we really want to say no. We often say no to our needs when we really should say yes. The result is that we are constantly building up anger and resentment because we are taking care of others and not of ourselves; our needs are not getting met.

Most of the time we pretend to ourselves and to those around us that we are not really angry. We have all seen men at times who are virtually steaming with anger. But when asked about it they reply, "Who me? No, I'm not angry", or "It didn't really affect me that much." But there comes a time when we can't take any
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more. Then it explodes out of us in loud and frightening ways. After the explosion we are so scared that we clamp down again, try harder not to get angry, and begin another cycle.

The power and strength of our anger is frightening because we don't have models of men who get angry without becoming abusive. We don't have models of men who can express a range of feelings which include anger. We don't have models of men who communicate their wants and needs effectively, in non-threatening ways. However, we can become models of men who do these things.

As men we have two crucial tasks before us in order to be able to use anger powerfully and not abusively. The first is to separate out the anger from the many other kinds of feelings we were never allowed to express. We need to acknowledge, feel and express the love, caring, sadness, hurt, dismay, affection, gentleness and hope we can carry within us.

As we separate these feelings from the anger we see the second task; to work with the anger, understand where it comes from, what we can do about it and how to express it in positive ways. One level of this is not blaming others for our situations. We have been taught to expect women to take care of us, to nurture and support us in the ways our mothers were supposed to. It is particularly easy to blame them and to project our anger onto them. We can end up feeling that they caused our anger, pain and hurt. Women we know may be very strong, but they don't have this kind of power in our lives. Not blaming them, and not blaming ourselves as well, is part of dealing with anger and recognizing where the deeper roots of it lie.

As part of this process we need to learn to express our anger and talk through issues with the people around us. This means talking and staying connected, instead of walking away, getting busy, withdrawing or distracting attention away

from the issues between us. We must learn to listen to each other as well as speak. And speaking here means from the heart *and* mind. We must learn to compromise, give and take, come up with more complex solutions. Patience, respect, courage, empathy, perseverance, commitment are some of the virtues we need to develop for this to work.

Expressing anger directly, with a full amount of communication in a non-threatening way is not easy. We need to know ourselves well enough to know when we can do it and when we need to blow off steam, walk away, ask for a time-out, do something physical, sleep or be alone before we can come back and continue talking.

We need also to know when it is anger we feel and when it is physical restlessness or tension, or a need for sexual affection and expression. Sometimes movement, dance, sports, shouting is all we need to do. Other times we may need to hold someone or be held, touch and talk intimately. Each of these things are skills which we can learn, practice and put into our everyday lives.

When we can clear away our other needs, when we can stay with our anger without violence and blame, when we can express a full range of feelings, then we can move on to the next level of dealing with the causes of our anger.

The second level of working with anger involves identifying the deeper problems and situations which concerted community attention. Then we can find ways to work cooperatively for change. Working conditions and pay scales, lack of support for parenting, poor housing, poor educational systems, racial and sexual violence in our own past and in the community, male and female role expectations — these are some of the situations and social structures which breed pain, oppression, despair, anger and violence. We can use the skills we develop

to work with others to eliminate the sources of our anger. And we can use the anger to direct us to those sources.

As men we are angry, legitimately so. We can use the anger to guide us in constructing a more just society. Or, we can continue to use it to destroy ourselves and those around us. Will our anger be constructive or destructive? Active or reactive? Celebrating life or destroying life? Full of power or full of violence? As men we each have that choice to make. We need to remember that anger is not the problem.

— *Paul Kivel in What's Goin' On, The Newsletter of the Oakland Men's Project, June '90, 440 Grand Ave. # 320, Oakland, CA 94610* They were overwhelmed by the response to their appearance on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and have received a \$1,000 Matching Grant from the *Ms. Foundation*.

Towards Safe Masculinity

My friend Marie sits in her sunlight-filled kitchen talking about rape and fear.

The rape happened less than a block away on a weekday afternoon, on another day filled with sunlight, inside the women's home, and in front of a small child screaming with fear.

"I'm so fucking pissed off," Marie is saying, "I feel like a prisoner in my own home."

While Marie's speaking, I'm mostly trying to keep my mouth shut, trying not to let my own feelings, which are complex, and my own wish to 'make things better' prompt me to interrupt. Later I find myself thinking about men, and of our contradictory responses to men's violence.

A few weeks earlier, I had watched a man on a TV show tell the show's host of the responsibility he felt, as a man, after the Montreal massacre. A second man responded angrily that he felt no such responsibility, none, period.

Two men, two very different responses,

responses reflected elsewhere in letters to the editor. For some men, a minority, the choice of response is crystal clear. For others, probably the majority, the nature of men's silence in the face of men's violence cries out for comment.

