



**MEN'S QUEST FOR WHOLENESS:
THE CHANGING COUNSELLING NEEDS
OF *PAKEHA* MALES**

Philip Culbertson

Abstract

In this essay I will claim that one of the most significant factors explaining the high levels of domestic and public violence in New Zealand is the definition of masculinity that *Pakeha* (descendants of white colonial settlers) men have inherited and the risks and demands for men who attempt to achieve it. In order to comprehend the extreme stress which the *Pakeha* definition of masculinity places on men, we need to begin by understanding how culture-specific every definition of masculinity (and femininity) is. Next we need to review how this *Pakeha* definition developed as a result of the history of European settlers and settlements in this country, leading to a summary composite of "manliness" in *Pakeha* tradition. Finally, this essay will address some therapeutic methodologies which counselors might employ to support *Pakeha* men in their struggle toward a more holistic identity which refuses to take the traditional expectations of *Pakeha* masculinity at face value.

"It is very hard for a Kiwi to admit that he is half woman" (Baxter, 1990, 199).

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New Zealand statistics suggest that our men are in trouble. Eighty-percent of alcohol sold is consumed by men. Six times more young men than young women commit suicide (Shenon, 1995; see also "Boys have...", 1995). Ninety-four percent of drunk drivers are males. The country has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the world, and eighty-six percent of all violent offenders are males. Of the seventy-one homicides in New Zealand in 1995, sixty were committed by men. In spite of the domestic violence statistics, seventy-six percent of admissions to hospital resulting from assault are males, almost always the victims of other men. Wholeness and integration seem to elude men in New Zealand, and the counselor is challenged to take gender issues in the counselling relationship seriously.

The Construction of Gender

When I first arrived in New Zealand to teach at university level, I included in my syllabus two books which I had written in America on some psychological and spiritual issues for men (Culbertson, 1992, 1994). A number of male students responded that while they had learned a great deal from reading the books, the fit between my theories and their experience of being men in New Zealand was not always a successful one. The problem was that the American definition of masculinity and its resultant issues was not identical with the Pakeha definition of masculinity and its resultant issues.

To begin, a distinction must be made between "sex" and "gender". According to sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman: "Sex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males" (West and Zimmerman, 1991, 14). Ordinarily such classification is assigned to babies immediately at birth ("It's a boy!"), based on whether the baby has a vagina or a penis. Gender has been more difficult to define, but is generally agreed to be primarily a socially- or culturally-determined artifice, or as West and Zimmerman define, "a socially scripted dramatization of the cultural idealization of feminine and masculine natures" (1991, 17; see also Novitz, 1990). James K. Baxter uses the term "civil fiction" to define the same artifice (Jensen, 1996, 114). In addition to social and cultural determinations, I believe we need also to recognize historical determinations—definitions of gender which are based on the cumulative heritage of how men and women had to learn to behave in order to cope with a variety of sequential historical conditions. Whether gender is defined socially, culturally, or historically, its definitions are systemically inherited from one generation to the next, and each generation must decide whether to adopt or adapt what it has received.

One may be born a male, but manliness and masculinity have to be achieved, or even earned (Mailer, 1968, 25). Whether one has achieved masculinity is based on a whole series of standards and definitions which are quite culture-specific, though not usually spelled out systematically. The standards of definition are for the most part unique to the culture in which the male is living. The lack of congruence between one's assigned biological sex (male) and one's nature, characteristics, and behaviours (manliness, masculinity) usually results in a significant degree of interpersonal and internalized shaming. For example, during the 1981 Springboks

Tour demonstrations, men who supported the tour attempted to shame men who opposed the tour by calling them “pansies” or “poofsters”—a traditional expression of the feared incongruity between a person’s maleness and his success at achieving masculinity (Phillips, 1996, 262).

Many anthropologists claim there is an essentialist definition of masculinity which is pan-cultural. For example, David Gilmore claims that in every culture, men are expected to carry out the roles of Protector, Provider, and Procreator (Gilmore, 1990). Such a pan-cultural definition might be termed “the mythic masculine” and functions in the same manner as a Jungian archetype. But archetypes also have culture-specific incarnations—for example, the Trickster archetype is incarnate in classical Greek culture as Pan and in traditional Maori culture as Maui. Pan and Maui are not identical, yet both are cultural embodiments of the Trickster. Similarly, in one culture “Man as Protector” might be defined as going off to fight far-away wars, while in another culture it might be defined as protecting the immediate boundaries of the home. In one culture, “Man as Provider” might be defined as a nomadic hunter, in another culture as a settled gatherer of grain, and in a third culture as the man who works in an office and brings home a paycheck. Each specific incarnation is a product of the history and cultural heritage of a specific location and period in which it is acted out (Culbertson, 1993). To comprehend the incarnation of the mythic masculine in Pakeha society, we must analyze the history of European settlement in *Aotearoa* New Zealand.

The Historical Construct of Pakeha Masculinity

James and Saville-Smith (1994, 12) comment upon how many Commonwealth societies organize themselves around race, class, or gender. An example of the first would be South Africa, and of the second, Britain. They claim that New Zealand is organized around unusually strict gender roles.¹ The strong dichotomy between masculine and feminine gender roles can be interpreted as a product of the history of white settlement in this far-away nation.

The majority of Europeans who came to this country from the 1830s to the 1880s were single men or men who had left their families behind (Phillips, 1996, 6-7; Belich, 1996, 278, 334, 391).² The first half of the puzzle is: how does a single man, halfway around the world from his culture of origin, play out the traditional roles of Protector, Provider, and Procreator? Does this not leave some sort of vacuum which must be filled with another definition of masculinity?

The second half of the puzzle is: who were these men and what wounding caused them to go so far from home? Generally they were men who couldn’t find their place in their family of origin, or in the economic and class structure of their society. But, what prompted them to risk their lives on a difficult and dangerous voyage to a remote island so far away that they were almost out of communication’s reach?³

These men came only 150 years ago or less, a time-period within the reach of my students who do family genograms. The students keep running into secrets in their family trees, a further confirmation of the wounding or shame which caused these men to leave England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Dalmatia, the U.S., Germany, Scandinavia, and Australia.⁴ Among these were also the “remittance men,” the black sheep of ‘good’ families, for whom special opportunities were created as long as they stayed away (Belich, 1996, 326).

Thus we have a vacuum of Provider, Protector, Procreator, and we have family-of-origin wounds. But the variety of personal wounds seems to have coalesced here to form three primal wounds, wounds so common that they became a gender-corporate founding trauma (“The Search...” 1996; Belich, 1996, 337). These three primal wounds dictated new definitions of masculinity designed to give single men who could not be Providers, Protectors, and Procreators, something to be. The new society of single Pakeha men would not organize itself around

class: that was one curse they left back home (Belich, 1996, 321). Evidence suggests that this new society did not organize strictly around race, for some of the white men married Maori women.⁵ This leaves only gender, particularly because of the numerical imbalance between men and women.

