

MEN TALKING

by

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## MEN TALKING

Sean Philip Faulk

The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s inspired many Americans to stand up for what they believed. For women that meant protesting the ways in which they had been treated as second class citizens. Across the country, they came together in what they called *consciousness-raising* groups to uncover the limitations that they faced. After that, those small groups began to reach out to one another and create national organizations based on the oppression that they had identified in the small groups. The focus of the national organizations was to transform the personal struggles of women into a political movement for change. The motto the “personal is political” became the mantra of the highly successful Women’s Liberation Movement.

Inspired by the success of the women’s movement, men in the 1970s gathered in small groups, much in the same way women had, to investigate the ways in which society’s expectations had limited them. Finding that they did, in fact, feel similar pressures, a small percentage of American men began to follow the steps of the women’s movement to transform their personal struggles into social change. In spite of their efforts over the past thirty years, the men’s movement has failed to produce the same sort of large-scale social change because the men’s movement has never been able to make the personal become political in the way that the women’s movement had. The personal remained personal. Yet, in spite of that reality, a small percentage of American men still participate in the men’s movement and find personal growth from it.

In the past, historians have investigated the men’s movement from a national perspective, yet they have largely ignored the stories of the smaller local organizations. The history of these local organizations is crucial to understanding why the men’s movement was never able to make the transition from the personal to the political and how it has managed to survive in spite of that fact. The Men’s Center in Minneapolis represents an organization of men who came together to discover the personal effects of society’s expectations for men. Realizing their similarities they created an organization for promoting change in this area. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, they struggled to maintain themselves as an organization for all men as individual causes threatened to pull them apart. The fact that they chose not to delve into one specific cause has limited their ability to transform the personal into the political and has made fundraising difficult.

Despite these struggles, The Men’s Center survived the seventies and eighties by helping individual men make personal changes. In the nineties, The Men’s Center struggled as a new generation of men came of age and reached adulthood. During that decade the men’s center met the challenges, as they always had, by remaining flexible and open to all men’s issues.

Unlike the women's movement, the men's movement was never able to transform the personal issues of its members into a political agenda. While this prevented the movement from ever achieving large-scale social change, the men's movement has helped many men make personal changes that have improved the quality of life that they enjoy. The Men's Center of Minneapolis provides an excellent example of this. It reached out to men in an effort to help them make personal change. In doing so, it became and remains an important part of the network of social services within Minnesota.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

The social protest movements of the 1960s such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Antiwar Movement, and the Women's Liberation Movement consisted of Americans, empowered by their personal convictions, attempting to make change on a national level. As a result of their success, the America of 1970 was far different from the America of 1960. Because this change took place all Americans had to adjust their way of living and thinking to fit their new world. The men's movement grew out of men trying to do just this; however, the men who gathered in groups in the early seventies to respond to the changes in their world found that there were things that men had in common that they would like to change.

The men's movement, which began around 1973, was a direct response to the women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It followed in the steps of the women's movement and developed in a similar fashion. Small local groups formed around local issues in cities across the United States like Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis and others. They conducted *consciousness-raising* talk sessions to analyze the ways in which oppression occurred. These small groups formed "men's centers," began to make connections with other groups across the nation, and formed national organizations. These national organizations dedicated themselves to the purpose of extending the work of the local

groups and tying them more closely together through national conventions and publications along with media attention.

While the formation of the national men's movement traced a path similar to that of the women's movement, the men's movement never achieved the critical mass necessary to create social change on a national level in the way that the women's movement had. Anthony Astrachan articulated this reality in a 1984 *Ms. Magazine* article:

By its impact on both public opinion and social policy, and by the changes it brought in the workplace and in the family, the Women's Movement has touched the lives of millions. Meanwhile, the men's movement has touched the lives of a few thousand. The men's movement? Most Americans don't know there is a men's movement. Yet there are men who want, like women to change the boundaries of their lives and reshape sex roles—so men can spend fewer hours at work and more time caring for their wives, their children, and themselves.<sup>1</sup>

The central factor in this failure of the men's movement was its inability to transform the personal issues of men within the movement into a political agenda for American men. Far from achieving this type of cohesiveness, the men's movement struggled even to create a common vision for its members. Simply put, the men's movement could not make the transition from the personal to the political.

Members of the men's and the women's movement, sociologists, and historians have noted the success of this endeavor for the women's movement and the failure for the men's movement. These people, however, have not examined the ways in which the local organizations of the men's movement, some of which are still in existence today, facilitated changes within their community or region. The Men's Center of Minneapolis,

Minnesota represents an excellent opportunity for such a study. It is one of the oldest such organizations in the nation and yet it has struggled to survive in each of the twenty-three years since its inception in 1977. Problems stemming from disagreements on direction, tactics and methods have prevented The Men's Center of Minneapolis from ever successfully transforming the personal issues of its members into political action within the community and yet it remains an important social service organization for both.

Both the men's and the women's movements brought about changes in the way men and women related to each other and to themselves. Each of these movements, together and in their own way, resulted in important changes in American society. Consequently, both have a shared and yet distinctly separate historiography that begins with literature written by members of the movements and sociologists and ends with historians. Because these movements are relatively recent, the amount of historical literature on them remains limited. This, combined with the strong ties between the two, makes it important for historians interested in the men's movement to examine both movements within the broad context of gender initiatives. Though limited in size, three distinct phases of gender historiography have surfaced. The first consists of literature, written by people involved in the movements themselves who had little or no historical training. Their expertise resides in their experience. The second phase of historiography consists of works with broader perspectives, written by authors who were not themselves deeply involved in the movements. Of the two books discussed here, a historian wrote

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Astrachan, "Men: A Movement of Their Own," *Ms. Magazine*, August 1984, 91.

one, the other was written by a sociologist. Both authors in the second phase of historiography, however, had specific professional training in their field on the subject of their study. The result is a more critical, objective, yet focused retrospect. The final phase of this young historiographical subject consists of works by professional historians who attempt to synthesize the development of a women's and a men's movement. Though neither book in the third phase focuses solely on the gender movements themselves, each author makes a significant attempt at making a connection between the current state of women and men and the movements that fostered the situation.

As with most historical events, the first histories of the women and men's movements were written by those who experienced them. For the women's movement, the first analytical literature began to surface in 1975 with the publication of Jo Freeman's *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and Its Relation to the Policy Process*. A journalist by training and a devoted member of the women's movement, Freeman was first introduced to the idea of social protest during her years at Berkley and through her work with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Largely a sociological study, Freeman's book analyzed the process of social change within the context of the women's liberation movement and the role that politics plays in it.

Freeman argued that social movements are one of the most important ways private disputes are transformed into a political issue. She pointed out that a successful movement needed to have an intersection between a personal issue and a social change and that the personal change is a vehicle to concrete social change. In others words, in

order for a movement to have a dramatic impact on society, the personal issue must be made a political issue otherwise the movement will be restricted to change on the personal level. The personal is political.<sup>2</sup>

Although Freeman's analysis of the relationship between personal and political change is important to dissecting the women's movement, her book plays a pivotal role in the historiography of gender movement's of the 1970s for two other reasons. First, her book was the first to outline the chronology of the women's movement beginning with its roots in the black Civil Rights Movement and ending with the developments in the movement as late as 1975, the year the book was published. Freeman includes in her history of the movement the transition early movement members made from the Civil Rights Movement to Women's Liberation. Also included was the foundation of the National Organization for Women, the press attention that the movement received in 1969-70, and the policy changes made in response to the movement.

Freeman's work is instructive for those writing about the men's movement because the men involved in the early stages of the men's movement shared many of the same values as women involved with the women's movement. Just as Women's Liberation developed out of the Civil Rights Movement and thus had a connection, the men's movement grew out of the women's movement. As a 1970 *Newsweek* article pointed out, "The majority of men's lib members are husbands and boy friends of radical women; others are ex-husbands and ex-boy friends, casualties of the high separation rate

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<sup>2</sup> Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and Its Relation to the Policy Process* (New York: David McKay Company, 1975), 5.

in women's lib circles."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the two are inextricably linked. Understanding the values and motives of one will help illuminate the other.

Second, and more important to understanding both movements in retrospect, Freeman's analysis of the women's movement points out why the women's movement has had such a well known and lasting impact on American culture. Implicitly, a reader interested in the men's movement can surmise why the impact of the men's movement has not been felt on the same scale. The organizations within the women's movement were able to make the personal become political, pushing it from a discussion about society into a discussion about policy. The men's movement, unable to achieve this goal, remained a movement largely focused on facilitating personal change in its members.

Like Freeman's book on the women's movement, the first analytical literature on the men's movement was the work of a movement member and was written from the sociological perspective. In *The American Man*, Joseph and Elizabeth Pleck compiled the writings of sixteen prominent historians and family sociologists in an attempt to create a synthesis history of the American man. Among the most respected contributors to the collection were Mary Beth Norton, Eugene D. Genovese, and Michael Gordon. Overall, the editors argued that although many of the facts about men's lives in the past are already known, these facts were badly in need of a new sex-conscious reinterpretation. The notion that the history of masculinity needed to be reconsidered grew directly out of the women's and men's movements of the 1960s and 1970. Moreover, it fit the trend toward social history that had begun in the same period.

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<sup>3</sup> "The Gents' Auxiliary," *Newsweek*, 20 July 1970, 75.

*The American Man's* importance to the understanding of the historiography of the men's and women's movements lies in the subject of the last chapter of the book. Contained in a section titled Period IV Companionate Providing (1920-1965), the last chapter describes men's power with men and women and provides an analysis of the men's movement. Written by Joseph Pleck, the essay turned chapter represents a contemporary analysis of the men's movement by looking at men's power relationships. Pleck implicitly suggests that the power relationships between men and women provided the impetus for the women's movement; but it was a combination of the relationship between men and women and between men and men that provided the need for the men's movement. This adds a variable to men's issues that the women's movement did not have to face. As a result, the men's movement is naturally more divergent because different people respond to things differently. Accordingly, transforming personal convictions into a cohesive political agenda becomes an increasingly formidable task as the members struggle to agree on what the personal is.

Pleck argued that the fundamental question raised by the women's movement was not a question about women at all. Rather, he suggests that it was a question about men. Why do men oppress women? While he presented this as the sole foundation for the women's movement, he explained that the men's movement must deal with this question as well as another issue. The other issue Pleck identified as fundamental to the men's movement was the issue of sexual politics between men. By 1980, the year the book was published, the sexual politics between men and women were well known; however, the men's movement was only beginning to uncover the complex sexual politics between

men. Pleck argued that the patriarchal norms in American society shaped and patterned male-male relationships. He identified norms such as the pressures to provide for families, fear of homosexuality or the appearance of homosexuality, as well as the need to suppress emotions to appear strong as the main obstacles between men in relationships.<sup>4</sup>

Pleck's analysis of the men's movement neither outlines a chronology of the movement nor does it describe its members or their actions. Rather, he focuses on describing the problems which created a need for the movement. He argues that these problems influence all men and so, by necessity, they are broad and abstract. The length of the format [essay] prevents him from adding any information on the actual movement and as a result he forces his reader to take his argument at face value without much evidence. In some ways, Pleck's essay can be compared to Jo Freeman's book on the politics of women's liberation. Freeman in her attempt to present an overview of the movement makes generalizations about the need and focus of the movement in an attempt to make it broad enough to fit most American women. Unlike Pleck however, Freeman wrote a book and so she had the room to include specifics about groups, people, and actions that make her analysis easier to see in the context of place and time. Pleck's abstractness in outlining the men's movement prevents the connection between ideology and action that Freeman achieved.

The second phase of gender movement historiography for the women's movement is illustrated by *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* by Alice

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth H. Pleck and Joseph H. Pleck, *The American Man* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980),

Echols. Written in the 1980s and published in 1989, the book represents the first major work by a historian analyzing the radical feminist movement in America. The graduate school experience for Alice Echols illustrates in part the extent to which her book represents the second phase of gender movement research. First, Echols received her Ph.D. in history from the University of Michigan where she did much of the research present in the work as part of her doctoral thesis. Second, she had the assistance of the Women's Studies Program of the University of Michigan, itself a product of the women's movement. And finally, she received financial assistance from the University of Michigan's Center for Gender Research; an institute designed to facilitate this type of endeavor.

In *Daring to Be Bad*, Echols argued the need for a monograph on radical feminism. She stated that as of 1989, only one historical monograph had been published on the topic of the women's movement. She cites Sara Evans', *Personal Politics*, but points out that Evans' book ends with the state of the movement in 1968 and thus does not fit the criteria of being part of the radical feminist movement. Rather it fits into the broad topic of feminism. *Daring to Be Bad* focused on analyzing the trajectory of the radical feminist movement from its beginnings in 1967 through its ascendance as the dominant faction within the movement to its decline, and supplanting by cultural feminism in the mid 1970s.<sup>5</sup>

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418-419 & 423.

<sup>5</sup>Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 5.

Like the books in the earlier phases of the historiography of gender movements, Echols incorporates the experiences of those who actually took part in radical feminism; however, the main difference is that none of the voices used as support were her own. The method she used for *Daring to Be Bad* incorporated 40 interviews with women from New York, Washington, Boston, and Chicago who belonged to groups that made "significant theoretical contributions" to the radical feminist movement.<sup>6</sup> By sticking to predominantly East Coast interviews, Echols opened herself up to critics who might argue that the monograph was too focused on one section of the country. Yet, she does acknowledge this potential criticism and argues that the groups chosen were the most important organizations in the movement.

The main theme that runs throughout Echols' book argues that the women's movement was a product of female civil rights workers and members of the New Left who tired of espousing the rhetoric of equality and yet failed to achieve it in the organizations designed to create it. From there, she outlines how the women's liberation movement formed between 1967 and 1969 and almost immediately developed fissures. These fissures led to a split between a radical women's liberation movement and a larger feminist movement. Finally, she argues that class elitism and lesbianism within the radical women's liberation movement limited its size and eventually allowed cultural feminism to supersede radical feminism.