That silence is, in fact, an illusion. Like the 'silence' of the countryside to the casual visitor from the city, it is, on examination, a presence full of sound rather than an absence of sound.

By choosing to remain silence — and it is a choice — men are saying many things. Among them: It's not my problem. I'm safe. No means yes. Beaten women are masochists. Children aren't sexually innocent. Pornography does no harm. To speak against this violence is to speak against other men and that is frightening. I don't know that I feel about these things because I barely know what my feelings are.

This list could easily be extended. The items on it vary greatly in the degree to which they are conscious, expressed ideas. Some are things men do say, but mostly to one another where they are not challenged, while others are barely conscious ideas and feelings. All of them need to be challenged, by men, whenever and wherever they are heard — workplace, home, street, media, bar.

Doing this, men can begin to create what I call safe masculinity. This entails a respect for the bodies of self and others: a willingness to protect those bodies; the acceptance of responsibility for thoughts, feelings and actions; a refusal to blame others; a refusal to invade the personal spaces of others; an unshakeable and public commitment to change that is.

— *Ray Jones, April 6 '90 in the August Men's Network News available for \$25 per annum (\$10 if low income) from Men's Network for Change, c/o Mac Gervan, 256 Mowat Ave., Kingston, Ont. K7M 1K9*

Please send us positive stuff to print!

Education by abuse

"The recent revelations of sexual and physical abuse at Mount Cashel Orphanage have reminded me of something I had tried to forget: the abuse I experienced as a child at boarding school.

We were supposedly elite young men being trained as leaders. Under the guise of education, we were taught to justify violence and the intimidation of those weaker than ourselves. Physical abuse was the accepted way to teach obedience. Within a few years of arriving at our school, most new boys were turned from sobbing children into arrogant young sadists who took out their frustrations on those whom they could bully or entice. On Sundays we were reminded that those in authority were given their positions by an all-loving God.

It has taken me many years to get over the ill effects of my schooling: my constant fear of other people, of saying the wrong thing. I still tingle with the old feelings of impotence and rage when those in power flatly deny the truth.

In the case of Mount Cashel it is interesting to note that after the original charges were laid, those in authority transferred the offending priests and tried to obtain counselling for them. No such consideration was extended to the orphans.

Given the long traditions of child abuse in our culture, the real wonder is that nowadays we seem to have enough openness to give the matter serious public attention. — excerpts from an article by *Ray Cunningham* in the *Kingston Whig-Standard*, March 8, '90 (also in *Men's Network News*).

N.O.M.A.S. Atlanta Conference

At the end of May "*Ending Men's Violence: Pathways to a Gender Just World*" was held in Georgia, the peachtree state — although I couldn't find any peach juice, only Coke.

Along the highway was a billboard "Gay America loves you", although there had been 13 known gay-related murders in the

last year. (Another highway billboard states "Abortion is Murder".)

The keynote speeches were great and the panels interesting, mainly because they gave the viewpoints of women and Blacks not normally heard at a white men's conference. (There were more white women than Blacks attending.)

The first keynote speaker, Kathleen Carlin, the Executive Director of Men Stopping Violence, stated that part of women hating is equating men as being full humanity while women lack rationality, are irrelevant. "Developing one's feminine side", i.e. a 19th century male appropriation of women's experiences, is an example of women hating. Instead of men (us) forming our own definitions, we need to risk listening to women.

On Saturday Bell Hooks spoke of men as always wearing a mask, unable to express their pain, and that men have to move beyond their pain to be in non-violent relationships. She also talked about Black men not having any status, but it isn't clear how we could support Black self-determination.

On the last morning keynote speaker John Stoltenberg, a founder of Men Against Pornography, tried to address a division between gays and straights that was noticeable at the conference. He spoke of the need for revolutionary honesty, telling the truth about male power, starting with our own lives. He shared his story of being raped by his lover (male). He has felt betrayed by the gay liberation movement as it assimilated male supremacy values. Homophobia is linked to women-hating, is used to enforce male supremacy, to keep men doing to women what they would not want done to themselves.

This was the first time this annual conference focused on activism and was valuable in bringing an awareness of racial oppression and homophobia into men's work against sexism.

— Erik Malmsten

In New York last February there was a protest over the annual swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated*. Organized by the *New York Antisexist Men's Action Network* in cooperation with *Women Against Pornography*, they stood outside the Time Life Building with an eight-foot long penis with movable fist aimed at a six-foot high magazine cover called "*SPURTS ILLUSTRATED*". They gave out 2,000 flyers and were well photographed, although the media avoided mention of the graphic imagery.

It's interesting to read what women are thinking about their changing relationships with men. This is from the July/August issue of *Rebel Girls' Rag* (shortened).

Heterosexuality Revisited

In the seventies, feminist analysis meant analysis of the patriarchy. Heterosexuality was revealed as a normative and oppressive institution.