As the growing number of single men here produced a demand for commodities, farmers growing food and middle class merchants with goods to sell and trade began to arrive, often bringing families with them. They sought land and a settled lifestyle. For a time, this produced tension between the minority of settled colonists and the majority itinerant males.⁶ The males who had no families provided the foundation for a new definition of masculinity, contradictory to Protector, Provider and Procreator: The Man Alone.⁷ At the same time, the growing economy began to produce jobs away from home that were more lucrative, and the settled colonial households began to break apart by the 1860s (James and Saville-Smith, 1994, 27; Belich, 1996, 379-80). These new jobs, plus the jobs which brought single men to the country, often couldn't be done alone, so men began to work cooperatively with male mates (Belich, 1996, 393).

Large groups of unsettled, untamed, uncontrolled men roamed the country. They, plus the victims created by this male rootlessness—the elderly, the destitute, and the abandoned—formed a serious threat to any orderly form of government.⁸

The Depression that began in the 1880s caused great upheaval, and some of those who could afford it fled the country. Perhaps in response, the 1890s saw the rise of a conscious governmental policy to promote the Cult of Domesticity, chiefly through propaganda and through legislation such as the Factories Act of 1894 (Phillips, 1996, 49-52).⁹ Belich attributes this sharp turn in policy to “moral panic” over the continually increasing vagrancy of the 1870s and 80s (Belich, 1996, 326). Gender relations were reframed and new roles overlaid upon the old. The cooperative association of masculine and feminine gender roles was promoted as necessary for the national interest, the public good, and the maintenance of law and order. Women now had two roles: The Dependent Woman, and The Moral Redemptress, Purifier and Guardian of the Domestic Order (James and Saville-Smith, 1994, 55).¹⁰ Women's suffrage gave women further power over the home as well as an anticipated “civilizing” influence within the rowdy sphere of national politics. In response, men were expected to become The Family Man.¹¹ But men already had a firmly entrenched role of Man Alone, with his mates. While the two roles for women could be fairly easily reconciled, men now felt caught between their old and new roles. This tension seems to have been resolved by men imaging themselves as Family Man, but continuing to behave as Man Alone (Donnelly, 1978, 92). Along the way, all other forms of masculinity had to be subordinated.¹² Family Man was accepted as part of the stable national order. Man Alone was romanticized, and continued to be the primary draw and principle area within which masculinity was achieved or failed.

The Effects of Theology and Literature

An additional influence on the construct of Pakeha masculinity entered via the church, particularly with the gendered theology of several of the early Anglican missionaries (Belich, 1996, 326, 428). The late Victorian era (the mid-1800s) saw the rise of a movement known as “Muscular Christianity.” The stage was set for Muscular Christianity in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Coleridge equated manliness with charity, virtue and good-will, all of which would lead a right-living man to the fulfillment of his potential in a better and more useful life (Coleridge, 1905, 6-7). Virtue *was* manly energy for Coleridge. This manly energy was

to be applied to the intellectual pursuits. In the generation next after Coleridge, it was an easy shift from intellectual pursuits to even more manly ones on the athletic field.

In 1876, Thomas Hughes gave a series of lectures, published three years later under the title *The Manliness of Christ*. Christianity was interpreted as synonymous with robust energy, spirited courage and physical vitality. Hughes and others who thought like him, particularly Charles Kingsley, Thomas Arnold, George Augustus Selwyn (perhaps the most influential bishop ever to live in New Zealand), channeled their theological insights into reforms affecting school education, competitive sports, and overseas missionary activities. Whereas Coleridge had regarded manliness as a description of maturity, Kingsley and Hughes stressed the gender and muscular connotations of the word manliness, emphasizing these qualities by identifying the converse of manliness as “effeminacy” (Newsome, 1961, 197).¹³ Hughes wedded the virtues of manliness, godliness, and strenuous physical exertion in his writings, the most famous of which is *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*. To this mix of virtues, Kingsley added cleanliness by writing, oddly, *The Water-Babies*, still a beloved children’s book.

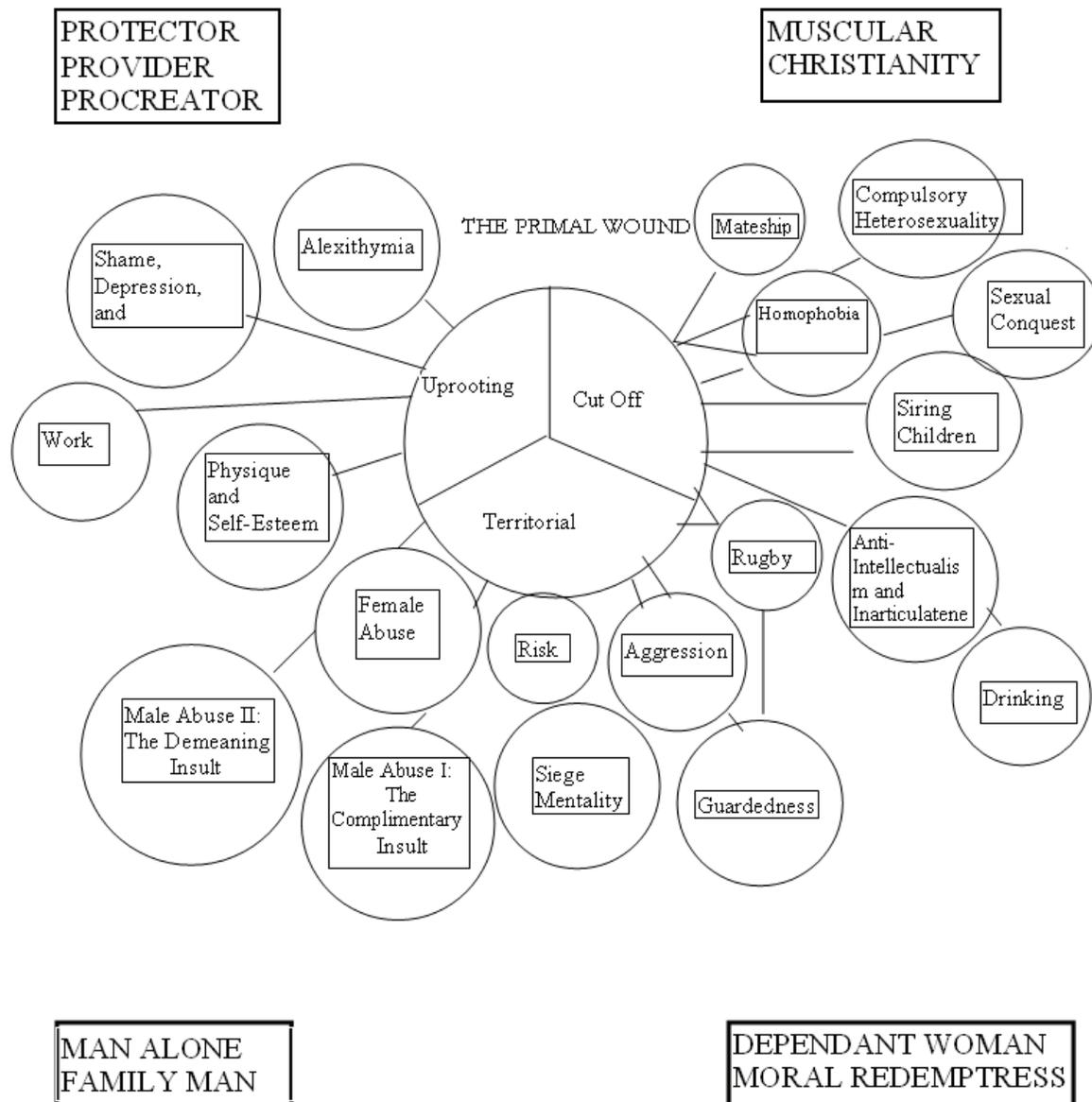
Muscular Christianity was premised on the physical superiority of males; if God made them physically superior to women, that extra advantage must be developed to the maximum in order to be faithful stewards of God’s gifts—to fight in His service, to protect the weak, to conquer nature. No less important to Kingsley, it was a man’s duty to fulfill his sexual function by the procreation of children in that bliss which is the marital state (Newsome, 1961, 209). Healthy competition was worked out on the rugby field, and “impure” thoughts were kept under control by cold showers and sleeping in the winter with all the windows open.¹⁴ Boys were encouraged to become rugged men in keeping with an eccentric mis-quotation of Psalm 147:10 as “The Lord delighteth in a pair of sturdy legs.”