*Daring to Be Bad* represents an important work within the historiography of women's and men's movements because it marks the point at which historians stood up

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<sup>6</sup> Echols, 20.

and acknowledged that the issues raised by the gender movements of the 1960s and 1970s make up an important element of our recent history. They fall within the parameters of "new social history" that developed during the 1960s and 1970s and shed valuable light on who we were, who we are, and who we might become. In a sense, *Daring to Be Bad* legitimized the subject so that other professional historians might follow.

On the men's movement side of the historiography of gender movements, the second phase in the historiography did not result in historians researching the men's movement. Rather, sociologists, trained in family sociology, explored the area. Still, no book length monograph on the men's movement or men's issues developed. Like the first phase of the historiography of the men's movement, the second phase resulted in another anthology of essays, this time brought together by Michael Kimmel.

Like Alice Echols, Kimmel, a Professor of Sociology at S.U.N.Y. at Stony Brook, had the benefit of professional academic research as well as academic institutions such as Rutgers University to provide support for the endeavor. Therefore, he and the contributors to the anthology illustrate the characteristics of phase two of the historiography of gender movements and research insofar as each was trained in an academic discipline and was distanced somewhat from the men's movement. As editor of *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*, Kimmel brought together twenty men and women, including Joseph Pleck, doing research in the area of men and masculinity. The group included sociologists, psychologists, and historians, and topics ranged from the changing male role, to men and women, to men's studies. In the

introduction by Kimmel, he argues that men (in the 1970s and 1980s) were changing. They were exploring different avenues in their careers, paying more attention to their physical and emotional health, and developing new relationships with women and themselves. As a result, the definition of what it meant to be a man was changing. The focus of Kimmel's book then was exploring the research being done at that time on men and masculinity.<sup>7</sup>

The piece most significant in the collection to the historiography of the men's movement is an essay by Michael Shiffman. In "The Men's Movement: An Exploratory Empirical Investigation," Shiffman analyzes the movement in terms of its methods, goals, and members as stated by one of its national organizations, the National Organization for Changing Men<sup>8</sup>. Like Echols, Shiffman was not a leader or an organizer of the men's movement but rather an academic researcher interested in understanding what effect it was having on society. In his essay, Shiffman argues that the goals of the men's movement were oriented toward both personal transformation and structural change. He echoes Pleck's notion that the men's movement was a direct result of the women's movement. He acknowledges, as Freeman did, that the members of the movement understood keenly that in order for structural change to happen there had to be a connection between the "macropolitical sphere and personal life." Finally, Shiffman's

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Kimmel, ed., *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987), 9.

<sup>8</sup> The National Organization for Changing Men changed its name. It is now known as the National Organization of Men Against Sexism.

work for the first time outlined the structure of the movement and the profile of its members.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Pleck's analysis of the movement, which dealt only with the abstract, Shiffman explained that the movement began through men's centers, organized on the local level. These local organizations sent delegates to the National Conference on Men and Masculinity, where the movement could potentially solidify its rank and file and focus their efforts. Shiffman's profile of men's movement participants is particularly instructive because unlike the women's movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, the men's movement never received the same media blitz to which Freeman referred. Consequently, the movement's members and their backgrounds have always been subjected to speculation. Shiffman showed through his use of surveys that the average participants were young, white, heterosexual, college-educated men.<sup>10</sup>

The final phase of the historiography of the gender movements of the 1960s and 1970s consists of monographs written by professional historians, neither of whom took part in either of the movements. Each book attempts to offer a new perspective to understanding how we as a society have arrived at our place in time in the 1990s. The first book, by Wini Breines, examines the girls of the 1950s, their development, and their impact as they became the women of the 60s, 70s, and 80s. The second book, by E. Anthony Rotundo, examines manhood in America exploring the ways in which masculinity has evolved throughout American history and the impact that the transformations have had.

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<sup>9</sup> Kimmel, 299.

In *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*, Wini Breines, argues that the fifties was the decade before all hell broke loose in the 1960s and 1970s. She suggests that although Americans imagine the fifties as a placid period, under the surface of "assimilation and homogenization, discontent was brewing."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, she argues that not only was the discontent brewing but that it helped to ferment vigor for the youthful social movements of the 1960s, including the women's movement.<sup>12</sup> Breines' book on girls of the 1950s proves to be valuable to understanding the women's movement of the late 1960s because it provides an understanding of who its members were, where they came from, and how they got to the point where they were ready to rebel in the 1960s.

Throughout the book Breines uses a wealth of diverse sources. Novels, movies, periodicals, and newspapers make up the body of her primary sources, while numerous historical and sociological monographs on subjects like gender roles, the 1950s, and popular culture constitutes the bulk of her secondary sources. The importance of Breines' sources lie in the fact that, unlike the aforementioned authors, Breines had the benefit of twenty-five years of social history research at her fingertips. Therefore, the resulting book is more sophisticated and more specific than those of her predecessors and yet it still contributes to the overall understanding of the women's movement.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Breines, 5.

Similarly, E. Anthony Rotundo's book, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, benefits from the same wealth of historical literature. In the book, which took fourteen years to write, Rotundo attempts to describe the mixture of "feeling, intention, and conduct that flows through social customs and political structures to emerge as individual behavior" of middle class men.<sup>13</sup> He argues that since men have held "the great predominance of power over the last two centuries, the picture of middle-class men in relation to women over the last two centuries is bound to have an unattractive side."<sup>14</sup> He adds, however, that to portray men as faceless oppressors is too simple. This dismissal neither helps understand how gender operates as a cultural and political force nor does it show the varieties of male behavior or motive.<sup>15</sup> Rotundo uses this argument to try and point out how throughout American history, manhood has changed to suit the needs of the society in which it exists. He does not suggest that men have been innocent of oppression, rather he acknowledges the oppression but seeks to highlight shifts and nuances in masculinity by analyzing different individuals at different times.

By writing a monograph that attempts to synthesize the history of manhood from the Revolution to 1900, Rotundo goes beyond Joseph Pleck's compilation of essays, which represents an early attempt at synthesizing the history of American men. Rotundo goes beyond Pleck's work because he is able to follow his common theme of examining how individual behavior is brought about during different times. Pleck's analysis was

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<sup>13</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Rotundo, 9.

composed of a variety of authors from different backgrounds and different perspectives, making a common theme unattainable.

Like the work of Wini Breines, Rotundo moves beyond an abstract analysis of the movement to provide an explanation of specific changes in men that have occurred over time. This makes the work valuable to understanding the men's movement despite the fact that it does not explicitly cover the twentieth century. It suggests that the men's movement does not represent an anomaly within the American experience. The 1970s were not the first time that men felt the need to change the way they interacted with women. The fact that many of them sought to change through a men's movement illustrates the extent to which they were reacting to their times. Rotundo's epilogue on the twentieth century sums up his appreciation for where we have been and where we are going. He acknowledges the fact that for the past quarter century men and women have been concerned about their relationships between themselves and one another. While Rotundo never gives his opinion on which direction the relationships are headed, he seems to offer his book as proof that this transformation is nothing new.

The men who formed The Men's Center in Minneapolis are proof of Rotundo's conclusion. Twenty-three years ago, those men, reacting to their environment, came together in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with the express purpose of changing the way they lived and helping other men make that same change in hopes that it might someday change society. For both the women and men's movement local organizations have been the bedrock on which larger national organizations have placed their foundations. Yet to

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

date, most historians have focused their attention on the larger national organizations attempting to weave the stories of the local organizations together. This was beneficial to achieving an understanding of social protest movements in the last twenty-five years; however, it has not offered an understanding of how these local organizations formed without initial connection to the larger movement and facilitated change on the grassroots level.

The Men's Center in Minneapolis provides an example of how this occurred. Inspired by the political and social changes that were a result of the women's movement, the men who formed The Men's Center created an organization designed to facilitate social transition toward humanism. In the past twenty-three years, The Men's Center has maintained that focus, avoided political causes which might tear it apart, and developed strong connections to the network of social services that exists in the Twin Cities area. By doing these three things its has been able to sustain itself throughout the ups and downs of the "men's movement" and yet remain on top of issues concerning men.

The study that follows chronicles The Men's Center beginning with the point in time when initial founders came together in the mid 1970s out of a need to make personal change. It then traces the path of The Men's Center in the late 1970s as its members created an organization designed to reach out to the community to help other men experiencing similar situations, attempting to transform the personal into the political. From there the study examines the challenges such as funding, leadership, membership, and ideology that The Men's Center faced as it reached out to the community in the new political environment of the 1980s. Finally, the history of The Men's Center ends with a

look at how the center has survived the 1990s as its leadership ages and its membership changes.

## Chapter II

### MEN TALKING AND PLANNING

The Civil Rights Movement, the youth movement, the women's movement and the counter-culture of the 1960s, each in their own way, rebelled against being forced into roles that limited their life choices. By the 1970s, the era of the 1950s and many of the roles that went along with it had given way to something different. As the gender roles that had been embraced by their parents and used as guidelines to raising children became outdated and out of touch with the present, men who came of age during the 1970s had to find a way of changing their expectations and methods of dealing with life. The men's movement grew out of this historical context. Throughout their childhood "the gray-flanneled, success-driven organization man of the '50s" was held up as the ideal, but over the course of a decade people questioned its validity. During the 1970s men found success in new ways of living.<sup>1</sup> The men's movement was a vehicle for its members to make life changes to better suit the needs of life in a new era.

Most of the members of the early men's movement had wives or girlfriends or ex-wives or ex-girlfriends who had been or were involved in the women's movement.<sup>2</sup> In the movement, these women had found personal liberation by validating through discussion their experiences. The realization that they were not the only people

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<sup>1</sup> David Gelman, "How Men Are Changing," *Newsweek* 16 January 1974, 52.

experiencing the problems that came with the limits of women's gender roles gave them the power to pinpoint the ways in which they were being oppressed. Identifying the sources of oppression empowered women making it possible for them to begin working to break down those limitations.

The men in these women's lives could see the transformation that took place. Knowing that sexism was not just a women's issue and hoping to benefit from the same type of transformation, men began meeting to discuss their own experiences and found that gender roles had in fact impacted them in uniform ways.<sup>3</sup> They found that they all had difficulty relating to men on an emotional level. They all experienced a sense of being cut off emotionally from the support of others, and they all wanted to experience deep emotional attachment and freedom with the people in their lives.<sup>4</sup> In Minnesota, the organization of these discussions led to the formation of the Men's Awareness Network, which eventually gave way to The Men's Center. The Men's Center would survive to become one of the nations longest running centers of its kind. It would publish a newsletter that would communicate men's issues to the public, host regional conferences and publish a resource guide. From 1973 to 1977, a group of men in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, as a result of their experiences with consciousness raising groups, developed a focused concept of a men's support center separate from political causes. It began with men talking.

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<sup>2</sup> "The Gent's Auxiliary," *Newsweek* 20 July 1970, 75.

<sup>3</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999.

### Men's Awareness Network

By 1973, a small number of men, approximately 75 to 100, in the Twin Cities were beginning to question, in a public way, the roles that had been placed on them. They formed what became known as the Men's Awareness Network.<sup>5</sup> MAN became an umbrella organization aimed at making men aware of the different ways they could deal with their emotions whether it was pain, happiness, sadness or joy. Founded by men inspired by the women's movement, they sought to make changes in the way they dealt with others and their emotions.<sup>6</sup> Frank Holmgren, one of MAN's founders, articulated the group's focus. "We are angry at the traditional role models that decree that real men must be strong, independent, aggressive leaders, Humphrey Bogarts who never show emotion and always win."<sup>7</sup>

From 1973 to the spring of 1975, MAN met as a consciousness-raising group similar to those used by the women's movement. Most of its members were graduate students at the University of Minnesota and were between the ages of twenty and thirty.<sup>8</sup> With longer hair and heavy beards, they more often than not fit the typical image of the liberal graduate student often found on the West Bank at the University of Minnesota. Some were married, some had children and others were single, but generally, they were straight, white, well-educated, and perfectly fit the profile of men's movement members created by Joseph Pleck. They focused directly on breaking down masculine stereotypes

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<sup>4</sup> "The Gent's Auxiliary," *Newsweek* 20 July 1970, 75.

<sup>5</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Pearson, "Man to Man . . .," *Minneapolis Star*. 2 May 1975, 1b

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

in their lives, exploring their feelings, getting clear on who they were, and changing their behavior with their family and friends.<sup>9</sup>

After two years of introspection and personal change, some members of MAN began to look for ways to bring the change they had experienced to a larger arena. Unlike women's consciousness raising, men's consciousness raising had not uncovered a system of political, social, and economic discrimination; rather, it pointed out the importance of men's issues and how men and women could benefit from men making personal change as a group. The personal had not become political but rather the personal had become uniformly personal for men.

At this stage MAN, in its form as a collection of consciousness raising groups, seems to have lacked the direction and purpose that some of its members were seeking. While many members of MAN were content to continue with the work in discussion groups, these members felt it was necessary to bring growth to the group. They were still dedicated to changing themselves, but they felt that if they wanted to change their community, they had to move beyond their own introspection. Somehow they had to bring their message to the community.

The realization that for MAN to move forward it had to reach out, drew the attention of a small group of MAN participants who were involved in social service occupations. Together they began to consider how their new way of living might be

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<sup>8</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999. In the interview, Andy Mickel expressed that the members of MAN met quite informally and that the goal of the meetings was usually introspection.

expanded to involve more people and facilitate the change in their community that they desired.<sup>10</sup> By spring of 1975, these men, the most active members of MAN, began to consider expanding MAN from a consciousness-raising group to a community education organization in an effort to move their personal attempts at social change into a larger venue.