Even if we are not defined by men, we are still defined, inevitably, in relation to them. Or in relation to our relations to them. How do we women who sleep with men evaluate our sexual orientation as evolving and "genuine" and not entirely socialized or prescribed? As Adrian Rich (in *Compulsory Heterosexuality*) points out, heterosexuality is not seen to be in need of explanation. If heterosexual relations were as stigmatized and punished as are homosexual ones, would we risk so much to pursue them?

Heterosexual people who do not accept the normative definitions must define themselves against them, and as those relations are so pervasive and slippery, much energy goes into the project: questions of marriage or not, whose name to use, the division of labour, and whether or not to have children and how to raise them. Then there are all the more subtle elements of everyday

behaviour: how does one refer to one's mate? "Partner"? "Lover"? "Main Squeeze"?

Heterosexuality, for feminists, comes to be defined by what it is not — it is not lesbianism, and it is not Barbie and Ken; happily-ever-after. It is forever defined in the negative. For feminists, what does it mean to be innately attracted to people whom we also fundamentally feel to be our oppressors?

Sexuality has historically been defined as a male phenomenon, or prerogative. Lesbians have redefined it, and reclaimed it, as female. Heterosexual women have had to define our sexuality in relation to men, from the Wife of Bath to Moll Flanders to Erica Jong's "zipless fuck" to Kim Basinger in *9 1/2 weeks*. Have we internalized the values of the colonizer? Those of us in couples work to subvert "Barbie and Ken", but how do we as individual women deal with the inevitable disjunctions? We must move towards a stronger understanding of the historical construction of our sexuality as a discursive practice. It is easy for us to "play the game" and we need to take responsibility for our privilege and resist co-option.

In my own work in the pro-choice movement, I realized long ago that the anti-choice were not nearly so concerned with protecting the "pre-born child," as they are with enforcing, with violence if necessary, a restrictive, retrogressive, and highly codified view of women's sexuality. We cannot simply categorize the pro-choice struggle in liberal terms of freedom and personal choice; we must also discuss it in the context of heterosexual power relations, and of redefining the possibilities for women within those relations, especially for the women of colour or of the working class, who are most restricted.

Women are in danger in contemporary sexual cultures, and new explorations of heterosexuality will have practical implications for us all.

— Miriam Jones in speech, March, '90

Upcoming Events

October 15 — 21 7th annual **AIDS Awareness Week** Outliving, Out Loving, Outlasting AIDS displays, workshops, panels, and on Oct 21. a 10 km pledged walk

October 20 **BrotherPeace**, an international day of actions to end men's violence *Metro Men Against Violence* will have a table, and ceremony at 4:00 pm at the "No Time to Waste" Rally for Peace and the Environment, Grange Park. In Winnipeg John Stoltenberg is the keynote speaker at their conference.

October 26 — 28 **Growing Together**, the Sixth Annual Men's Conference in Kingston - Great sharing with men from other cities, and it's free! see flyer, and join car pool.

October 27 Benefit for "**Healing Images**", a month-long art exhibition/symposium on violence against women, presented by "A Bunch of Feminists". Rivoli. (See December 8 listing)

November 2 — 3 **Child's Play: Toying with Violence** an invitational event by the Toronto Board of Education

November 4, 7:30 **Relationships Workshop** led by Dr. Joseph Goodman & Mardi Thomas Goodman at *A.H.P.* meeting, 77 Charles St. W., \$5 221-5272

November 7, 7:30 **Metro Men Against Violence** meets at George Brown College, 200 King St. East, room # 469 Bob Alexander 392-0985

November 12 **Men's Network for Change**, Toronto branch monthly meeting at 519 Church St., Rm. 32, meet at 7:30, meeting 8 - 10pm

November 9 — 11 **Languages of the Male Heart**, *The Applewood Centre's* annual men's conference led by Tom Verner and Doug Von Koss. "...activate the emotional body..." info: 162 Bloor St. W., T.O., M5S 1M4 537-1777

November 11 **Free Play - Improvisation in Life & Art** with Stephen Nachmanovitch, \$10 at OISE, 225 Bloor St. W., John 231-0670

November 25 **Parkdale Rise Up to End Wife Assault** with have a variety of workshops including one for men.

November 30 — December 1 conference on **Violence Against Women** at O.I.S.E. 923-6641

December 6, 8 — 9 **Energies of the Emerging Male**, a transformational gathering of men facilitated by Dr. Barry Cooney, editor of *Man Alive* journal, \$195 Penn & Associates, 10 Alonzo Road, Willowdale, Ont. M2R 1T5

December 5 **Metro Men Against Violence** monthly meeting

December 8 **Men Against Violence Against Women** panel discussion and workshop, a special men only part of "*Healing Images*", on the anniversary of the Montreal massacre.