Muscular Christianity was worked out not only on the rugby field, but in the mission field as well. New Zealand author Jock Phillips summarizes the philosophy of Muscular Christianity as “the duty of patriotism; the moral and physical beauty of athleticism; the salutary effects of Spartan habits and discipline; the cultivation of all that is masculine and the expulsion of all that is effeminate, un-English and excessively intellectual” all combined with a simple and unquestioning Christian faith (Phillips, 1996, 216). The influence of this movement, arriving originally with Bishop Selwyn, was insignificant except among the early male settlers who retained a connection with organized Christianity, but at the same time it served to reinforce the exaggerated virility associated with Pakeha manliness.

Two further sources influence the historical development of New Zealand masculinity: the Depressions of the 1880s and 1930s, and the phenomenal price of the wars: Land Wars of the 1860s, the South African War, both World Wars and the Viet Nam War. Space limitations prevent me from developing those themes here, but in neither case should their importance be underestimated.

Closer to our own time, the construction of Pakeha masculinity has again been reinforced in the *artes literati* of the 1930s through the 1970s. As Kai Jensen has argued, male writers of that period carved out a new literature designed to capture the values and parlance of the common working man.¹⁵ The effect of this “masculinist” literary movement was to nearly eclipse the writing of women for four decades, and to create a national image of New Zealanders based almost exclusively upon the “Kiwi bloke.” Perhaps no novel expresses this more clearly than John Mulgan’s 1938 classic, *Man Alone*.

Having identified a number of significant historical sources, we must now ask how this history lesson informs the construction of the Pakeha “mythic masculine”?



Diagramming the Historical Construction

The Pakeha construct, when laid out in black and white, seems overwhelmingly large, but then the Fox Indian tribe in North America called masculinity “The Big Impossible”. Archetypes are by their very nature large in scale, and no human embodiment fits them perfectly or exclusively. As well, it might be claimed that in New Zealand the mythic masculine is more obviously alive in rural settings than in the urban environment of Auckland, though some would claim that even in a metropolis it continues to lurk underground. Here we need to name it in its fullness in order to decide what to deconstruct systematically, and what are the inherent positive qualities upon which alternatives can be built.

The Primal Wound of the early male colonizers took three forms:

1. Uprooting, or being flung from familiarity into the unknown. Survival in the face of adversity demands affective dissociation, but it also produces great pools of unresolved grief and a culture

characterized by numbness. When one is trying simply to survive, there is no room for emotional processing in one's hierarchy of needs.

2. Cut-off from relationship networks. "Cut-off" may be used in a systems theory sense, or as in AA's "isolating": a voluntary exile which solves little. Mateship becomes the Australasian substitute for relationship networks, a social phenomenon unique to this part of the world because so much of it was settled by single men. Mateship winds up masking the grief of relationship cut-offs.

3. Territorial Conflict with *tangata whenua* (people of the land). One solution to uprooting and cut off is to claim a new space of one's own, but there was already someone else in this space. Conflict leads to guardedness, aggression, and a siege mentality. We will return to all three of these primal wounds in other guises.

Out of these three primal wounds grew the unique historical construct of Pakeha masculinity.

1. Mateship. New Zealand historian Jock Phillips writes (1996, 26-27):

Colonial mateship was founded initially upon the needs of the work situation. From the earliest, Pakeha men formed themselves naturally into groups. Sailors arrived in groups; the whalers unable to capture whales alone organized themselves into parties—at first of five oars to a boat, increasingly of six or seven. These boats would then compete for the final capture. The goldminers were renowned for their "independence," their insistence on calling no man master, but from the first rushes, miners found it to their advantage to combine with one or two mates. It became easier to guard the claim and increased the chance of a lucky find. Subsequently, as the technology became more complex, the building of long aqueducts and tail-races made it even more likely that the miners would combine into parties. The solitary miner was always to be found on the fields but the pressures of work were likely to push him into partnership. In the sheep districts there were lonely jobs, especially boundary-watching, but much of the work depended on collective action—most notably shearing, mustering or droving. In the bush areas the felling of trees and the subsequent pit-sawing demanded a trusting teamwork. Those who lived a more itinerant life on the road found that safety often came with a mate.