This decision was directly related to the growth that the members of MAN had experienced in their own lives. Now they hoped to bring that growth to others via this new organization. The success of the organization would depend in part on its ability to reach out to others who were experiencing some of the problems its members had been or were currently working through. This meant that the organization also depended on experienced members volunteering their time and energy to facilitate the activities of the organization even after they felt they had solved their own problems. The fact that members had to be interested in achieving more than just personal change would create problems as experienced members left or burnt out. Without stable leadership and members accomplishing social change became more difficult. The other factor that would determine their success would be the organization's ability to convince community foundations that what they proposed was a viable solution to a pressing need within the community and at that worth funding. In order to reach out to the community and facilitate change, the organization had to have a source of funding.

The decision to move in this direction represents one of the key turning points in the early history of the organization. Whereas similar groups in California, Oregon and

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<sup>10</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

Michigan leaned toward political activism, the Minneapolis men turned to community action.<sup>11</sup> While missing the flare and drama of political activism that would draw publicity from *Newsweek* and *Life* magazines, community action offered stability and realistic opportunities to make social change. Also, it fit well with the skills of the members since some of the founding members were involved and had training in social service related fields.<sup>12</sup>

Together Marty Wong and Keith Olstad drafted a short term funding proposal for the organization. In the document they pointed out that in the past the roles and expectations for men were much clearer but also more limited. Men were to hold a well-paying job, marry a sensual woman, provide for a family, be socially and physically aggressive, maintain control over the family, and be a solid, rational, unemotional figure on which his dependents could rely. They argued that American society was changing and the societal codes and rules were rapidly being modified. Women had tasted political upheaval and career rewards, and were demanding equal shares of power, money and status. As a result men needed alternatives to the roles and expectations that they had been taught as children. Without alternatives, they suggested that "men unused to demands for change in a world they had viewed as subject to their needs for power felt a loss of identity and a corresponding increase in fear, anxiety, and stress." They pointed out that by opening MAN up to the public, the members could share their experiences

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<sup>11</sup> Barry Farrell, "You've Come a Long Way Buddy," *Life* 27 August 1971.

<sup>12</sup> Hank Bruns, an interview with the author, 3 August 1999.

with others who also were struggling to change; the result would be a service aimed at helping the community make positive changes.<sup>13</sup>

The initial proposal by Wong and Olstad identified four objectives for the Men's Awareness Network. The first was to continue organizing men's support/consciousness-raising groups for men who sought them. The second objective was to establish a telephone hotline and referral service for men in crisis situations. The third objective was to conduct a needs assessment of men in the Twin Cities in an effort to focus the future actions of the organizations. The final objective was to embark on a community education effort to inform people about the nature and extent of men's issues. They proposed the formation of a speakers' bureau, a writer's bureau, open houses, a resource library, a publicity campaign, and a two day conference on men's issues.<sup>14</sup>

The short term funding proposal for MAN is significant because it provides a rough sketch of the future men's center. There was a provision for a physical center that would house a reference library, meeting place, and telephone hotline. It called for a forum for publicity, a need that would eventually be met by *Men Talk*, The Men's Center newsletter, and regional conferences on men and masculinity. The proposal also acknowledged for the first time in any of the documents that consciousness-raising groups would be "support groups" and it reflected the nature of the future organization as a support agency rather than a political activist group. Even at this early stage of development, it is clear that the intention is not to follow the women's liberation model.

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<sup>13</sup> Marty Wong and Keith Olstad, "M.A.N. Proposal for short term funding," From The Men's Center archives, 4 March 1975.

The Men's Center was not to become a male version of NOW which was a political organization. Instead, the organization would be more focused on the individual than the whole.

While the initial short term funding proposal prepared by Olstad and Wong was presented at the 5 March 1975 meeting of MAN, by the spring of 1975, the organization had begun to drift apart. Members either left or simply continued their work in consciousness-raising groups. Despite the innovative efforts of Olstad and Wong to take the organization in a new direction, there was little interest in transforming the organization into a support agency for other men. MAN began to fall apart. No records exist of any regularly held meetings of MAN after March of 1975.<sup>15</sup> Consciousness-raising groups continued to meet but the formal organization faded away and Wong and Olstad's proposal went nowhere for a year.

#### Planning The Men's Center

A little over a year after MAN began to disintegrate, Keith Olstad and Mel Gray sent a letter to former members of MAN and other people who had expressed interest in men's issues. They announced a series of "town hall" meetings to create a coalition of men interested in forming a men's center.<sup>16</sup> The meetings would be used to plan a new organization based on Olstad's earlier proposal. The intention would be to establish more

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<sup>14</sup> Marty Wong and Keith Olstad, "M.A.N. Proposal for short term funding," From The Men's Center archives, 4 March 1975.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes from Meeting of MAN 5 March 1975. This was the last set of minutes in the archives of The Men's Center. From then on the archives contain bulletins based on the work being done to form a men's center.

than just new consciousness raising groups. The new organization would be a men's service organization.<sup>17</sup> In the letter Olstad acknowledged this desire.

We want to include in our discussions any men who have experience in dealing with men's issues for both themselves and other men. Because we want this coalition to be service oriented for men in the Twin Cities community, we are not inviting men whose interest and experience seem solely or primarily their own personal growth. Knowing our intentions, please invite men you think should be present.<sup>18</sup>

The purpose of the town hall meetings was to begin the discussion by sharing thoughts on how to proceed and develop a common set of goals and structures. From the outside, this appears to be an example of the personal becoming political. The members of MAN were creating an environment where men who share their experiences could come for support and growth. From the minutes taken during those meetings, however, it does not appear that the agendas were so far removed from the personal. The men who responded to the call to plan the organization may have been there to reach out to the community but they were still looking for change in their own lives. This point is illustrated by the fact that once in the meeting each person seemed to have a specific area on which his passion focused.

Because the emphasis in the formative state of planning rested on creating a shared understanding of the center's purpose, the diverse nature of the participants' beliefs slowed the process from the beginning. Regardless, the members of MAN continued to attend the planning sessions. This group included Mel Gray, Keith Olstad,

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<sup>16</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Cook, "The Men's Movement," *Minneapolis Tribune Magazine* 14 January 1978, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Keith Olstad and Mel Gray, a letter from The Men's Center Archives, 13 July 1976.

Frank Holmgren, Scott Bartell, and Hal Steiger. They were joined by Lance Egly, Paul Kraska, Paul Endres, Peter Blau, Chris Stixx, Jim Olson, Jeff Abbot, Jim Fitzgerald and Steve Smith. Together, this group of young, white, well-educated, middle class, men met at least once a month, sometimes more often, for the next six months to work through their differing ideas and outline the structure and purpose of a men's center.

During the month of July 1976, Keith Olstad introduced the group to the idea of the men's center that he had envisioned in 1975. From that point on, the group considered what types of calls a men's center might get for information, referral and counseling. As they generated ideas, they began to categorize them. They came up with eight different categories of calls: relationship and sexuality, feelings therapy, crisis intervention, medical, job related, sex roles, legal, and miscellaneous community information.<sup>19</sup> These categories are important because they reflect what the men who attended the planning sessions saw as men's issues in the 1970s. The ideas came from the participants' own experiences or were developed out of the consciousness raising groups. In both cases the issue was identified through the personal experience of men dealing with the issue. Now the goal was to transform that issue into a community solution; however, the diversity of concerns and solutions would be problematic.

While in fact, most of these issues were things with which all members of society struggle regardless of gender, it seems that what makes these men's issues for the planners was that they believed that men had a particular perspective on the issues simply because they were men. Moreover, they felt that in regard to these concerns men were

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Blau and Jim Fitzgerald, a letter from The Men's Center Archives, 29 July 1976.

relatively excluded from community support when confronted by problems in these areas. In the future this faith in the “brotherhood” of men would lead to difficulties as the members of The Men’s Center came to realize that often class and race had a greater impact on one’s beliefs than gender.

In August, the planning committee used their list of men's issues to shift discussion from general community issues to needs for education and public relations in those areas. Education and outreach had been a focal point of the proposal that had been presented to MAN in 1975. In the area of education members suggested workshops, media presentations, a men's issues speakers' bureau, guest speakers on women’s issues, financial planning (how to get by with less), and resources on the men’s movement issues as possible directions for the type of organization they were proposing. At this juncture, the town hall meetings were merely trying to generate ideas and consolidate them into a plan of action. The general sentiment of the town meetings was that for educational purposes the center must have a physical location, a place where study groups could form around issues and discuss them. In the area of public relations, the men suggested that entertainment such as plays, theater, a special retreat, and a place where sports and games could be organized would reach out to the community and draw them to the center. They also suggested that classes, seminars, and groups that deal with men and violence as well as a dialogue between men’s, women's and gay groups would be a positive role for the group that would attract attention from the community.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jim Fitzgerald, a letter from The Men’s Center Archives, 13 August 1976.

As the group began to conceptualize its role, purpose, and activities in the community, they began to realize that program development and advocacy on men's issues needed to play a significant role in the organization. They felt that this was important because in many cases the community was neither aware of the problems that men faced nor were they aware of the places they could find help. This organization was to be one such place and so program development and advocacy would help publicize the organization. While it is clear from the meeting notes that they understood the importance of these two elements in making their personal values a political agenda for the community, they also understood that this area had been the down fall for many of the nations largest men's centers.<sup>21</sup>

Most men's centers that formed across the country at this time were dominated by advocacy and special interest program development. These activities were the components that politicized most of the nation's men's centers and became divisive elements within them.<sup>22</sup> The Minneapolis men acknowledged the importance of advocacy but felt that there was less a need for a special department than an attitude or posture that should encompass all areas of the men's center. This illustrates how the men of the Minnesota group avoided a shift into the political spectrum. Issues such as gay rights, divorce issues, singles' lifestyles, patient rights, the ERA and employment were all identified as important issues but ones that ought to be pursued by ad hoc groups or discussed in specific consciousness raising groups that could cater to an issue.

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<sup>21</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Hank Bruns, an interview with the author, 3 August 1999. This conclusion was confirmed by discussions with Andy Mickel on 30 July 1999 and Jim Lovestar 9 August 1999.

In this instance, the organizers of the men's center made a conscious decision to avoid the divisive element of advocacy that was the hallmark of the personal becoming political. They felt that preventing any single issue from dominating the center in this manner was vital to avoiding political problems and infighting within the group that would limit the center's impact.<sup>23</sup> The policy created equal advocacy for all men's issues rather than any one particular issue and prevented what they saw as too much political action. As time went on, this policy moved from the realm of a mere guideline to a steadfast rule as members increasingly acknowledged the importance of keeping the center open to men of all beliefs, perspectives, and political positions.<sup>24</sup>

While this decision may have solved a problem faced by other centers like them, it created its own problem. This structure prevented the organization from gaining the attention from the community that could potentially make the center stronger in spite of divisiveness because it would bring funding and direction. Moreover, this stance would often force energetic members who held deep convictions on certain issues to leave the center and use their energy to create their own organizations.

In addition to developing a policy on advocacy, the group decided that program development had to remain open to any program that fulfilled men's needs. The center planners felt strongly that when men's needs were not being met, the center should be able to create something to address those needs or support efforts outside the center to fill the gaps for its members. The concept of developing new programs to fit the changing focus of men's issues has kept The Men's Center vital and relevant over the years. In

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<sup>23</sup> Keith Olstad, a letter from The Men's Center Archives, 27 August 1976.

some cases, its programs such as those on domestic abuse and AIDS were even ahead of their time. The only limitation that the committee placed on program development was that programs could not prevent other programs from functioning or dominate the men's center. For this reason, groups that got their start through the men's center such as the Domestic Abuse Program, the Minnesota Aids Project, and the Father's Resource Center were asked to split from the men's center when they became too large. Sometimes the split was amiable and the two organizations would maintain close contact such as with the Domestic Abuse Program and the Minnesota Aids Project. At other times the split was less congenial as with the Father's Resource Center. In this case, both sides seem to harbor hard feelings. Each of these three situations point out places where members of The Men's Center transformed the personal into political and found that The Men's Center's position on equal advocacy prevented it from continuing a formal relationship.

Program development raised the issue of identifying men's changing needs. One of the questions that the center planners faced was deciding who would determine what direction the center would go and how best to facilitate the achievement of future goals. They felt that there were two models available to accomplish this task. Either the center could be structured in a hierarchical manner where the person on top tells someone down the line what needed to be done, or they could create a model based on initiative. In this model, those most interested and capable carried out what needed to be done. The first model would provide solid organization; however, it might require checks and balances to see that power was not being abused and members were carrying out their tasks. The

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<sup>24</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

second model risked the possibility of disorder but guaranteed the enthusiasm of members working on tasks. The group decided that of the two models, an initiative based structure seemed to fit best with the members' current motivation levels.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it fit well with what many members at the time saw as a problem with how men worked in groups.<sup>26</sup> They believed that because men had traditionally worked within a hierarchical structure it had been part of the problem. The “initiative” model ultimately failed because rather than someone taking too much control, The Men’s Center often lacked leadership and direction. From time to time an individual would volunteer to lead the organization, but in most cases they did not receive the assistance from the membership necessary to complete the job. As a result these men frequently lost motivation and burnt out.

At the same time the collective structure was being discussed, a concern was raised on how to acquire funding while maintaining this alternative collective model. After all, most of the foundations that contributed money to non-profit organizations such as the one they were proposing were usually organized in a hierarchical manner. At this point, the planning committee felt that because they were brainstorming they did not have to resolve issues but merely raise them. The structure never became a controversial issue; however, the fact that the issue was even brought up illustrates the extent to which the group was considering the efficacy of what they were doing.

