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CCC-Break 1/2019: How can we change and reinvent male roles in today's diverse generational cultures?

BACKGROUND:

The recent controversial [Gillette ad](#), coming on the head of the [#metoo Movement](#), has helped to bring into focus men's issues, which have long been simmering beneath the surface, largely drowned out by women's concerns in public discourse. Asked to launch the discussion with a five-minute focus on these issues, I began with a brief survey of my activity in men's work which began in the mid-1970s and continues to this day. This included relevant [articles](#) about gender culture, a project called *Hidden Valley Center for Men*, which for several years delivered workshops entitled "[How to love an Angry Woman](#)". Out of these activities emerged a [book on workplace behavior](#), a [Cultural Detective](#)® comparing women's and men's values, and a [diversophy](#)® [game on gender](#). More recently, my best buddy Walt and I wrote [a book on aging for men](#), and now I am developing a new [game on Manhood](#), a card from which appears almost daily on the [SIETAR LinkedIn](#) page and is broadcast by [The Good Men Project](#).

ISSUES:

"Toxic", Oxford dictionary's Word of the Year 2018, is most often heard in conjunction with masculinity. What it means is that traditional core male roles of *Protector* and *Provider* and the masculine sense of identity are too narrow for and causing serious damage today's world. Whereas women, in the solidarity of the women's movement ride on the strength of newly defined aspirations of possibilities, most men largely remain members of [the disposable sex](#), whether we are talking about their exploitation in the workplace or their deaths in the military. The decline of manhood is highlighted in the current [boy crisis](#), increasingly manifest in the declining performance and attendance of boys in academia, as well as to the "father wound", the absence of rich fatherly models of and a well-rounded initiation into manhood. [Research](#) is showing that in some places the stress of survival is actually forcing the younger generations of men back on more traditional archetypes making them less egalitarian than the older generations.

There is a throwback to violence and the tactical use of fear, as politicians stimulate populism in many Western countries. The insight [*corruptio optimi pessima*](#) is applicable to cultural values. While our group values are continually created and adjusted to serve us in the management of everyday life, they can also be taken to extremes, erasing other essential values in their wake. Donald Trump's wall (protector) and his taking responsibility for the US economic upturn (provider) are rooted in and reinforce the narrow and constricted definition of manhood in the larger picture of identity politics. Suicides and mass shootings are overwhelmingly male acts driven by frustration the part of men to assuage the anger generated by unsatisfying attempts to reach a sense of identity and personal affirmation. *Puer aeternus* (everlasting boyhood) and the [Peter Pan Syndrome](#) are labels for this rage and the consequent inability of so many men to perform effectively and responsibly in an adult context. These tendencies seem to be increasing rather than diminishing in Generation X and beyond.

DISCUSSION & INSIGHTS:

Our discussion centered around these issues and brought to the fore the importance of both dialogue between women and men as well as the preparatory need for men to be speaking with each other, exploring their challenges and caring for each other. The fact that this discussion was attended solely by women, with the exception of the contributor, is a sad indicator of this need. So, the question of reinventing male identity, enriching it begins there.

Having a man's perspective on the issues was valued by the participants. We brought up and challenged the current tendency to dismiss the specificity and value of female and male roles rather than enriching and refining them. Political Correctness is on the decline in contemporary voices of discontent as is civility. It is important that confirmation bias not be used to immediately label an element of a man's behavior that a woman finds uncomfortable as "toxic masculinity." There needs to be a space for male voices in the gender debate, so it is unfortunate that a small portion of the feminist movement lumps all male gender activists into a conspiracy of rapists and abusers. While there are masculinist extremists, most male activists are both supportive of and learning from feminist discourse.

We asked each other what we can personally do to change this situation? As interculturalists, for example, we can work to fill the identity void in those we work with, for example, refugees undergoing identity crises. We can make evident the huge range of options open to both men and women to identify themselves in their current and new environments. We need to resist identity politics based on fear and anxiety that make traditional roles the default and urge us to adopt or reinforce them. We noted that fear is not limited to those who sense they are losing traditional roles but that it exists as well on the part of those challenging them, ourselves included. Fear on both sides of the social rift hinders productive dialog. We need to forge the new reality together. We cannot create change simply from the right or the left, or simply from the female perspective, despite the strength of the feminist movement. We need to deal with our tendency to label others and our often-unconscious resistance to dialogue.

SIETAR Europa Cross Cultural Coffee Breaks

Summary

We noted that those with power or leverage need to empower those lacking them. Men need to hear not only from each other, but from women can empower men as well by letting them know that their concerns are legitimate and deserve listening and considered exchange. In many respects, most men are not per se in defining positions of power, but they have ingested from their earliest years the message that they should “man-up”, giving rise to the attitudes and behaviors of dominance that are limiting, burdensome and painful to women.

Men need to be empowered in their right to determine their identity freely, emerging from the so-called “man box”, to awareness of a much broader range of possibilities of how-to-be. Without this it will be impossible for us to bring our differing gender perspectives to bear on issues of world concern.

We felt that there was much more talk about, but having emptied our coffee cups for the morning, we look forward to further discussions in this series of SIETAR Europa Cross-Cultural Coffee breaks.

Thanks for this summary of our CCC Break discussion to:



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Summary

Thanks for the intriguing discussions to our participants:

Susan Holm and Ludmila Biernacka