Even if men did not actually work together, frontier conditions often forced them into close comradeship. When living in temporary or make-shift housing, they found it easier to combine accommodation and cooking. Inevitably, isolated from the amusements of town, they were forced to find their relaxation in the companionship of men. Unmarried women were not usually found on the frontier; anyway, before marriage the relations between men and women were distinctly restricted. Most men in colonial New Zealand were unlikely to find much emotional support or friendship from relatives. Usually siblings and parents were left behind in Britain while the itinerant lifestyle and the extreme isolation of frontier New Zealand would have severed any remaining family ties. In this absence, colonial men were forced to look for solace, encouragement and mutual aid to other similarly isolated men. ... [Mateship]... was a relationship of circumstance. Living and working in the same locality, men would be drawn into comradeship, loyalty and dependence by the situation at that time. The relationship between two men might not last long, but while it did it would be continuous and, therefore, intense in its own way. Yet, mates were somehow interchangeable. When one moved on, another would fill the place.¹⁶

One couldn't go it alone on the sea, on the frontier, or in the bush. Too many jobs needed more than two hands. Men took mates easily, but mateship had to be limited because it was inherently dangerous (if one assumes that men can't trust their sexuality or emotions), and it was limited in three ways. Limit #1 was the necessarily transient character of mateship. This is particularly descriptive of Barry Crump's *A Good Keen Man*.

2. Limit #2 was compulsory heterosexuality. All feelings of intimacy had to be expressed as lust for women. This of course objectifies women, and makes them the vehicle

for homosociality, the way men bond by trafficking in women (on homosociality, see Sedgwick, 1985; on the “traffic in women,” see Rubin, 1975).

3. Homophobia is the third limitation on mateship. A mate could never be a lover,¹⁷ and in fact was rarely a friend. Australian author Terry Colling writes (1992, 55), “All the bullshit about mates. I’ve got mates but no friends. I’d no more dream of showing them my real self than fly. We all know it’s a facade, but go along with it. I’d love to have a real friend.” Felix Donnelly talks (1978, 92) of the “unproven belief that kicking a football...makes one a man. They think that tackling other chaps, or going into a ruck boots and all, immunises a male against the dreaded ‘lurgy’ of homosexuality.”

All three of these limits upon mateship come as a package. They form a sort of Australasian Trinitarian Creed (Tacey, 1993, 250). They are also the source of the myth that New Zealand is a classless society, for in theory, mates are unconscious of class distinction. But as a package they are also misogynist, sexist, and repressive, making victims ultimately not only of women and gays, but also of heterosexual men (see Sargeson, 1964, 124ff and 157ff).

4. Compulsive heterosexuality and homophobia decree that certain things are termed “effeminate”. Masculinity came thereby to require both anti-intellectualism (brawn, not brain, the emphasis on Kiwi ingenuity, and the continuing suspicion in New Zealand of a university education) and inarticulateness (a cultured way of speaking is effeminate, though a structured form of performance to impress other men, called “yarning”, became quite common; see Belich, 1996, 431). The outcome of anti-intellectualism and inarticulateness has been a culturally-supported “autism”.¹⁸ Education is deemed useless, and useless is feminine, therefore education is feminine (Jensen, 1996, 35). For many of the Men Alone, religion also was seen as effeminate and so to be shunned, in spite of the efforts of Muscular Christianity to draw them in (Belich, 1996, 438).

5. Sexual conquest is the proof of compulsory heterosexuality and the affirmation of homosociality by further objectifying women (Jensen, 1996, 26).¹⁹

6. Siring children. In a famous essay, A. R. D. Fairburn argued that the failure to father a child is sufficient reason to presume a man homosexual (Jensen, 1996, 114).²⁰ Siring children is an extremely limited definition of the normative stage which Erik Erikson called “generativity.”

7. Alcohol excess and abusive drinking.²¹ Drinking serves three purposes: to numb the grief of cut-off and isolation; as a bonding ritual between mates; and as a socially-sanctioned opportunity for men, otherwise inarticulate and non-emotional, to confide in each other.

8. Rugby. Initially a product of the Muscular Christianity movement, it provides an arena for acting out three roles: The Man Alone with his mates, The Family Man (but with wives and girlfriends on the sidelines to cheer, to prepare the food in the clubhouse and stay in the kitchen, and to wash the dirty shorts), and the Warrior (James and Saville-Smith, 1994, 43; Phillips, 1996, 86-87). Novelist John Mason described rugby as “best of all our pleasures...religion, desire, and fulfillment all in one” (Jensen, 1996, 20).²²

9. Risk. In its original form within the historical construct of masculinity, this took the form of soldiering or going off to war: the Land Wars and both World Wars.²³ This explains the earlier importance of the RSA, whose entrance credentials were that one took a risk to prove one’s manliness and succeeded by surviving. Today risk is still part of the historical construct, but in the absence of war, our young men in their late teens and twenties take risks in the form of speeding on the roads, drink driving, gangs, and the more dangerous forms of conquering nature.

The next three characteristics go together, as an extension of the search for a safe place:

10. Aggression. In Pakeha society, this may be acted out by street fights outside the pub or, combined with Risk, may explain Auckland drivers. Douglas Campbell of Otago University connects aggression with the Pakeha male's abuse of power and desire to impose his will upon others.²⁴

11. Guardedness. The emotional inaccessibility of Kiwi males.²⁵

12. A siege mentality. This also translates into siege behaviour at work, and after-work behaviour at home, including that form of violence referred to as "just a domestic.". The siege mentality may also explain the common forms of xenophobia in New Zealand, such as the fear of Asian migration.

13. Male Abuse I, The Complimentary Insult. The traditional Pakeha male expresses intimate feelings only by insulting: "How are you, you great bloody bastard?"²⁶ Such insults are a negative form of intimacy, expressed through the Jungian shadow, and in a manner calculated to be neither emotionally or verbally literate.

14. Male Abuse II, The demeaning and shaming of any man who does not live up to the historical construct of masculinity. The common vocabulary includes terms like poofter, pansy, fag, fruitcake, wimp, queen, fairy, etc.

15. Female Abuse, including physical abuse and emotional abuse. The 1987 *Report of the Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into Violence*, often referred to as "The Roper Report," suggests that 80% of violent offending in NZ society occurs in the home (NZ Committee of Inquiry, 1987, 95). Abuse of women may be physical: the 1995 Department of Justice study called *Hitting Home* revealed that 20% of the Pakeha men surveyed admitted that they saw nothing wrong with hitting their wives. This is surely under-reported. Abuse of women may also be emotional, including the objectification of women, and the way men pressure them to conform to the historical construct of Pakeha woman as The Dependent Woman and The Moral Redemptress.

16. Physique and Self-Esteem. The history of concern with body-image is a developing sub-specialty within the social construction of masculinity: how society tells us what men's bodies are supposed to look like.²⁷ In New Zealand, the most common image is the rugby build: big, powerful and solid, with thighs like tree trunks. And of course, this image includes having a big penis to win the competition with other men, as was apparent in Greg McGee's popular play *Foreskin's Lament* (Jensen, 1996, 29, 66). Body-image also implies related issues of self-esteem: a Pakeha male is not to admire his own body, and certainly is not permitted to admire the body of another man.