By the end of summer 1976, the town hall meetings shifted away from brainstorming sessions to constructing a model for the center and outlining a funding

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<sup>25</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

proposal. The goal was to distill their ideas into a manageable center concept, which could be articulated for potential funding groups. While the group had no specific organizations in mind for funding they initially targeted community foundations that were funding social service organizations. When this garnered little support they turned to corporate foundations. As this shift took place, they had to revise some of the goals of their funding proposal to focus on the problems of men at work rather than men in the home.

As the group organized their funding strategy, they set three short term goals. The first goal was to collect information from three groups the Minnesota Woman's Center, Sagaris, and Chrysalis. Each of these organizations was similar in purpose to the men's center they were proposing and as a result could be studied to find out how they were set up, funded, managed day to day, who they served, problems they encountered and future plans. Neither the Minnesota Woman's Center nor Sagaris are in existence, however, Chrysalis remains a center for women in need of support and services similar to The Men's Center.<sup>27</sup> This first goal of investigation produced very little in the way of meaningful information that might help the emerging men's center. In essence, the men who went to investigate were told that the women's centers did not support what the men's center was proposing and were not willing to assist them.<sup>28</sup> The response by the women's centers seems to have been based on their perception that the men's group was to be in opposition to their efforts in the women's movement. This issue of perception

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<sup>26</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Blau, a letter from The Men's Center Archives, 17 September 1976.

represents a reoccurring problem for The Men's Center as well as the national men's movement. While misperception itself did not destroy either The Men's Center or the national men's movement, the criticism they received as a result seems to indicate that their importance in the eyes of mainstream society may have been marginalized by it. This made it more difficult to achieve the transformation from the personal to the political which was one of the failures of the men's movement on both the local and national levels.

While the first goal did not further the process of creating the men's center, the second goal achieved greater success. The second goal was to begin planning for fund raising. In the fall of 1976, the men planning the men's center felt that there were six things that had to be decided in order to begin the process. What had to be done? Who was going to do it? How long would it take? Where would they go for funding? Who would draft the actual proposal? And finally, what would they call themselves? The group hoped that the first step of investigating the three women's groups might help them answer these questions more accurately and avoid pitfalls that they could not see from the point they were at in the development of the center.<sup>29</sup> When this did not pan out, they used what they knew from their work in the social service sector to guide them.

They determined that they needed to incorporate as a non-profit organization so that they could receive tax-exempt status. Then, they had to write a funding proposal for distribution to possible sources of funding. Both of these tasks began immediately. The

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<sup>28</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Blau , a letter from The Men's Center Archives, 17 September 1976.

process to incorporate and file for tax-exempt status was completed by 1 January 1977. In conjunction with the process of incorporating, a contest was held to determine the name for the center. Planning committee participants sent suggestions and The Men's Center was selected as the name of the organization.<sup>30</sup> Keith Olstad, Scott Bartell, and Peter Blau undertook the task of writing the funding proposal, which took a bit longer than incorporating and applying for tax-exempt status. By June of 1977, they had developed a readable proposal, which outlined the goals of the group, explained its rationale, and detailed the financial needs of the center.<sup>31</sup> This proposal was then sent to community and then corporate foundations in hopes of generating funds to run the center. As the first responses to the St. Paul and Minneapolis foundations returned negative, the group had to rework their proposal to emphasize the ways in which the organization would help the community itself not just the men within it. The idea that men needed help was a new idea since typically they were not the ones being oppressed. After this revision The Men's Center elicited greater attention from the community foundations and later on even received small amounts of funding. The notion that men needed help was more readily received by corporate foundations because they themselves were dominated by men and sought to help their "typical" employees live better lives and thus become more productive at the workplace. Once the funding proposal was targeted toward the business community the center received greater attention from these sources; however, funding remained a problem.

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Blau, a letter from The Men's Center Archives, 4 October 1976.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Blau, "TMC Proposes!" *Men Talk* June 1977, 1.

The third goal was to begin forming the center by tackling some of the ideas proposed during the town hall meetings.<sup>32</sup> After meeting for three months, the men who had attended the meetings regularly were anxious to begin the process of running a men's center rather than continue planning how they would create it. One unfortunate consequence of this decision was that once the men began to get involved in the various initiatives of goal three, the central focus of organizing and acquiring funds began to deteriorate. Rather than being the primary reason for gathering, organizing and funding became merely another activity of The Men's Center. This is not to suggest that the group did not progress but rather they made a subtle change in approach that took them in a new direction. The three initiatives that took shape were the therapy collective of support groups, the men's resource book collective, and the newsletter collective. Each committee was referred to as a collective reflecting the non-hierarchical nature of the organization. It seems more than coincidental that the organization would embrace this term in the late seventies at the same time the United States was softening its attitude toward the Soviet Union during *détente*. Even more striking is the fact that the non-hierarchical structure and the use of the term collective would disappear during the more conservative era of the early 1980s as the nation's attitudes toward the Soviet Union hardened. Regardless of these future developments, The Men's Center was on its way.

The 1970s ushered in a new era transformed by the decade that had preceded it. The men who found their way to consciousness raising groups uncovered important issues that they realized were not just important to them but important to many men. In

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Blau, a letter from The Men's Center Archives, 17 September 1976.

many parts of the country, this led men to form men's centers that tried to politicize these issues. In Minnesota the men who came together between 1973 and 1977, like men across the country, began discussing issues germane to their lives in consciousness raising groups. They too saw that these issues were important to men in their communities and sought to bring their ideas to a larger venue. Unlike men across the country, the men who came together in Minnesota turned away from political activism and toward community activism. Between 1975 and 1977, empowered by their experience with consciousness raising, these men forged a concept of a men's support center out of their knowledge of social and community services separate from political causes. By January of 1977, they had incorporated into a non-profit organization, created a funding proposal and identified three concrete activities designed to carry their message to men and women in their community.

## Chapter III

### THE MEN'S CENTER

In February of 1977, the first issue of the monthly newsletter of The Men's Center, *Men Talk*, was published. It marked the official debut of the newly incorporated community organization The Men's Center. While this publication represented the beginning of the organization, much planning and organizing had already been put into getting it off the ground. By the spring of 1977, the planning committee that had been meeting since the summer of 1976 to organize a men's center had created a physical center, a newsletter, and had begun to put together a men's resource book. From 1977 to 1980, these three initiatives served as the focal point for the organization and its members as they worked toward making their personal beliefs a legitimate cause for the community.

In spite of their effort to prevent political beliefs from tearing the organization apart, the activities of The Men's Center between 1977 and 1980 were plagued by disagreements over direction and policy based on members' personal beliefs. Rather than giving in to one perspective or the other, the group responded as they had during the planning phase, turning away from the most political and controversial causes to maintain the vitality of the organization. In an effort to facilitate their apolitical stance and yet still attempt to produce meaningful change in the community, The Men's Center became a

part of the network of social services that existed in Minnesota at the time. Yet still by the end of the decade controversy would lead The Men's Center into its first low point and force them to adopt a new policy for the 1980s.

### The Center

The physical men's center was the heart of all of the activities that were sponsored or hosted by The Men's Center. Initially the center was located at the University Lutheran Center near the University of Minnesota. As the membership grew and the organization could afford it, The Men's Center moved from the University Lutheran Center to a vacated convent called the Christus Center in south Minneapolis in 1978 where it remained until 1980. At the Christus Center The Men's Center found the type of home that the founders of The Men's Center had had in mind. The location had a room for meetings, a phone, and an answering machine.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the physical center was to bring together and acknowledge a community of men in the hopes that doing so would benefit the interests and ideals of humankind. This meant that the center would be responsible for carrying out the education and outreach goals outlined during the center's proposal. Essentially these activities were support groups, attending and planning conferences and social gatherings.

Support groups were the largest and most important function of The Men's Center in the early stages. There were two types of groups, open and closed groups. Open groups were groups that met at regular scheduled times each week and could be attended by anyone. From 1977 to 1980, the open group met on Thursday evenings at The Men's

Center. This open group would eventually be referred to as a "Drop-In" group. The nature of these groups was such that men interested in discussing men's issues, men's liberation, or things that they were struggling with in their life could come to the meeting and do so. A facilitator, trained in leading supportive discussions would be present and men, by discussing these issues, could begin to acknowledge the source of their problems or difficulties in their lives much in the same way consciousness raising groups functioned during MAN. They were advertised in most issues of *Men Talk* as either an open group or a drop-in group.<sup>2</sup> Because The Men's Center continually struggled with funding, the organization was not able to advertise outside the magazine to a great extent. Rather they relied on the publicity they received from conferences and seminars which were often covered by the local papers.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as the support groups became more and more professional, The Men's Center received an increasingly large number of its members from referrals through The United Way. The fact that these groups were open to new participants kept them fresh, lively and well attended.<sup>4</sup>

The second type of group was the closed group. Closed groups were different from open groups in that closed groups formed around specific issues whereas the open groups were open to any discussion. Also, closed groups, once formed, were not open to new members. These groups often dealt with sensitive issues such as abuse,

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

<sup>2</sup> "Men's Events," *Men Talk* February 1977. The open groups were also advertised in subsequent issues under the heading Men's Events or Announcements.

<sup>3</sup> For an example of this see Bob Ehlert, "Defining Masculinity in the 1980's," *Star Tribune Magazine*, 6 October 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999 and Paul Kraska "Getting Involved," *Men Talk* November 1977, 6.

homosexuality, and bisexuality where the anonymity of the member seeking help was particularly important.<sup>5</sup> The Men's Center's role in these groups was simply to announce that groups were forming around specific issues and to direct interested individuals to a contact person.<sup>6</sup> Once there were enough people interested, The Men's Center would contact the people and set up the initial meeting with a facilitator. From that point on the group would set its own meeting times and places without informing the center. This served two functions. First, it protected the anonymity of the participant. Secondly, it freed The Men's Center from responsibility of maintaining the group and organizing its meetings. This alleviated much of the cost for maintaining the group. Since its leaders were also members of it, the group could be held off-site with little or no connection to The Men's Center. The fact that the closed groups were so disconnected created a problem for The Men's Center in terms of its community outreach. With its participants so autonomous the organization could not articulate a cohesive agenda or focus. This prevented the personal from becoming political. Because the groups had organized around a specific issue, it was that issue which concerned them the most. Rather than focusing on the health and well being of men in general, the closed groups tended to concentrate their energy on their particular problem or issue.

Because these groups were not announced and, once they were started by The Men's Center had little or no contact with them, it is difficult to know how widely they

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<sup>5</sup> Jim Lovestar, a telephone conversation with the author, 9 August 1999.

<sup>6</sup> "Announcements," *Men Talk* April 1977, 6. "Men's Events," *Men Talk* April 1977, 7. Examples of announcements organizing closed groups can be found throughout past issues of *Men Talk*, the previous citations provide an example in which two announcements can be found. One is for a group for battering men. The other is for a mixed bisexual group.

were attended or how many were in existence. The regular appearance of announcements in the newsletter, however, suggests that men were contacting The Men's Center on a regular basis in an attempt to join these types of groups. The success of both the open and the closed groups illustrates the progress that The Men's Center achieved in reaching out to the community and helping those who were looking for assistance. Moreover, the support groups created the first links between The Men's Center and the network of social services that existed in Minnesota. As the groups became increasingly formalized as support groups, The Men's Center was acknowledged for its work in helping men who were hurting by being placed in the United Way's directory for social service organizations known as *First Call for Help*. This accomplishment helped to legitimize The Men's Center as an organization and attract new participants. While being included in the directory did not bring any funding directly to The Men's Center, the increased publicity gained by being included brought references from social workers whose clients could pay for support group services.

In addition to establishing open and closed discussion groups, The Men's Center reached out to the community between 1977 and 1980 by sending men to conferences and eventually hosting their own regional conferences on men's issues. The first interaction with conferences that members of The Men's Center had was at the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Conference on Men and Masculinity held in Des Moines, Iowa during the spring of 1977. The conference brought together 350 men and 15 women from all parts of the country to discuss issues relevant to the men's movement. These issues included rape, sexism, racism, gay and straight men in the movement, and local versus national

organizing.<sup>7</sup> At least five of the members of the Minneapolis group attended. In their reflections on the event, it is apparent that from the conference they learned valuable lessons about the men's movement that affirmed the direction that the group was heading and solidified their policies on outreach and advocacy.

The first lesson they learned was that there were major ideological differences between members of the men's movement. The second lesson they learned was that among the ideologies people could be categorized into two groups. One group consisted of those who thought the men's movement was a political movement focused on social change. The other group consisted of those who thought the men's movement was a movement of men making personal change so that eventually there would be social change.<sup>8</sup> This second group matched much more closely the goals of The Men's Center, and as a result, it became the dominant faction within the organization. Unlike many of the local organizations within the women's movement and other men's organizations, The Men's Center consolidated its apolitical ideology and stuck to it. If member's beliefs did not fit with the center as it was they were encouraged to start their own organization. This in part explains why The Men's Center has been able to maintain itself for so long.

From these two lessons the leadership of The Men's Center seems to have drawn the conclusion that they must continue to remain open to all men from every political perspective and life experience. Further, there would never be a mass political movement from a national organization because no national organization could bridge together the political differences within the movement. As far as The Men's Center was concerned,

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Holmgren, "Des Moines in Retrospect, Part I" *Men Talk* May 1977, 6-8.

any national organization that would be formed would only be useful to the extent that it would help to connect members of the men's movement who did have similar beliefs and it would draw national attention to the topic of men's issues. When the 4<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Men and Masculinity was announced later that same year, The Men's Center again sent members; however, from that point, the national conferences on men and masculinity became only of cursory interest to The Men's Center.<sup>9</sup>

To the members of The Men's Center the issues that the national organization identified seemed too theoretical and distant from the local needs of its members and community. Instead, The Men's Center became increasingly interested in holding its own regional conferences on topics of interest to men in the Midwest. The Men's Center's decision to move away from the national movement indicates that the national men's movement was not transforming the personal into the political because Minnesota men could no longer identify with it. If the national movement had been successful at turning the personal issues of its members into the political issues of the organization than The Men's Center should have felt increasingly connected to the national movement; however this did not happen. Juxtaposed with the development of the women's movement, which became increasingly cohesive at the national level, this trend points out a major difference between the two movements.