December 8 — 9 **Men's Network for Change** organizing weekend

January 9 **Metro Men Against Violence** is initiating a discussion between feminists and pro-feminist men on pro-feminist men's groups and men working with feminism groups; does it work? panelists wanted contact Erik 463-4681

Growing Together

— The Sixth Annual Gathering of men at Kingston, Oct. 26 - 28 —

Growing Together is ... the shared process of defining - and redefining- masculinity, male power, privilege, personal and political growth, in an open, caring, challenging, and supportive atmosphere

All events are **free of charge**, except for the Saturday night party, but donations are needed. Women are welcomed to all events except for the Saturday night party and some workshops.

Friday October 26 7:30 - 9:30 at Kingston Public Library, 130 Johnson St. at Bagot.

Welcomes, and **Popular Theatre**: Seeing the humour in it all, two plays, and music.

Saturday October 27 8:00 - 6:00 at St. Lawrence College, Portsmouth Ave. and King St. (west end of Kingston)

Workshops (at 8:45 and 3:00): Each limited to 15 participants. Some of their titles are:
Finding Your Inner Voice ♦ Cooking ♦ Men and Abortion ♦ Racism ♦ Overcoming the Past and Getting on with Life ♦ The Personal is Political - Revisited ♦ Gay Relationships: Strategies for Success ♦ Responding to Sexist Remarks ♦ Making the Personal Political ♦ Grounding Ourselves Through Crayons ♦ Talking Dirty ♦ The Spirit of Play ♦ Is It Perilous For Us Males To Define Masculinity on our own? ♦ The Private and Social Me ♦ AIDS, Homophobia and Spirituality ♦ Hurtful words and Degrading Images of Women - When did we learn them who taught us; do men need them? ♦ Hurt Children - The Legacy of Patriarchy ♦ Putting a Face on our Men's Group ♦ Rites of Passage, From Patriarchy to "New Men" ♦ A Simple Pleasure of Complexity: Bisexuality

The Gathering (10:30 - 2:45): A time for honest talk, listening, and expressing feelings, exploring common questions in a general assembly and moving into small groups.

Saturday October 27 8:00 pm - 1:00 am at Baby Grand Theatre, 218 Princess St..

Men's Party: Fun, food, music, dancing, cash bar. \$10

Sunday October 28 8:30 - 1:00 at St. Lawrence College

Spiritual Gathering, or 1991 planning meetings.

Plenary Session (10:00 - 11:30): Reflections and perspectives on what we are doing, where we are going. Panelists:

Men's Network for Change- David Currah, Guelph
The Queen's Project - Johnny Yap, Kingston
Spiritual Development - Gordon Stevenson, Toronto
The 'Move' Program - Hary Hughes, Ottawa
Violence in Curriculum - Peter Jaffe, London

Rally: Declaration of positive action towards women and children, and celebration of personal growth and non-violent change.

For more information please contact:

Kingston Men's Conference, 99 York St., Kingston, Ont. K7K 1P9

Kingston (Steve) (613) 542-1136, London (Terry) (519) 432-1286,

Montreal (Bert) (514) 457-9758, Ottawa (Ken) (613) 233-7376,

Toronto (Erik) (416)463-4681 (call to participate in car pool)

There's a new newsletter: *island MEN*, 35 Cambridge St., Victoria, B.C., V8V 4A7. "It is for groups or individuals who are working towards integrated positive growth for men spiritually, psychologically, morally and physically." They like drumming, are dreaming of a men's centre (modelled on the *Austin Men's Centre* founded by John Lee, author of *The Flying Boy – Healing the Wounded Man*, and would include women), and are looking forward to a workshop led by Michael Meade of Seattle.

They mention a new *Handbook For Starting a Men's Group* by Gervase Bushe, Vancouver Men's Evolvement Network, 3392 W. 34th Ave., Van., B.C.

The *Toronto Conference of the United Church* held a successful 1 1/2 day workshop for men on Violence Against Women last Sept. (In the week of the largest Take Back the Night march yet).

The Toronto Branch of the *Men's Network For Change* has established, for those tired of talking, a regular action of putting up Rape Myth posters. The temporary contact person is Ben, 532-0322 (12 – 7pm, Fri., Sat. or Mon.). There are also looking for volunteers to plan a Men's Forum every 3 months, and, in the long term, start a men's centre. Contact Greg 537-3528

There's a new group, *African Men Against Sexism*, which focuses on sexism within the Black communities. Contact person is Wesley, 367-9556.

In response to an increase in attacks on gay men and lesbians in Toronto, *Queer Nation* is making themselves visible.

If you would like to see this newsletter continue, please write! Share articles and ideas (money helps, too).

T.M.C. Newsletter
c/o Greg Barsoski
104 Spencer Ave.,
Toronto, Ont.
M6K 2J6