17. Work is where we display our masculinity publicly, how tough we are, how good our brains are when they are disconnected from our bodies, how adept we are at suffering in silence. Of course, real work is still defined as manual labor outdoors, alone or with a mate or in the company of men, as incarnated in the cultural icon, Fred Dagg.

18. Shame is the technique by which our fathers and the "invisible male chorus of all the other guys" (see Pittman, 1990) taught us the importance of being manly. Depression is the condition which men feel when we have failed to measure up to the construct, and becomes another way we objectify women, by convincing them to carry it and feel it for us (see Taffel, 1991). More attention needs to be paid to "double-shame," the crippling cognitive dissonance created by the chorus of men who demand that we be masculine, and then abuse us by using us sexually as though we were women.²⁸

19. Alexithymia is a technical term that means "the inability to locate within, to label, and to express certain emotions." It is usually the result of rigid gender role separation, wherein women are defined as emotionally literate.²⁹ To be emotionally literate, then, means being effeminate. Emotional illiteracy is one way of playing The Family Man role without being fully

present—“I’m all here except for my feelings.” Alexithymia connects to the unresolved grief of the historical primal wound, as well as to inarticulateness and anti-intellectualism, and thus to mateship, compulsory heterosexuality, and homophobia.

So we have come full circle, and we realize how each of the component parts reinforces the other. But this in turn makes deconstruction simpler (though probably not easier): dismantling one part automatically weakens all the other parts. In the long run, however, weakening the structure doesn’t necessarily release its grip. We may claim that the construct is crumbling around the edges, but freeing ourselves from its dictates still demands a lot of intentional choices.

Belich and Phillips claim that the traditional construct began to fall apart in the 1970s, due to a variety of causes, including the change in liquor laws, the rise of feminism, growing economic prosperity, increased urban migration, the introduction of sports professionalism, society’s response to the soldiers returning from Viet Nam, and the availability of more and more television shows and movies from all over the world, bringing new values and new images of masculinity. It might be claimed, then, that beginning in the 1970s, the Pakeha “mythic masculine” was driven out of the middle class and into the working class. But others would claim that it has simply gone underground, even in Auckland. In any case, it is still creating victims, both male and female. This will be the case until a new pantheon of masculinity models are blessed by society.³⁰

Using the Pakeha Construct Therapeutically

Most research in the area of counselling men suggests that the best methodologies are specifically gender-informed. The remainder of this essay will address counselling approaches which are designed to capitalize on the validity of the above materials outlining the historical construction of Pakeha masculinity. Wholeness for male clients will look significantly different than for female clients, once the basic premise has been accepted that all of us are indelibly imprinted by the gender expectations of the culture in which we live and, more importantly, the culture in which we spend our most formative years.

Meth and Pasick argue (1990, 132-33) that therapy with men is not personally or socially responsible unless it includes issues of power and control, fear of dependence, vulnerability, femininity, self-disclosure, and failure. A counselor’s projected treatment plan should be designed to convince the client that tackling these issues is indispensable to achieving healthy masculinity. Obviously, these issues relate directly back to the component parts of the historical construct of Pakeha masculinity, including entitlement, guardedness and a siege mentality, homophobia and sexual conquest, inarticulateness, and self-esteem.

While it is customary to begin the counselling process with a structured assessment, Meth and Pasick (1990, 138) posit that even the assessment should be gender-specific. They suggest structuring the assessment of male clients around five steps:

- a. Identifying the beliefs that the male client holds about masculine identity and behaviour.
- b. Identifying the sources of these beliefs in societal institutions and in the client’s family-of-origin.
- c. Identifying some of the potentially harmful results of these beliefs.
- d. Connecting the client’s beliefs about masculine identity and behaviour to the presenting problem or problems.
- e. Emphasizing to the client that these beliefs were not freely chosen, are not “carved in stone,” and can be changed should he choose to do so, as the logical road to new health and self-integration.

Once a treatment plan has been devised based on this series of assessment steps, the counselor must be ready to adopt what Meth and Pasick call “a male model of communication.” Especially in the initial phases of the counselling relationship, “this requires therapists to concentrate on active strategies such as setting goals, using lists and diagrams, delineating tasks in sessions as well as ‘homework,’ and creating ‘contracts’ to structure the therapeutic relationship” (Meth and Pasick, 1990, 149). This fairly aggressive approach will provide the male client with some sense that he has retained control over the therapeutic process and will further encourage his participation, unlike the more ontological and verbal “female model” which most therapy stimulates and which the male client is poorly equipped to intuit. Other active strategies might include negotiating a “formal” contract to govern the relationship, using manual activities in the therapy process, or incorporating outdoor activities into the larger structure of the course of treatment (see Culbertson 1994, chapter 1).

The Psychoeducational Approach

In the case of male clients who are self-motivated for change and wholeness, a psychoeducational treatment methodology will prove quite effective. As Meth and Pasick’s assessment techniques suggest, the greatest value of the psychoeducational method is to teach the male client that while he did not choose whether to inherit the cultural mythic masculine, he has a great deal of choice whether to perpetuate it in his attitudes and behaviour or to deconstruct it personally. Just as Murray Bowen believes that the purpose of psychotherapy is to teach clients how to make themselves well (1985, 316),³¹ so the psychoeducational approach gives men the historical and sociological tools by which they can opt for freedom and creativity in the face of crippling gender-role expectations. Psychoeducation empowers clients, and should never be dismissed as a purely intellectual exercise or as a distraction from the affective task. Psychoeducation even enables the process of transference, though the counselor may need special training to recognize that process within the educational content that teaching and discussion demand.

The psychoeducational method allows room for the male client to address his own “wounded parents.” Since our parents were as much a product of their own time and context as we of ours, they were as wounded by inherited gender-role expectations as we now find ourselves. A male client who has trouble identifying where to begin the therapy process can be encouraged to talk about his relationship with his mother and his father. Such conversations will frequently reveal some degree of fusion between men and their mothers and a significant degree of disillusionment with fathers, by whom most men feel emotionally or even physically abandoned.³² The complexity of men’s relationships with their parents may be accessed through narrative therapy, for most of the significant memories about parents have a story attached to them, a story rich in detail, gender-role expectations, and inherited assumptions about cause and effect (Culbertson, 1998). Some men can claim their own dysfunction only when they tell the stories of their fathers and grandfathers and then recognize themselves acting in the same ways (see Taffel, 1991).