In some respects the fact that The Men's Center pulled away from the national men's movement is an example of the personal becoming political in that The Men's

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<sup>8</sup> Frank Holmgren, "Des Moines in Retrospect, Part II" *Men Talk* June 1977, 5-7.

<sup>9</sup> "St. Louis Men's Conference," *Men Talk* December 1977, 8.

Center was reaching out to the larger regional community through the conferences. On the other hand it also serves as evidence that the group was pulling away from national organizations which might have facilitated the social change that they and others like them were seeking. The fact that the national organization could not voice an agenda that resonated for all of its members points out the difficulty that the national organizations faced in attempting to articulate a common agenda for the men's movement. This reality has continually limited the efforts to create a national men's movement because it has prevented the personal from becoming political.

The first regional conference held by The Men's Center was proposed in September 1977. In a letter to the members of The Men's Center, Floyd Winecoff pointed out that hosting a conference would bring men into The Men's Center as well as provide members with concrete ways of getting involved with the center.<sup>10</sup> In response to his call for organizers, he and five other members of The Men's Center formed a conference collective and began planning a regional men's conference in cooperation with the Minneapolis Community College. The conference planners argued that the focus of the conference should be breaking down masculine stereotypes on an intergenerational basis and having fun because until men realized the joy of male friendship they could not achieve the social change that The Men's Center sought to accomplish. They encouraged men of all ages to attend and encouraged fathers to bring their children and set up day care activities to facilitate this.<sup>11</sup> "Man: Choosing and

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<sup>10</sup> "Letters," *Men Talk* September 1977, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Kraska, "Regional Men's Conference Cosponsored with MCC," *Men Talk* April/May 1978, 2.

Changing" became the theme for the three-day conference which was held from October 6 through October 8 1978. While conference planners had worked to provide sessions that would educate men who attended on breaking down stereotypes, the focus on having fun became the most salient feature of the conference. This was disappointing for organizers on one level because the men's movement in the region only "inched ahead" as a result of the conference.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the first Midwest regional conference was a huge success for The Men's Center because it raised awareness of men's issues in the community. Men and women attended in great numbers and brought their children. Nearly 400 people, including sixty women, attended the conference. As a result of the conference, The Men's Center was able to add all of the names of the conference attendees who were not already a part of the list to the mailing list of The Men's Center. This in turn brought in new members to The Men's Center. The conference was also a financial success and helped to defray some of the costs of running The Men's Center.<sup>13</sup> The 1978 Midwest regional conference accomplished the goal of reaching out to the community in a nonpolitical way and set a precedent for activities in The Men's Center. From this point further conferences were seen as a vital part of The Men's Center.

While support groups and conferences were an important formal part of The Men's Center, social activities were an important informal part of The Men's Center. For the leaders of The Men's Center bringing the community together did not just mean education and support. Rather, it included friendship among the members of the

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<sup>12</sup> Craig Wilkins, "Support, excitement generated by first Midwest regional men's meeting," *Men Talk* Spring 1979 6.

<sup>13</sup> Andy Mickel, an interview with the author, 2 August 1999.

community. In an attempt to foster congenial relationships among its members who often had significant differences in experience and perspective, The Men's Center from time to time held social gatherings such as potluck picnics, coffeehouses and weekend retreats. Unlike the support groups and conferences, men's issues were the backdrop for the meetings but the primary purpose was to enjoy the friendship of those who came. At these get-togethers, members and their families talked, listened to live musicians and played games.<sup>14</sup> These meetings though moderately attended had a positive effect on the organization as a whole as the members got to know each other on a personal level.

As far as the physical center of The Men's Center was concerned, by 1980, the organization had come a long way toward meeting its goals. It had established a physical location that allowed it to house its support groups and provide an answering machine for inquiries into The Men's Center. Support groups were steadily growing in number. The 1978 conference had been a success and members were anxious to host another. The number of social activities was minimal but the ones that were held were enjoyed by all who attended. Essentially, the only problems that the community center portion of The Men's Center had were funding and organization. The funding proposal that had been drafted during 1976 and completed in 1977 only generated moderate interest. In fall of 1977 both the Bush Foundation and the Minneapolis Foundation rejected The Men's Center proposal, which asked each foundation to fund a portion of their large first year budget proposal.<sup>15</sup> The initial request was for \$79,000 to get the organization off and

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<sup>14</sup> Gary North, "It Was Good!" *Men Talk* May 1977, p. 5, and Michael Allen, "Picnic Reflections," *Men Talk* June 1977, 8.

<sup>15</sup> "Local Foundation Rejects TMC Grant Request," *Men Talk* November 1977, 1.

running after which the amount would be reduced to under \$30,000.<sup>16</sup> After being rejected by the Northwest Foundation and several others, the Otto Bremer Foundation of St. Paul provided The Men's Center with its first modest grant of \$4,000 to fund its community education and outreach activities.<sup>17</sup> This first grant provided an important step toward funding some of the activities proposed by The Men's Center and allowed them to hire a part-time education coordinator. The grant was significant because it was proof that the community was beginning to see the value of the activities that The Men's Center was providing. However, the grant was not enough to get the center up and running in the manner desired.

The awarding of the grant did help to curtail one of the growing problems of The Men's Center, lack of organization. The grant allowed The Men's Center to hire a paid staff member to organize the community education and outreach of the center on a part-time basis. As volunteers came and went communication had begun to break down. The initiative based model that had been the backbone of the organization from its formation did not provide the structure and accountability necessary to complete all of the tasks that needed to be done. By the end of 1977, several members began to point out that the lack of direction was lessening the impact of The Men's Center on the community.<sup>18</sup> Although the community education coordinator would help provide the organization missing from The Men's Center, it was a temporary position lasting only from the

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<sup>16</sup> The Men's Center Proposal, 1977 from the archives of The Men's Center.

<sup>17</sup> Craig Wilkins, "TMC Awarded Grant from Bremer," *Men Talk* March 1978, 2.

<sup>18</sup> "TMC Annual Meeting is Dec 12," *Men Talk* December 1977, 2.

summer of 1978 to the end of the year. By the beginning of 1979, the problem would resurface and continue until 1980.

### *Men Talk: The Newsletter*

As part of their goal to establish consistent communication to their members, The Men's Center created a monthly newsletter titled *Men Talk*. A collective of members interested in establishing a forum for communication on men's issues ran the newsletter that was published from 1977-1980. Subsequent groups or individual members continued to publish the newsletter in one format or another with a fair amount of consistency from that point all the way to the present.

*Men Talk* replaced the monthly letters that had communicated the activities of the planning committee prior to the incorporation of The Men's Center. Whereas the monthly letters were simply elaborate minutes from the planning sessions, the members involved in putting out *Men Talk* during the first few years were interested in publishing a more formal newsletter that would appeal to men interested in men's issues, members and non-members alike. In the first issue, the collective explained that their goal was to make *Men Talk* a forum for meaningful dialogue among men committed to liberation. They argued that through open and honest dialogue all who read *Men Talk* would experience a certain amount of consciousness raising. To that end, they encouraged the participation of readers to create the dialogue and were open to all perspectives. In addition to letters and articles that conveyed feelings and ideas, the collective invited poets, artists, and cartoonists to submit their work as well. The goal was to create a newsletter that was interesting as well as informative whether or not one was an active

participant.<sup>19</sup> Early on this effort yielded passionate articles by members of The Men's Center. One of the best examples of this was published in the second issue of *Men Talk*. In a piece titled "Birth of the Phoenix," Paul Kraska explained his excitement about the formation of The Men's Center and attempted to articulate a vision for the new organization.

We are men who believe that we and other people must no longer relate, or participate without comment when others relate, to women and gay men as second class persons. We believe that sexism and sex roles hurt us as well as women. We have accepted the impossible male image as our ideal for too long – that image is that: real men don't cry, show any emotion, or have any weaknesses; real men are successful, are leaders of men, and are always rational with words and thoughts that can be organized into linear logic; and real men are handsome, the masters of women, and aloof from other men. We have competed in every arena – sexually, socially, and professionally by trying to be in charge all the time. We have succeeded in isolating ourselves.<sup>20</sup>

"The Birth of the Phoenix" was typical of the type of article that the *Men Talk* collective sought in its early stages. As enthusiasm waned these articles became less frequent. After 1980, they almost disappeared until new members began publishing a rejuvenated *Men Talk* in the mid 1980s.

While the initial ideas generated by the *Men Talk* collective yielded interesting and exciting issues, the collective faced one major problem time after time from 1977 to 1980. Their conception of what the newsletter ought to be was far too ambitious given the limited resources of the men trying to accomplish it. The newsletter they were proposing would be published monthly and would contain several letters and articles per month as well as all of the announcements and minutes of The Men's Center. When

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Holmgren, "What is 'Men Talk'?" *Men Talk* February 1977, 1.

members did not submit articles or letters, the members of the *Men Talk* collective were responsible for providing them. This is evident insofar as the number of different people submitting articles to the newsletter was usually four or five and often they were the same four or five who had submitted all of the articles the previous month. Moreover, they were the same members who were responsible for all of the other tasks that went into preparing the newsletter. While they were all talented and dedicated individuals, they were not full time journalists and did not always have the time to write the articles necessary. As a result some of the issues were rather lengthy and others were very short. As the level of motivation of the collective declined some months were skipped and there were frequent gaps in the issues after the first six months.

Not only was the newsletter too ambitious in terms of the amount of material necessary for a monthly issue, it was also too ambitious in terms of formatting and typesetting for printing. In 1977, the members were forced to type each issue out by hand on an electric typewriter. Making things even worse was the fact that none of the members owned an electric typewriter. And, once the newsletter had been typed, copied, and collated each of the copies had to be addressed by hand. This posed a significant problem when, by August of 1977, the *Men Talk* collective was circulating about 750 copies a month.<sup>21</sup>

The final obstacle making the goal of the *Men Talk* collective too ambitious was the fact that only about twenty-five of the recipients had paid the voluntary fee to receive

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Kraska, "Birth of the Phoenix," *Men Talk*, April 1977, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Holmgren, "Men's Liberation: Organizing Personal Politics," *Men Talk* August 1977, 7.

the newsletter.<sup>22</sup> While this would change when The Men's Center instituted a subscription rate for the newsletter of three dollars per year, the collective was still consistently under funded. Advertising began to bring in more revenue during 1978 and 1979 allowing the collective to print higher quality issues; however, the lack of revenue still prevented them from achieving their high goals.

In spite of the problems plaguing the *Men Talk* collective, the group managed to put out the newsletter on a fairly consistent monthly basis. Furthermore as time went on, the issues became more and more professional looking as they found better methods of preparing the type, selecting paper, and laying out the issues. By the summer of 1978 many of the issues included poems, pictures and cartoons. While things had improved greatly in all areas since 1977, the problems of funding the publication continued and in the summer of 1978, the *Men Talk* collective faced a decision that affected not only their own well-being but the well-being of the entire organization.

In December of 1977 when hopes for funding were at their dimmest, a member of the proposal collective sent a copy of the funding proposal to the Playboy Foundation. In the summer of 1978, Hugh Hefner's organization responded positively to the funding proposal. While they were not interested in any of the community outreach activities of the community center, they were interested in *Men Talk*. Responding to some of the financial problems that the *Men Talk* collective had experienced, the Playboy Foundation

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

offered to publish two issues of *Men Talk* in a magazine format.<sup>23</sup> The mere fact that one of the members of the funding collective had sent the proposal to the Playboy Foundation created a stir. Some of the members of The Men's Center were in favor of taking anything they could get from anyone. They assumed a pragmatic approach arguing that even though The Men's Center did not agree with Playboy's activities, at least the money they donated would go to a good cause.<sup>24</sup>

In the end, after lengthy debate, the board of The Men's Center accepted the offer from the Playboy Foundation but did so in a way that alienated many members.<sup>25</sup> In June of 1978, in one of their best issues yet, the *Men Talk* collective announced that as the result of a donation from the Playboy Foundation next month they would begin a two month experiment with a new format. The new format would be longer and would be published on a bimonthly schedule. The increased size and length of the publication would accommodate the lengthy "think" pieces that members had enjoyed in the past as well as more personal and intimate articles about men, their feelings, and their experiences.<sup>26</sup>

Accepting the funds from the Playboy Foundation was upsetting enough for many members of The Men's Center. The fact that an organization, founded on the basis that input from its members was essential, had decided to make this dramatic decision without opening it up to discussion from the group was, for many, unconscionable. In a letter to

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Kraska, a letter to Margaret Standish, executive director of the Playboy Foundation, from the archives of The Men's Center and Margaret Standish, a letter to Paul Kraska, from the archives of The Men's Center.

<sup>24</sup> "Funding hopes dim for TMC proposal," *Men Talk* December 1977, 6.

<sup>25</sup> "Letters: Men Talk, Yes, Playboy, No," *Men Talk* July/August 1978, 2.

the *Men Talk* collective a member articulated a sentiment that was held by many members of The Men's Center.

It feels bad to not have my (our) love/hate feelings toward the Playboy myth explored as part of the grant considerations. But it mostly feels bad to sense that I don't know you through your magazine as I thought I did -- now that I have seen funding from Playboy come along and seen you accept it apparently without discussion, I am unable to identify with *Men Talk* as I did before.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of the decision to accept the funds from the Playboy Foundation without the open discussion of its readers and members of The Men's Center, both *Men Talk* and The Men's Center experienced a significant decline in support. Many of the members who felt alienated by the situation left the organization.<sup>28</sup> A time that should have been marked by the positive way things were falling into place, like the first grant for education and outreach activities, a successful regional conference, and a swiftly improving newsletter, turned into a low point for the organization.

### The Men's Survival Resource Book

In addition to creating a physical center and publishing *Men Talk*, the third major initiative undertaken by The Men's Center from 1977 to 1980 was the men's resource book. During the town hall meetings to create The Men's Center, the center planner's felt that one of its needs that men faced was a lack of information on men's issues. Their idea was to create a male version of *Our Bodies, Our Selves* that included information on

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<sup>26</sup> The Men Talk Collective, "Men Talk Plans New Format," *Men Talk* June 1978, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Bob Spottswood, "Dear Men Talk Collective," *Men Talk* July/August 1978, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Andy Mickel, an interview with the author, 2 August 1999.

everything from health and sexuality to legal information for men.<sup>29</sup> Twin Cities women had done a Minnesota version for women in 1976 called the "Women's Network Directory."<sup>30</sup> Along with the information on men's health issues, the editors of the book also sought to call attention to the male condition, providing information for men undergoing change and help remove role limitations for men and women.<sup>31</sup> This was an enormous task.

Work on the book had begun even before The Men's Center officially incorporated and was so intensive that the collective nearly took on a life of its own as the editors organized the writing of each article and tried to acquire a publisher.<sup>32</sup> For over three years, six members of The Men's Center bore the brunt of most of the organizing - Chris Cooke, Peter Blau, Leslie Montgomery, Jerry Tucciarone, Paul Endres, and Guntis Kupers. They set up a fund within the accounts of The Men's Center to be used for acquiring a publisher. Actually getting men to write for the book was relatively easy because there were so many men in the area anxious to help with men's issues in a public forum such as the book. As a result, the book was completed in late 1977 but the collective could not find a publisher interested in taking a risk on such an unprecedented endeavor. In the end, *The Men's Survival Resource Book* was published in 1978 under the name M.S.R.B. Press and sold out of The Men's Center.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

<sup>30</sup> Cynthia Boyd, "Book offers resources to men who are searching for help," *St. Paul Pioneer Press Magazine* 8 March 1979, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Endres ed., *The Men's Survival Resource Book* (Minneapolis: M.S.R.B. Press, 1979), I.

<sup>32</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

<sup>33</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999.

While *The Men's Survival Resource Book* met with only moderate success in terms of book sales, members of The Men's Center and men who came to drop-in groups found the book to be a wonderful source of information that had not been readily available prior to its publication. By 1979, the members of the Men's Resource Book collective had accomplished what they had set out to do. They had created a valuable reference guide for men in their community and helped to educate them on men's issues.

### The End of an Era

*The Men's Resource Survival Book* was completed around the same time the other initiatives were also experiencing certain amounts of success as well. By the fall of 1978, The Men's Center had received its first grant, hired its first employee to direct community education and outreach and was holding the first Midwest Regional Conference on men's issues. *Men Talk* had become a professional looking newsletter that conveyed current ideas on men's issues as well as information about The Men's Center to its readers which numbered around 750. These successes combined with the publication of the *Men's Resource Survival Book* should have made the fall of 1978 the high point of The Men's Center between 1977 and 1980. In some respects it was. Looking back on these accomplishments they stand among the most remarkable activities in the history of The Men's Center. At the time, however, The Men's Center was experiencing its first period of collapse; the end of a short a cycle of active member involvement that resulted in member burnout followed by inactivity.

From 1976 to the fall of 1978, the most active members of The Men's Center were limited to a small group of individuals, between ten and twenty-five, who were

responsible for the initial incorporation of The Men's Center. These same men had carried out the first three initiatives forming the physical men's center, writing and publishing *Men Talk*, and editing and publishing *Men's Survival Resource Book*. Some of them had been working on The Men's Center for three or more years in addition to working or going to school full time. By 1978, the activities and organization had burnt out most of the original group. The low level of motivation that followed combined with the controversy over the acceptance of funding from the Playboy Foundation sent The Men's Center into a period of decline that lasted until 1980. Member involvement fell, social activities were minimal, and publication of *Men Talk* virtually disappeared after the spring 1979 issue.<sup>34</sup>

The Men's Center had accomplished a great deal during its first two years of existence, but during its third and fourth it clung to life. Support groups were the only initiative keeping it alive. By January of 1981, the beginning of The Men's Center's fifth year, changes in the organization had to be made if it was to continue.

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<sup>34</sup> Andy Mickel, an interview with the author, 2 August 1999.

## Chapter IV

### CONSOLIDATION AND CONFLICT: THE 1980S

From the spring of 1979 to January of 1981, The Men's Center did not publish an issue of *Men Talk*. The controversies, activities, and constant search for financial support had drained the initial membership. Many of original members left the organization or drastically reduced their involvement. In spite of this decline, the support groups continued to function. Social service agencies continued to refer men who needed to work on their relationships with other men or who could benefit from the support of men. These new faces rejuvenated the organization and kept it alive. At the same time a new leadership took over for the founders of The Men's Center. They brought with them new methods of leadership and new ideas about the direction of The Men's Center. The combination of the new men, new leadership, and new ideas strengthened the center as they transformed it into a more business-orientated organization. At the same time this introduced new problems as the old goals and new goals of the organization clashed. At times this threatened the organization as The Men's Center moved away from the participatory leadership style on which it had been founded. The eighties for The Men's Center were a period of consolidation and conflict.

### A New Type of Men's Center

In January of 1981 Robert Muscala took over as the Chairman of the Board of The Men's Center. From the beginning, his businesslike approach was apparent. In the chairman's address in the January issue of *The Men's Center Monthly Newsletter*, Muscala announced a restructuring of the financial operation.<sup>1</sup> This included a more formal fee assessed to participants of support groups, a stricter subscription-based distribution of the newsletter, and an increased number of workshops offered on a fee basis.

While these monetary changes were a significant deviation from the original policies of The Men's Center, the shift in approach went further than a simple adjustment of the financial structure. Muscala brought an element of pragmatism to the organization. Graduate students from the University of Minnesota had organized the original men's center. They all had similar backgrounds, philosophies and problems. They had sought to create an organization free from hierarchy that would improve the community in which they lived. As they grew older or moved on, the organization as a whole aged and came to the realization that in order to survive The Men's Center had to let go of some of the high-minded philosophies on which it had been founded. As a result, the use of the word collective, referring to the various committees nearly disappeared. Perhaps this was a result of the hardening of Cold War feelings during the early 1980s. Reagan came to power. Détente ended. The nation turned away from the more relaxed attitude toward

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Muscala, "Centering the Men's Center: TMC Board Chairs Perspective," *The Men's Center Monthly Newsletter* January 1981, 1-2.

the Soviet Union as the baby boomers grew up. Regardless, after 1980, only a very few of the founding members continued to use the term.

In addition to the changes in method of leadership, the issues that The Men's Center tried to confront changed. For it to survive it had to adapt to the needs of the members of the organization. These needs were different than they had been during the 1970s. Most of the members in the early eighties were coming from failed marriages and relationships or were struggling with their careers. They were not graduate students struggling to make a name for themselves. They were middle class professionals who had embraced mainstream ideals but were struggling. Muscala, realizing this, argued that the center had to change "its West Bank Counterculture image so it becomes o.k. for 'short haired, wing-tipped, meat-eaters' to feel welcome."<sup>2</sup> This meant that during the early 1980s The Men's Center shied away from volatile political issues even more than it had during the 1970s. The center was not necessarily more conservative than it had been in the 1970s, but the nation was more conservative and as a result the issues that most middle class men were dealing with were more conservative.

As the members who created the organization began to fade to the background it is clear that The Men's Center had evolved into something different from when it began; however, the early eighties also represents an affirmation of the organization's importance to the community. Its ability to adapt is also a testament to the new political tenor of the times and illustrates the flexibility of the organization. As its membership grew older and moved on to different stages of life, the center adapted to their needs.

The leadership of The Men's Center seemed to realize that catering to middle class professionals was a more profitable venture than catering to the needs of graduate students. Moreover, corporations were more willing to donate funds to organizations that served their employees.

The extent to which The Men's Center began to cater to the corporate middle class element of society at this point is illustrated by its shift toward assertiveness training. Whereas in the 1970s Warren Farrell's notion of the liberated man had been the mantra of the organization, Herb Goldberg and his concept of the new male became the focal point of the mainstream ideology of the organization. Goldberg's books *The Hazards of Being Male* and *The New Male* discussed the new male-female relationships and the role men ought to play in that relationship.<sup>3</sup> They affirmed assertiveness training as a method for participating in relationships without oppressing women but also without stripping men of what was good in them. This appealed to the middle class corporate membership of the organization and thus became an important part of the center's activities.

#### The Bill Cox Era: Assertiveness and Corporations

In January of 1981, along with the restructuring of the financial operation, Muscala announced that the board of The Men's Center would create a new position to oversee the day to day operations of the center. The man appointed to the newly created

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<sup>2</sup> "Wider Men's Advocacy Role Urged for Men's Center," *The Men's Center Monthly Newsletter* February 1981, 1.

position of director of The Men's Center, Bill Cox, facilitated the shift toward assertiveness training.<sup>4</sup> Bill Cox was a psychologist who had been a member of The Men's Center from the beginning and who had established himself as a men's counselor. His position of director was created to facilitate effective and professional counseling services for men as well as to find funding sources for The Men's Center.<sup>5</sup>

Under Cox's leadership from January 1981 to May of 1983, The Men's Center consistently published *The Men's Center* newsletter, expanded the number of support groups, trained new facilitators and organized various retreats and activities.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the organization received several grants, which facilitated further growth. In July of 1981 The Men's Center was awarded a \$7,000 grant from The Minneapolis Foundation to pay Bill Cox a salary and expand the center's office space.<sup>7</sup> In September of the same year, The Minneapolis Foundation donated another \$1,000 to hire an administrative assistant.<sup>8</sup> The General Mills Foundation contributed \$2,500 for the creation of new programs focused on issues of corporate men such as midlife crises, career plateauing, denial of feelings, and coping with the changing expectations of women.<sup>9</sup> These issues were identified through a meeting organized by The Men's Center, sponsored by the Honeywell Corporation that included line and human resource managers of other major

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<sup>3</sup> Herb Goldberg, *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege* (New York: Nash Pub., 1976) and *The New Male* (New York: Nash Pub., 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Muscala, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Hank Bruns, an interview with the author, 3 August 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Lovestar, a telephone conversation with the author, 9 August 1999.

<sup>7</sup> "TMC Receives \$7,000 Grant from Foundation," *The Men's Center* July 1981, 1.

<sup>8</sup> "Grant Creates Funds for TMC Secretary," *The Men's Center* September 1981, 1.

<sup>9</sup> "TMC Receives \$2,500 from General Mills" *The Men's Center* March 1982, 1.

Twin Cities corporations.<sup>10</sup> In spring of 1983 Investors Diversified Services, a nationwide financial services firm based in Minneapolis, donated \$1,000 for on going expenses incurred by The Men's Center. The Men's Center's openness to corporate men's issues brought in funds and encouraged further development in this area.

In addition to funding from corporations, the growth of assertiveness training as a result of the popularity of Goldberg's books allowed The Men's Center to capitalize on the new trends in gender relationships. It offered an array of assertiveness training workshops and received local recognition by the media. The NBC affiliate in Minneapolis, channel 11, ran a special by Dr. Michael Breen on "The Minnesota Male: Fragile."<sup>11</sup> *The Skyway News*, a newspaper distributed in the skyway system of Minneapolis ran an article on The Men's Center based on an interview with Bill Cox and publicized the services of the center.<sup>12</sup> *The Minneapolis/St. Paul Magazine* ran an extensive article about men's relationships in which The Men's Center was acknowledged and Bill Cox appeared on the ABC affiliate's television show "Twin Cities Today on 4 June 1981."<sup>13</sup> On 28 June 1981, *Minneapolis Tribune* columnist Robert Smith published an article that typified The Men's Center of the early 1980s. It described a man, age forty-six, who had been married for twenty-five years. The man felt that his life had come to a dead end in terms of his corporate job and his marriage and counseling were not helping. In the article Smith argued that the man had come to this dead end because he had let his life become narrowed to his wife and his job. Smith pointed out

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<sup>10</sup> "TMC to Explore How to Meet Needs of Corporate Men," *The Men's Center* January 1982, 1.

<sup>11</sup> "The Men's Center in The News," *The Men's Center Monthly Newsletter* January 1981, 2.

<sup>12</sup> "TMC in the news . . ." *The Men's Center* March/April 1981, 3.

that The Men's Center provided at that time assistance for men like the one in his article.

A statement from Bill Cox included in the article supports the notion that in the early

1980s The Men's Center consolidated its focus to the mainstream man and his problems:

We are one of only three centers in the nation that deals with mainstream men going through life changes. Men have been somewhat forgotten when it comes to help organizations. We exist to aid mainstream men look (*sic*) at themselves and their changing roles in relation to other men, women and children.<sup>14</sup>

By the spring of 1983, The Men's Center had evolved into a stable social services organization that supported middle class men going through life changes through drop-in groups, assertiveness training, and other varied activities. While this was profoundly different from the initial organization found in the mid-to-late seventies, The Men's Center was making a positive impact on its community.