The psychoeducational method can also be useful when treating male clients in groups. Groups provide an excellent setting for men to explore together what they like and dislike about their inherited historical construct of masculinity, and easily capitalize on men’s prior experience with mateship. Groups in which men work cooperatively for greater wholeness and integration make

a statement about nontraditional masculine values, providing an opportunity for men to relate to other men in an interpersonal setting without women, providing a setting in which to discuss topics that are usually difficult for men to discuss, such as dependency and sexuality (sexual

identity, homosexuality, and early childhood sexual experiences), and increasing the political awareness of men as a means for addressing individual and institutional sexism (Rabinowitz and Cochran, 1987, 51-52).

Terry Stein cautions (1982, 275) that there are two types of men's groups: consciousness-raising groups and psychotherapy groups. In either case, an explicit mutual contract between the therapist and the participants must be negotiated, and participants must be carefully screened in advance.³³

Groups are an excellent place to explore the relationship rituals which men construct, though such rituals may also be explored in individual counselling. Richard Whiting suggests five types of relationship ritual which are particularly suited to men seeking wholeness and integration (Whiting; Dienhart and Avis, 1988, 40):

- a. Letting-go rituals, letting go of power, dominance, control, and competence.
- b. Documenting rituals, to track communications of apology and commitment.
- c. Giving and receiving rituals, finding new ways to be a Provider, and acknowledging women and all Providers, especially men.
- d. Rituals of role reversal or odd/even day empowerment and responsibility.
- e. Ritualizing the "games" of healthy relationships or of therapy.

All of these techniques and methodologies—psychoeducational dialogue, narrative therapy, group work, and ritual re-design—are potentially very productive with men who are self-motivated to deconstruct their gender-role inheritance. But not all men who enter therapy are so motivated. Some male clients are in counselling because they have been referred by the courts, an employer, or a physician. Are there techniques which work with these recalcitrant men, in spite of their resistance?

Working with Men in Resistance

Retrenchment and regression may be normal reactions to marital and employment stress or other personal trauma. For certain men, retrenchment and regression are a response to the betrayal of their sense of "entitlement," for the traditional masculine construct has convinced some men that they are due the advantages of power, authority, and control by virtue of being masculine and not feminine. Such men are particularly threatened when women become empowered. Meth and Pasick point out (133) that "Some men feel cheated out of their 'birthright' by feminism." In the workplace and in legislative bodies, this may produce what has come to be called "backlash" (Faludi, 1991).³⁴ In therapy rooms, it may produce defensiveness, resistance, and anger. Gary Brooks (1991) identifies the source of this backlash as "gender-role strain," the discomfort resulting from the disharmony between early gender socialization and newer role expectations.³⁵

In 1995, while leading a series of workshops for the Marriage Guidance network on "Gender Issues in the Counselling Relationship," I conducted an informal survey of how MG counselors perceived their male clients' self-presentation. The following portrait of the typical male client emerged:

Defensive and distant, emotionally shut-down or paralyzed; in pain but unwilling to admit it; task, job and solution oriented; resistant to the counselling process and resistant to change; grieving; aggressive and powerful, self-centered and domineering; rigidly defensive of his rights and authority; anxious about or afraid of loss; confusing love and intercourse and wanting more of both; angry and hurt but unwilling to accept responsibility for relationship tasks or problems; difficult to engage; seeking a "quick fix"; distrustful or even despising of women.³⁶

Brooks presents a similar picture (1991, 53) of what he calls “traditional” men, identifying their main characteristics as “competitiveness, emotional stoicism, homophobia, distant fathering, emphasis on work and achievement, neglect of health needs, and distrust of women despite over-reliance on them for nurturance, emotional expressiveness, and validation of masculinity.” While Brooks finds these characteristics more typical of American working-class, non-academic traditional men, we can also note their similarity to the unexamined historical construct of Pakeha masculinity.

In working with traditional males who are expressing backlash, resistance, defensiveness, and anger, psychoeducational methods are premature. The counselor may wish instead to concentrate first on a reframing of the positive side of the typically traditional male values. For example, mateship can be reframed as loyalty; risktaking as courage and the willingness to try new things (as in Kiwi ingenuity); or hard work as the way men nurture. Only when a trusting collaboration has been established between the counselor and the male client via transference will the psychoeducational method and its related variants listed above be useful.³⁷

Wholeness presumes integration, as opposed to the primary defenses of splitting and dissociation. The “practical” emphasis within the construct of Pakeha masculinity will always make splitting a temptation: categories of good-bad or right-wrong seem as tangible as “a couple of fenceposts and some #8 wire,” and splitting leads into the comfortable world of problem-solving. Integration, on the other hand, demands a level of comfort with ambiguity which men’s life experience has not encouraged. Reframing may also be the key to helping men understand ambiguity. For example, mateship is really a delicate combination of controlled intimacy plus deadly-serious competition (see Culbertson 1994, 27-28).

Dissociation is also a constant temptation for men, in that they are already heavily conditioned toward alexithymia. Meth and Pasick believe that men have feelings, but are not adept at accessing or articulating them: “We find men’s feelings are just as intense and varied as those in women. What is true for men, however, is that they are not as adept as women at recognizing and expressing their feelings” (1990, 154). I have found useful the list of feelings included in Marshall Rosenberg’s *A Model for Nonviolent Communication* in orienting alexithymic men toward a generally unfamiliar vocabulary. The counselor can further assist these men by modeling emotions for them as part of the therapeutic process (see Culbertson 1994, 16).

Terry Kupers (1993, 30-31) offers an unusual perspective on men’s natural resistance to therapy, one which must be held in tension with men’s conditioned alexithymia:

In contrast to women, men suffer from too little responsiveness to natural cycles—in fact, to cycles of any kind. The coping styles we have evolved in order to succeed at work—working long hours without letting up, arriving at work each day even when not feeling well, hiding our true feelings, remaining vigilant before the prospect of attack from as-yet-undisclosed enemies—all depend on our ability to override natural cycles. It is natural to cry when hurt and laugh raucously when something appears very funny; thus, our own practiced stifling of tears and modulation of laughter are just two prominent symptoms of our arrhythmicity.

There are other symptoms: an obsessional feeling one always has to be on schedule, an inability to let emotional experiences take their course, an inability to truly enjoy relationships and events that are not task-oriented, a refusal to admit when strong feelings interfere with the desire or capacity to continue what one is doing, difficulty coping with illness (one’s own and those of others), an inability to rest and take time to heal, and so forth.

Dealing with arrhythmicity by means of the type of “documenting rituals” suggested earlier may afford the successful transition from reframing and modeling methodologies to a more psychoeducational one, once the therapeutic alliance is secure.