Bill Cox was a large part of the success that The Men's Center experienced during the three-year period from 1981 to 1983. In 1983, however, Bill Cox fell out of favor with the leadership of The Men's Center for two reasons. First, despite his success in gathering media attention and financial support, Cox had failed to attain any large grants like the \$7,000 grant from the Minneapolis Foundation that had paid his salary for a good portion of the time he had spent at The Men's Center.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, for the duration of his tenure at The Men's Center, Cox had been running his private counseling practice out of the center's office. He referred patients to The Men's Center and took referrals from support groups of The Men's Center. While this relationship allowed Cox to continue his

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<sup>13</sup> "TMC Receiving Local Media Exposure," *The Men's Center* July 1981, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Smith, *Minneapolis Tribune* 28 June, 1981 2b.

work with The Men's Center despite a low salary, it caused controversy with the social services network in the Twin Cities. Agencies that had sent large numbers of men to The Men's Center began to black list the center because they saw the relationship between Bill Cox's private practice and The Men's Center as unethical. By 1983, the number of referrals had dropped significantly.<sup>16</sup> The combination of these two controversies and a job offer to teach transactional analysis at Metropolitan State University led to Cox's resignation in May of 1983.<sup>17</sup>

### Decline and Resurgence

If the period from 1979 to 1981 represented the first low period for The Men's Center, then 1983 to 1985 represents the second low period. Like the founding members of The Men's Center, the group that rejuvenated the organization in 1981 had burnt out by 1983. The lack of member support and funds seemed to wear heavily on the leadership of the center. Despite the fact that they preached to others that men should not be afraid to ask for help, they could not overcome this gender stereotype themselves. As they became handcuffed by financial limitations or overwhelmed by the amount of work to be done they turned inward instead of reaching out.

When Bill Cox left in spring of 1983, one of the major concerns related to his resignation was the financial health of the organization. During 1982 The Men's Center ran a \$5,600 deficit and 1983 greeted a center without a fundraising plan and without any

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<sup>15</sup> Hank Bruns, an interview with the author, 3 August 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999.

<sup>17</sup> "Cox Resigns as TMC Director," *The Men's Center* May 1983, 1.

members with fundraising experience. In order to survive, the center cut all paid staff, reduced the amount of space rented for the center, eliminated the telephone service, and cut out the expense of printing the Newsletter.

Despite the significant reduction in funds, the organization continued with support groups three times a week, held a spring retreat, and sponsored The 1983 Midwest Regional Men's Conference which they regarded as their most successful to date.<sup>18</sup> The conference was well-attended and received significant publicity as a result of the keynote speaker Andrea Dworkin. The radical feminist, who seemed to blame men for everything, was chastised at the conference for her inability to distinguish between men who were destructive to women and those who were not. A female audience member who stood up and told her to stop shaming these men sparked an avid debate that encouraged conference attendees to join The Men's Center.<sup>19</sup> Adding to the controversy, a man by the name of Roy Schenk wanted to set up a table at the conference to promote the idea that men should be proud of being male. At that time a pro-feminist faction led The Men's Center. They felt that this would not be an appropriate message for the conference and prohibited Schenk from setting up his table. Schenk, remembering his experience with the sixties and the Civil Rights Movement, moved his table outside the conference. In the end, the police were called, Schenk was allowed to remain outside, and the whole thing caused quite a stir but in the end was useful to the extent that men

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<sup>18</sup> The Men's Center 1983 Annual Report, from the archives of The Men's Center.

<sup>19</sup> Andy Mickel, an interview with the author, 2 August 1999.

were talking again and talking about what role The Men's Center ought to play in society.<sup>20</sup>

Although the conference was a boon to membership, The Men's Center remained at relatively low level activity. The leadership at that time was such that it did not push the organization toward growth but rather were satisfied with focusing on maintaining the support group and retreats. Assertiveness training by this point had fallen by the wayside and corporate America had seemingly lost interest in The Men's Center so the amount of money coming into the center was limited to revenue generated by the retreats and support groups. The recession of the early 1980s was over. With a more prosperous economy, business felt less of a need to worry about the emotional needs of their employees. This low level of activity continued until 1985 when The Men's Center experienced its second resurgence.

### The Renaissance of 1985

In 1985 three things came together to create a renaissance for The Men's Center which catapulted the organization out of the slump it had been experiencing the previous two years. The first component of the renaissance was the fact that Scott Bartell renewed his involvement with the organization. Bartell had been a member of Men's Awareness Network and a founding member of The Men's Center. He was, in fact, the first paid employee of The Men's Center. While he had always remained a member of The Men's Center he had not been involved in the administration of activities for some period. The

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<sup>20</sup> Jim Lovestar, a telephone conversation with the author, 9 August 1999.

circumstances of his life in 1985 allowed him to become more active in 1985 and would make him Chairman of the Board in 1986.<sup>21</sup>

The second component of the Renaissance of 1985 was Jim Lovestar and the 1985 Midwest men's conference. Jim Lovestar had gotten involved with The Men's Center in 1979 by attending the drop-in support groups on Thursdays. He played a large role in planning the 1980 conference, burnt out and then ended his activities with The Men's Center. In 1983 he resumed activity in The Men's Center and became a member of the board. At the 1983 Midwest Regional Conference, Lovestar met and by his own admission was affected by Schenk's notion that it was okay to be male. By 1985 the pro-feminist faction that controlled The Men's Center in 1983 and 1984 were no longer controlling the organization. Lovestar proposed that The Men's Center hold another Midwest Regional Conference. He proposed that this conference be dedicated to celebrating the good things about men. He argued that a conference would give The Men's Center the financial boost that it sorely needed, and it would bring new men to The Men's Center.<sup>22</sup> The board of The Men's Center agreed and Jim Lovestar became the conference chair.

The theme chosen for the conference was "What's In A Man." The intention was to celebrate the wholeness of men and to help them find resources to nurture, nourish and care for themselves as they encountered the demands of work, relationships, and family.<sup>23</sup> Held at Hamline University the keynote speakers were Alan Page, a former member of

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<sup>21</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Jim Lovestar, a telephone conversation with the author, 9 August 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Jim Lovestar, "Conference '85," *The Men's Center Newsletter* April 1985.

the Minnesota Vikings who went on to become a Minnesota State Supreme Court Justice, and Robert Bly, an author on peace and men's issues.<sup>24</sup> Both men had lived much of their lives in Minnesota and therefore were well-known by the public and would attract people to the conference. Page was well-known for being candid about his values and priorities in his life, and Bly had been a speaker at the 1980 men's conference before he had really embraced the idea that men had a set of problems that they had to work toward improving. By 1985, Bly was formulating his "solution" to men's problems and was beginning to present to groups those ideas. At that point, Bly's argument was the "new" man had been stripped of what made him a man in the first place and what men needed was to return to those positive attributes of masculinity. The fact that both speakers were both personally famous contributed a certain amount of validity to the conference and attracted the attention of the media.

The *Star Tribune* Sunday magazine ran a several page article which explained how and why the organizers of the Men's Conference believed men were changing and what men ought to do about it. In the article, center members Jim Lovestar and Craig Ungerman along with Roy Schenk, and Robert Bly each explained their experiences and why they thought men needed to embrace their masculinity in the mid 1980s.<sup>25</sup> The article portrayed the men as kind and loving individuals who were trying their best to adapt to the changing expectations of the society of the 1980s. The positive press was

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<sup>24</sup> Jim Lovestar, "1985 Midwest Regional Men's Conference," *The Men's Center Newsletter* August 1985.

<sup>25</sup> Bob Ehlert, "Defining Masculinity in the 1980's," *Star Tribune Magazine* 6 October 1985, 6-9.

invaluable to attracting mainstream men to the conference and greatly contributed to its success.

In addition to the press and notoriety of the speakers, the social environment of the mid 1980s contributed to the success of the conference. In early 1985 Soviet-American relations had reached a dangerously low point, but in March of that year the death of Konstantin Chernenko brought Mikhail Gorbachev to the top of the Communist party. Mikhail Gorbachev represented a new generation of Soviet leaders and almost immediately relations between the United States and the Soviet Union began a gradual improvement.<sup>26</sup> Gorbachev needed to focus on fixing his nation and Reagan needed to show Americans that his policy was working. This situation brought about another softening of Cold War attitudes. Americans could soften their exterior, and men could let down their guard. As a result men in increasing numbers seemed to again look inward as they had during détente.

In addition to the international developments, Jim Lovestar argues that two other social developments were key. First, according to Lovestar, it was as if men in their thirties and forties in 1985 were ready to acknowledge that they were disconnected from support. For some, their relationships with women had failed. Others sought to improve their relationships with their children. In either case, men in these situations were realizing that how they had been dealing with their problems was not working. Secondly, people were willing to talk about the Vietnam War. Because the United States' relationship with the Soviet Union was beginning to soften again, men were looking for

ways to relate other than the military and as a nation we were deconstructing our experience with Vietnam.<sup>27</sup>

All of these things combined, the press, the speakers, and social environment of the 1980s, made the 1985 Midwest Regional Men's Conference the most successful conference hosted by The Men's Center. Their successes made Jim Lovestar and the conference the second component of the renaissance of 1985. The third component of the renaissance experienced by The Men's Center was the beginning of Andy Mickel's involvement with the administration of the organization. Andy Mickel was first introduced to The Men's Center in the late 1970s when a friend of his gave him a copy of *Men's Survival Resource Book*. Mickel was going through a divorce and struggling through all of the emotions that came with it. The book helped him sort through those emotions and introduced him to the drop-in support groups. In 1985 he attended The Midwest Regional Conference and decided to start volunteering his time to The Men's Center. He took over the responsibilities of publishing the newsletter and ran it from 1985 to 1990. A natural organizer, he established as his goal to publish a quality newsletter on a regular basis as it had been published from 1978 to 1983. Between 1983 and 1985, the number of issues declined and with it the quality of the newsletter.<sup>28</sup> Under Mickel's supervision the newsletter consistently contained articles on men's issues, information about The Men's Center, a directory of resources for men, and a forum for

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<sup>26</sup> Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1996* (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997), 317-318.

<sup>27</sup> Jim Lovestar, a telephone conversation with the author, 9 August 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Lovestar, a telephone conversation with the author, 9 August 1999.

discussion between subscribers. Mickel became the unofficial archivist of The Men's Center. He created a library of resources for the center's library, gathered the back issues of the newsletters, and in 1987, Mickel returned the name of the newsletter to *Men Talk*.<sup>29</sup> The increased communication provided by the newsletter under Mickel's supervision allowed The Men's Center to be a more effective organization and in turn contributed to its growth.

The involvement of Scott Bartell, Jim Lovestar, and Andy Mickel in the 1985 renaissance of The Men's Center was critical in sustaining it from 1985 to 1990. During that period The Men's Center moved to its current location in an office building in Minneapolis at 33<sup>rd</sup> and Hennepin. It held regional conferences in 1987 and 1989 and continued to grow after each one. Despite the relatively good times of this period The Men's Center continued to face challenges which threatened its existence.

#### Survival: A Constant Struggle

The 1980s provided The Men's Center with a significant number of challenges. From its inception, The Men's Center has had to work hard to generate sources of funding. In the early 1980s, the popularity of assertiveness training and corporate America's interest in men's issues and their effect on the workplace brought money to The Men's Center in the form of workshop and support group fees as well as grants. By the mid-1980s it seemed that most corporations in Minnesota at least were aware of men's issues related to corporate burnout and were taking their own measures to alleviate the problems. The grants that The Men's Center had been awarded during the early

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<sup>29</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999.

eighties dried up and the demand for assertiveness training workshops shrunk. As a result, funding remained a critical issue throughout the mid to late eighties. The largest sources of funding were private donations, revenue from drop-in support groups, and regional conferences. These sources, while appreciated, barely covered the costs of operation and only allowed The Men's Center enough to survive.

While finances were an important problem, the most significant challenges that faced The Men's Center during the 1980s were ideological. Because The Men's Center brings together men who experience emotional struggles with life, they come from a wide array of experiences, beliefs, and ideals. One of the goals of the founding members was to create an organization where all men would feel comfortable coming together and sharing their feelings. This meant that straight and gay men, black and white men, liberal and conservative men, and middle class and working class men and all other varieties of differences had to be accommodated. This was a tall order because the goal of the organization was not to change the men but to accept them.

As a result, from the beginning, The Men's Center had to guard against different factions gaining too much control. During 1983 and 1984, a pro-feminist faction controlled the leadership of The Men's Center and this placed significant strain on the members who had varied opinions about the direction of The Men's Center. This was not the only incident of factional differences. In 1985, a group of gay members argued that the 1985 Midwest Regional Conference did not make gay men feel accepted. The conference organizers argued that they had specifically tried to invite gay men and that the conference really was not about sexuality. Those men broke off and formed their

own organization for gay men that died out after a couple of years.<sup>30</sup> In 1984 and 1985, the HIV/AIDS support group wanted to create an organization that would support and assist members of the community living with HIV and AIDS. The Men's Center, while believing this to be an important issue, declined on the basis that the proposition was too large and would dominate the center. The support group separated from The Men's Center and founded Minnesota AIDS Project, which remains the largest AIDS organization in the state.<sup>31</sup> Finally in the late 1980's, a group of men concerned with father's rights proposed that The Men's Center take on father's rights as its central issue. Again not willing to alienate the rest of the organization, the center declined. The group split off and formed the Father's Resource Center in early 1990. The state's largest father's resource group now has an annual budget of \$600,000.<sup>32</sup>

In each of these cases, different factions, through their work with The Men's Center, have realized a set of issues important to men and sought to use the center as headquarters for their organizing efforts. Each time The Men's Center has acknowledged the importance of the issue and urged the group to create their own organization. At times the controversial group has left on good terms with The Men's Center and has continued a positive working relationship with the center. The Minnesota AIDS Project is a prime example of this outcome. The two organizations remain close and have in common many members. On the other hand, the gay issues faction that separated severed all ties and set up their organization as an opposition group to The Men's Center. The

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<sup>30</sup> Jim Lovestar, a telephone conversation with the author, 9 August 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Andy Mickel, an interview with the author, 2 August 1999.