While traditional male clients who are still in the defensive or resistant stage may not function well in psychotherapeutic groups, the counselor should remain aware that no one lives in a vacuum. The rugged independence of Pakeha males may easily mask the fact that many men need to be in some committed relationship in order to maintain their masculine identity. Hence a group of feminist psychotherapists can write: “There is no self without an other, and the challenge is to integrate autonomy and connection” (Goodrich et. al., 1988, 19). With men in the company of their partners, the therapist can begin the process of explaining the determinative weight of the inherited mythic masculine. It is usually more constructive within a relationship when both partners learn that a man’s interpersonal style is primarily a result of family, societal, and historical conditions than to think it is due solely to individual failures. Wives, partners, and even children may need to be included from time to time in therapy. They affect a man’s changing, are affected by his change, and may even be a significant source of resistance to his change. Realizing that the differences and difficulties in the mate they are trying to change are the result of socialization—not stubbornness—can be eye-opening (Meth and Pasick, 1990, 149-50).

Who Should Counsel Pakeha Men?

Not every counselor is equally equipped to deal effectively with Pakeha men. My experience with the Marriage Guidance network led me to believe that some counselors, women in particular, are so damaged by years of experience with resistant or unresponsive male clients that they have lost their ability to work well with them. The primary qualification for a counselor working with Pakeha males is the belief that they *can* change. If that commitment is missing, then therapy is pointless. This is not an issue of gender—that only men can counsel men effectively—but an issue of empathy and training. The bond of solidarity between two women or between two men is not necessarily easier to create than any other human bond. Every attachment between two people requires voluntary empathy and interpathy (the reciprocity of shared empathy, or mutual positive regard). Clear, tested, reflective insight and experience from a counselor of either gender are far more important than simple identification based on the presumption that two persons of the same gender immediately understand each other.

The crucial factors in predisposing a counselling relationship to success, when working with Pakeha men, are (a) both the counselor’s and the client’s belief that men can change; (b) a consciousness of the life situation of the other; (c) a capacity to discern influences internal and external to the client; (d) sensitivity to communications verbal and non-verbal; and (e) a sophisticated understanding of interpersonal dynamics. Men’s counselling of men holds different rewards from women’s counselling of men, but the issue of the counselor’s gender is less important than the level of skill, education, and experience she or he brings to the relationship, and her or his willingness to offer types of counselling which both recognize and transcend gender stereotypes. Forgiving realism and a tenacious hope are the keys to wholeness and integration.

The approach to “counselling Pakeha males for wholeness” which I have set forth in this essay is demanding for counselors. It assumes that counselors read New Zealand literature, history, sociology, and gender studies, as well as the more commonly-accepted continuing education in counselling theory. But it is designed as well to take seriously the fact that Pakeha males grow up in a very specific culture with its own unique gender construct of masculinity, which in turn is the source of many of their problems. Only by keeping our focus so narrow can we hope to adequately affirm Pakeha men in their quest toward wholeness.

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END NOTES

¹ Robert Chapman's essay "Fiction and the Social Pattern," in *Landfall* in the early 1950s, makes the same argument; and see Jensen (1996, 94) and Shenon (1995).

² Belich (1996, 371) illustrates the phenomenal rise: "In 1864, Hokitika was nothing. In 1865, it had 246 buildings including 67 hotels. In 1866, it had 102 hotels, as well as dance rooms, gambling rooms, skittle alleys and shooting galleries, plus an opera house seating 1,200. By 1867 it has three theatres, a cricket club, a skating rink and a waxworks with models of the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Pope, the Australian bushranger Ben Hall and the Maori killers of Volkner, so catering for all tastes. Its population may have peaked as high as 7,000, and it was the second port in New Zealand, measured by customs revenue."

³ Belich (1996, 284) describes British emigration policy as a form of "social excretion of the unwanted." Yet (302) "no one emigrated in order to be worse off."

⁴ Belich (1996, 313-387) documents that about 20% of the immigrants were former prisoners, released or escaped, who came from Australian penal colonies.

⁵ Though James and Saville-Smith (1994, 25) would disagree with most scholars on how much intermarriage there was, it is certainly true that in the 1860s, there were at least two men to every one woman in the country.

⁶ A list of the most common jobs performed by men between 1830 and 1880 reveals how many of them were itinerant, unsettled, or easily uprooted: rabbiters, shearers, herders, diggers, soldiers, sailors, loggers, railway workers, blacksmiths, farriers, wheelwrights, coachbuilders, carters, bullockies, saddlers, stockbreeders, carpenters, joiners, coopers, cabinetmakers, shipwrights, millers, miners, panners, tanners, dairy workers, freezer workers, scourers, fellmongers, musterers, yeomen, farmers, prospectors, sawyers, ploughmen, reapers, and fencers.

⁷ The phrase in this usage is coined by James and Saville-Smith (1994). John Mulgan used the same phrase in 1938 as the title for his only novel, though his book is about the post-First World War struggle with the War, and the government's resettlement program for returning veterans. Perhaps the phrase is so apt because it describes New Zealand masculinity at so many different periods.

⁸ Many of these men as well as their victims fell into the category which Miles Fairburn (1982) calls "atomism," i.e., isolated units with little sense of community. Belich (1996, 423) numbers these drifters and wanderers at one-third of the population, minimally. The reader should image what would happen if the entire city of greater Auckland were suddenly made homeless and began to roam the country. Fairburn's theories of anomie, radical dislocation, bondlessness, and atomisation, are most fully developed in *The Ideal Society and Its Enemies*. Fairburn's ideas received a sharp critique in *The New Zealand Journal of History*, April 1990, 3-21, and the entire October 1991 is given over to critique and Fairburn's vigorous response.

⁹ This policy led quickly to women's franchise in 1893: "Women's franchise was pursued not only as an inalienable democratic right consistent with liberal political philosophy; it was also presented as providing women with the legal power to protect their social and economic interests. Moreover, women's alleged moral superiority and conservatism were cited as important reasons for participation in the hitherto corrupt world of male politics" (James and Saville-Smith, 1994, 33).

¹⁰ "Men's pursuit of male mateship grows out of the organization of men's lives around paid labour. For women, the lack of economic resources, restrictions on geographic mobility, and the continual demands on women's time, all of which are associated with living within one's workplace (the home), means that the pursuit of mateship is replaced by the pursuit of a familial ideal. The presentation of home, children, and husband becomes the preoccupation, and self-sacrifice becomes as much ritualized in female culture as mateship is in male" (James and Saville-Smith, 1994, 58-59).

¹¹ Frank Sargeson used a related title for one of his short stories, "A Man and His Wife"; more recently, Ian Cross has written *The Family Man*, whose hero feels trapped in domesticity (1993, 10): "Because he couldn't get going on it this morning, he returned the manuscript to its envelope on the floor and picked up the second one in which he kept notes for an article he'd been struggling with lately on the plight of the NZ male as a victim of twentieth-century social idealism—for the most vigorous years of his life confined in a welfare society that gave him little sense of purpose and no real challenge. Practically all his achievements, or at least those that were recognized and applauded, stemmed from a desire to escape the dullness of his life. The poor devil had climbed the highest mountains, run the fastest miles, fought wars all over the world that were none of his business, sailed the seven seas in small boats, played physical sports with ferocity, and apparently would do practically anything to get away from the country; if unable to do that, he disappeared into the bush for days on end or swilled away the dreariness of his life in the pub."

12 “A challenge to our gendered culture most obviously entails abandoning the restrictive femininity prescribed by our gendered culture. But it also means redefining masculinity by promoting the alternative and subordinated masculinities which are not built on male dominance over women and male exclusivity” (James and Saville-Smith, 1994, 94).

13 In 1861, Hughes wrote, in his sequel *Tom Brown at Oxford*, “Sir, you belong to a body whose creed is to fear God, and walk 1000 miles in 1000 hours.”

14 Kingsley was severely beaten as a child by his father, leaving him with a life-long stutter. One cannot help wondering how this shaped his later philosophy of manliness. He also believed that “a man has only to take a cold bath every morning to become morally good, a conviction for which generations of English public schoolboys have had reason to curse him” (Chitty, 1974, 221). Apparently his own obsessive washing of both body and clothes was connected to an exaggerated aversion to sex.

15 Interestingly, Belich (1996, 436) roots this type of literature in the turn-of-the-century female writer G. B. Lancaster (Edith Lyttleton).

16 Belich (1996, 429) believes that the term “mate” arrived with the sailors; between 1840 and 1880, a half-million sailors landed in New Zealand.

17 Yet on the sexual tension between mates, see Sargeson’s story “A Great Day,” 80.

18 See Owen Marshall on “the takahe men”: “One never began a conversation, and in reply he spoke slowly, almost as if he were watching one word out of sight before releasing the next...Old Man Trumpeter advanced on to language as he would an untried bridge—with caution and reserve.”

19 Felix Donnelly, attacking popular masculinity in the late 1970s, identified ‘being a sexual conqueror’ as the most important attribute of the New Zealand male. Nearly half of NZ men claim to have more than five sexual partners during their lifetime (“Sex in New Zealand,” 48).

20 A. R. D. Fairburn’s essay “The Woman Problem” sounds very much like the way that Robert Bly shames contemporary men by calling them “soft,” and obviously to be masculine, one needs to be hard; see Bly (1990, 3-4) and Faludi (1991, 312).

21 Belich (1996, 424) points out that in the 1870s, drunkenness convictions in New Zealand numbered three times higher than in Britain. The whole culture still has an unusually high rate of alcohol consumption compared to most Western countries.

22 This is well illustrated in the recent Australian documentary, “Boys and Balls”. Among others, the film quotes George Orwell: “Rugby is war minus the shooting.”

23 Jensen (1996, 23) quoting Dan Davin: “No question what the war was about. There was a war and if you were a man you did your damndest to get into it.”

24 Both Fairburn and Belich characterize the 1830s-1880s as a period of “bingeing, hitting, and suing”; see Belich (1996, 424, 435, 450).

25 “Being ‘staunch’ is the dominant masculine ideal at both the all-male and the co-ed colleges studied and to be ‘staunch’ boys must display sexual and social domination of women” (Rout, 1992, 17; Davey, 2000).

26 Jensen (1996, 37) again quoting Dan Davin: “On the whole I have preferred to suggest emotion briefly, casually almost, and even inarticulately. This seemed to correspond to the way men actually expressed their feelings in their dealings with one another—a flippancy sometimes masking as well as expressing a deep concern or solicitude, a piece of apparent abuse intended in fact as a way of expressing affection and recognized as such.”

27 Recent writings on the subject include Feher (1989), Dutton (1995), Krondorfer (1996), and Culbertson (2002).

28 The usually quoted statistic in white Western cultures is that 3 out of every 10 males are sexually abused, usually by another male, before the age of 18; in New Zealand the statistic appears to be 4 out of 10. And see Sargeson’s story “I’ve Lost My Pal” (42).

29 For a contrast with Maori masculine emotional structures, see Henare (1988, 6).

30 According to James and Saville-Smith (1994, 95), the two major areas in need of immediate reorganization, if we are to undermine this over-gendered culture, are the running of the household and the care of others.

31 In the same chapter (1985, 310), Bowen rejects the title “therapist,” preferring instead to be called a “teacher.”

32 Material on these two subjects proliferates. On men and their mothers, see for example Gurian (1994), McMahon (1996), and Culbertson (2005). On men and their fathers, see for example Corneau (1991), Mitscherlich (1969), and Osherson (1986).

33 On structuring both men’s consciousness-raising and psychotherapy groups, see Culbertson (1992, 144-52); McLeod and Pemberton (1987, 86-91); Rabinowitz and Cochran (1987), and Stein (1982). See also Tiger (1969).

34 To a degree, this backlash is due to the fragility of the masculine identity. Kupers (1993, 164) points out how the boundaries defining traditional masculinity parallel the boundaries which distinguish pathology from mental health.

35 Brooks' term probably originates in Pleck as "sex-role strain paradigm."

36 The same survey listed the following as the most common problems that male clients in the MG network exhibit: Inability to see things from any perspective except his own, expectations about what a woman should be, look like, and do, head-heart disconnection, poor communication skills, controlling, unwilling to connect action and decision with re-action and consequences, fear of feelings, lack of insight, very low self-esteem masked by bravado, alcohol abuse to cover pain, grief over separation but unable to understand what is wanted of him, inability to be angry in a healthy way, stuck in inherited stereotypes.

37 The problem of establishing a therapeutic alliance with a traditional male client was already noticed as early as Freud. In his essay "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1963, 252), Freud wrote of men's difficulty in cooperating with the therapy process: "At no other point in one's analytic work does one suffer more from an oppressive feeling that all one's repeated efforts have been in vain, and from a suspicion that one has been 'preaching to the winds,' than when one is trying to persuade a woman to abandon her wish for a penis on the ground of its being unrealizable or when one is seeking to convince a man that a passive attitude to men does not always signify castration and that it is indispensable in many relationships in life. The rebellious overcompensation of the male produces one of the strongest transference-resistances. He refuses to subject himself to a father-substitute or to feel indebted to him for anything, and consequently he refuses to accept his recovery from the doctor."