<sup>32</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999.

father's resource group left under bad feelings between the two groups because the debate over whether The Men's Center should sponsor the resource group or not was very heated. The debate was so passionate because the leader of the resource group was a member of the board of The Men's Center and could potentially dedicate The Men's Center to the issue. The idea that The Center could become so focused on one topic threatened the attitude of openness to all issues, which had been the policy of the organization since the 1970s. The success of the Father's Resource Center has healed some of the wounds incurred during the debate and the organizations have a separate but positive working relationship.<sup>33</sup>

#### Toward the 1990s

The 1980s provided The Men's Center with a set of challenges, which included motivation, financial struggles, and ideological differences. While the decade forced the organization to part with some of its early countercultural ideals and consolidate in favor of a more business like approach, it managed to survive the decade without succumbing to disputes over issues or low levels of participation. The willingness of individuals to dedicate their time, passion and sometimes money to an organization that they felt was vital to the community sustained The Men's Center throughout the trials and tribulations that confronted it. The 1990s greeted The Men's Center with a new set of challenges every bit as difficult as those faced in the 1980s. In order to survive The Men's Center

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<sup>33</sup> Hank Bruns, an interview with the author, 3 August 1999.

had to prove its relevance to a community very different than the one that conceived it in the 1970s.

## Chapter V

### EPILOGUE: THE 1990S AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The 1990s brought The Men's Center into a new decade with a new set of challenges. In some ways these challenges were the same as those they had confronted in the past such as lack of funds, membership burnout, and ideological differences; however, the 1990s introduced a new environment to the old problems of The Men's Center. This new environment changed the dynamics of the membership of The Men's Center and brought new leadership to the board of directors. The new leadership experienced the problems that had plagued The Men's Center throughout its history. Finding no new answers they too suffered burnout and left the center. As they left the center, the leadership of the second half of the 1980s returned to lead the organization. The group returned the organization to some of its tried and true methods and sustained The Men's Center until the present. Now, The Men's Center faces the new millennium and a new set of challenges. Throughout the decade of the 1990s, The Men's Center has faced three turning points. The first was brought on by the popularity of men's issues in the early 1990s, the second by the failure of that popularity to expand The Men's Center, and the third by the efforts of an aging membership to remain relevant to today's men.

### An Iron Man for the 1990s

During the early 1990s a renewed interest in the men's movement surged through American society as men and women alike revived their interest in gender roles and the affects of the gender debate of the past twenty years. This interest was bolstered by the popularity of books by men like Robert Bly and Sam Keen whose works *Iron John* and *Fire in the Belly* argued that men had lost touch with the part of masculinity that made men who they were supposed to be.<sup>1</sup>

While these ideas had been fermenting in various men's groups across the nation since 1985, it was not until the early nineties that these books caught the attention of popular culture and splattered it across newspapers and television. In October 1991 in a section entitled "Picks & Pans" *People Magazine* argued that in fact the men's movement, which had been as they noted "one of the first identifiable megatrends of the '90s", had become television sitcoms' "favorite whipping boy."<sup>2</sup> During that television season, *Northern Exposure*, *Cheers*, *Murphy Brown*, and *Home Improvement* each ran episodes that poked fun at the movement by having their main characters seek the actualization described in Bly's book. Audiences enjoyed the light hearted pokes at a movement that seemed somewhat trite after twenty-five years of gender discussion.

The author of the *People* article concluded that the men's movement was over because "sitcom writers, like vultures, are scavengers, feasting only on carrion. Once

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1990); and Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> David Hildebrant, "The Pall of the Wild," *People*, 21 October 1991, 15.

you're a prime-time punch line, you're history."<sup>3</sup> While the sentiment may or may not have been true, the reality remained that the men's movement in the early 1990s had been introduced to the vocabulary of mainstream America in a way that it had never been in the 1970s and 1980s. For The Men's Center this meant that new people would become involved with the center. Although this refreshed the membership, it also created potential conflicts as new members brought new ideas about the focus of The Men's Center.

For The Men's Center conflict was avoided because at the same time new members joined the organization and began participating in the leadership of the center, the group that had been working to build a strong center was ready to take a break. Scott Bartell and Jim Lovestar, who both played significant roles in sustaining and strengthening The Men's Center during the second half of the 1980s, left the leadership of The Men's Center. While they maintained their membership in the organization, both felt that they needed to step back from the time commitment for personal reasons.<sup>4</sup> At this point, the only remaining active leader of The Men's Center from the 1980s was Andy Mickel. Mickel continued to serve on the board as the editor of *Men Talk* as he had since the mid 1980s. In this capacity he had consistently published issues of the newsletter that grew in length and became increasingly professional looking. By the end of 1990 he had been involved with *Men Talk* for five years and felt that he needed some time off from the difficult and time-consuming challenges of publishing a credible

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<sup>3</sup> Hildebrant, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Scott Bartell, an interview with the author, 13 September 1999, and Jim Lovestar, a telephone conversation with the author, 9 August 1999.

newsletter.<sup>5</sup> At the same time new members who joined during the rising popularity of the men's movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s were willing to take responsibility for the leadership of The Men's Center. As a result potential conflict was avoided by the willingness of the old leadership to step aside so that a new group of members could participate in organization of The Men's Center.

### New Leadership for the Nineties

The men who took leadership of The Men's Center in 1990 and 1991 were men who had gotten involved in The Men's Center for personal reasons as had the men who became leaders in the late seventies and in the eighties. They sought to continue the vision of the organization that they had joined which at that time focused on violence in the family, nation and world, as well as support for men in relationships and fathers. The organization still held its weekly drop-in support groups as well as closed groups focused on specific issues. Members still created workshops that could be used to reach out to the community and develop connections to other organizations with similar goals and beliefs. The Men's Center under the new leadership still had the problems that it had seen since its creation. Funds were limited, motivation sometimes sunk, and different ideas threatened to divide the groups. These problems were unavoidable for an organization like The Men's Center because men became involved with it because they had a need. Once that need or problem had been dealt with they often left the organization. Only a

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<sup>5</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999.

few actually stayed to participate in the programs or volunteer on a long-term basis.<sup>6</sup> The personal stayed personal.

The difference between the leadership and the problems of the 1990s from the 1970s and 1980s was that the men who were leaders were separated from the founding members of The Men's Center by three sets of leaders. None of them were among the founding members nor were they members during the early years of the organization. They had not been a part of the vision that sought to create an organization that would become a part of the network of support services. The founders of the organization sought to create a network of men seeking to help other men, not themselves. The men who led The Men's Center during the early 1990's were not counselors or community organizers. They were not organizers at all. They were businessmen who looked at the organization as that, a business.<sup>7</sup> As a result they seemed to make decisions on an economic level. This, however, will not work with an organization that at its most basic level is designed to take the personal experience of its members and transform it into a network of support for others having that same experience.

Essentially, the problem with running The Men's Center on a business level is that the group had never done what was good for business; they had tried to do things that were good for the community. This meant that members often contributed more time than they probably should have donated, more money than they probably could have afforded, and more dedication than The Men's Center probably should have expected. The Men's Center, after all, was created by men who had a genuine interest in serving

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<sup>6</sup> Herb Jaehne, an interview with the author, 8 August 1999.

their community and others who had a genuine interest in helping other men. When men who ran The Men's Center in the early nineties ran into the problems of funding and motivation that had always plagued The Men's Center they seemed to take it as a sign that the organization no longer had relevance to the problems men faced. The intersection between the personal and the political had seemingly disappeared. Therefore, to them it seemed that The Men's Center was no longer a necessary component of the network of community services in the Twin Cities.

The proof in this conclusion is not found in what is in the evidence left by the organization at that time but rather what is not left in the evidence. Publication of the newsletter from 1991 to 1995 became sporadic at best. No new issues surfaced to provide members an avenue for offshoot groups. Other than the 1992 Midwest Regional Men's Conference, The Men's Center had not hosted a significant community event since an exhibition of Judy Chicago's Birth Project in 1989. Moreover, the 1992 Midwest Regional Men's Conference was the first regional conference held by The Men's Center to lose money and not increase the membership of The Men's Center. By 1995 the leadership of the early 1990s had driven The Men's Center into a new low of inactivity and was prepared to let the organization close its doors.<sup>8</sup> It was at this point that the old leadership decided that rather than let The Men's Center die they would try to revive the organization one more time.

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<sup>7</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Andy Mickel, an interview with the author, 2 August 1999.

### The Rebirth of 1995

In 1995, as The Men's Center clung to life, Jim Lovestar and Andy Mickel decided that they would again get involved with the leadership of The Men's Center. Andy resumed the publication of *Men Talk* although at a greatly reduced level from what it had been in the late 1980s. The issues were not as long as they had been during the second half of the 1980s but they had the essential components, which made the newsletter important. It contained a directory of services for men in need of help, letters to the editor, advertisement for activities at The Men's Center and a front-page article on an issue germane to men's lives. Most importantly *Men Talk* resumed publication on a scheduled basis so that members could count on receiving their issues.<sup>9</sup>

Jim Lovestar returned to the board of The Men's Center. Under his leadership The Men's Center began to regain some of the strength that it had lost during the past five years. The drop-in support groups were maintained but new closed groups were added to The Men's Center. In terms of programs, anger management and workshops dealing with abusive relationships were created as an outreach to the community. Although it was still struggling to generate the financial stability to grow, The Men's Center rejoined the network of social services that it had worked hard to become a part of during the 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

### 2000 and Beyond

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<sup>9</sup> Andy Mickel, a telephone conversation with the author, 30 July 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Lovestar, a telephone conversation with the author, 9 August 1999.

Now, almost four years later, The Men's Center looks much the same as it did when it began the process of renewal in 1995. The newsletter remains consistent and professional looking. The calendar of events is full of support groups, weekly Wednesday night presentations on a variety of topics from adoption to the dynamics of grief, and social activities of all varieties. The Men's Center has generated enough funds to hire a part-time executive director, Herb Jaehne, who oversees the day to day operations of the center. A part time secretary, Randy Genrich, assists Herb, takes calls and maintains the facilities such as the library and meeting rooms. The Men's Center continues on its mission to "provide resources for men seeking to grow in body, mind and spirit" hoping that from that foundation they are "advocating for healthier family and community relationships."<sup>11</sup> In their twenty-three years of existence, The Men's Center has continued to struggle toward this goal. The new millennium provides The Men's Center with a new set of challenges as it tries to meet the needs of a new generation of men.

### New Men Talking

When the founders of The Men's Center began their brainstorming sessions on what role a men's center might play in the community, most of the men who were there were in their twenties or thirties. Some were married. Some had children. All of them, however, had the experience of growing up during the 1950s and 1960s. They came of age in a time that was radically different from the present in terms of expectations of men and women, love and marriage, children and parenting. As these men move into their

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<sup>11</sup> "The Men's Center Events" *Men Talk* August/September, 1999, 3.

fifties and sixties, they move beyond some of the conflicts that The Men's Center was formed to help them through. Having had these experiences they have become what the members of The Men's Center refer to as the elders. They are in a position where they can help others who are just now going through what they went through ten and twenty years ago. In order to do that, however, The Men's Center must maintain its relevance to the situation and understand that while the present does not afford a lack conflict for men, the conflict is different and thus the help needed is different.

The men who are now in their twenties and thirties and who are getting married, having children, and struggling with all of the things that come with adulthood have a distinctly different experience than the men who founded The Men's Center in the 1970s. They do not remember the 1960s or if they do it is a childhood memory. They did not participate in Vietnam. They did not experience the economic hardships of the 1970s. They did not experience the gender expectations of the 1950s. They have enjoyed the benefits of relaxed gender role expectations, an economy that is arguably the best since the 1950s, and a nation that has been relatively free from major international conflict. This does not mean that they do not struggle with issues such as gender roles, family, financial stability, or violence. Rather it means that they have had a different experience, which has shaped them in a different way than the first group of men to participate in The Men's Center.

If The Men's Center is going to remain a vital part of the community in which it exists, then it must begin to define what experiences have shaped young men today. Moreover, its members need to deconstruct the problems that have grown out of that

experience or reactions to it. The Men's Center has begun to do this. They now hold weekly meetings with twenty-somethings to discuss issues relevant to their lives. They provide closed groups on men's issues that are open only to men under thirty. Finally, The Men's Center has begun to use its anger management as an avenue to reach out to teens in violent relationships.<sup>12</sup>

Twenty-three years after its creation The Men's Center continues to be an important part of the Twin Cities community. What started from a desire to get involved with the social changes of the 1970s blossomed into a social service organization. Through flexibility, persistence and a willingness to avoid political connections to national organizations, The Men's Center has become the longest lasting men's center of its kind. Quietly working on issues they saw as important and not becoming politically active, The Men's Center has continued to carve out a niche for itself in the network of social service organizations in Minnesota. As the nation turns its attention to the new millennium, The Men's Center maintains its focus on changing men.

In the thirty years since its beginning, the national men's movement has never achieved the same transformation from personal issues to a political movement in the way that the Women's Liberation Movement accomplished. Despite the fact that the women's movement had served as the inspiration for the men's movement and the fact that the two movements developed in a similar fashion, for the men's movement, the personal remained personal. The men's movement is not the same as the women's movement because the fundamental goals around which the movement was formed were

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<sup>12</sup> Herb Jaehne, an interview with the author, 8 August, 1999.

personal. Different issues that concerned men within the movement that could have been politicized were not universal to men but rather unique to the men in that particular situation. The issues that concerned all members of the men's movement were, more often than not, issues that were personal. As a result, the movement remained just that, personal.

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