

TRANSITIONS

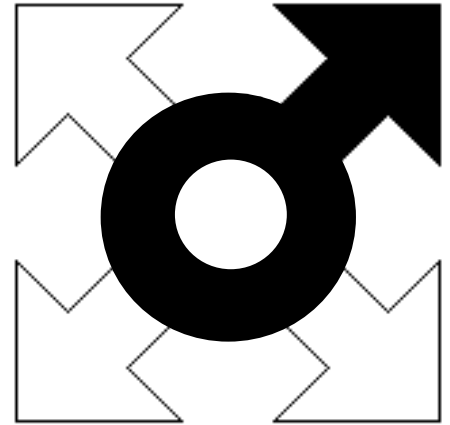
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One Man's Misgivings About One More Homophobic, Misandrosistic Missive

By Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

The National Coalition of Free Men's position on gay issues has always been defined by an uneasy balance between official stance and unofficial praxis. Officially NCFM is neutral on matters of sexual identity, neither condemns nor supports gay men insofar as they are gay, but supports them as men. This official position has been put into action when, for example, a judge who allowed lesbians to adopt children would not allow gay men to adopt. Since this discrimination was against gay men, not gays in general, NCFM got involved. Informally, however, NCFM's attitude toward gay men has been intermittent, largely dependent on how energetic its gay members are at any one time, and determined by the varying levels of pro-gay or anti-gay sentiment being openly expressed by its straight members.

In mid-2002 there was a significant fray over the "gay issue" because one of NCFM's members, Rudolph Bold, saw fit to use Transitions as a forum for his anti-gay sentiments. His initial foray resulted in a furor of writing which traversed three issues of Transitions: the May-June, July-August, and Sept.-Oct. issues of that year. These issues contained: an introduction to the debate written by myself, a letter I wrote to NCFM's

then-president Tom Williamson about NCFM's official position on gay men, Mister Bold's article, and an exchange of six letters

(adamantine and volatile all) between Mister Bold and myself.

The exchange ended in a stalemate. With the skirmish over, NCFM went back to its usual posture on the issue: an overt official position that is rarely given mention, and an informal relaxed attitude which, if often mentioned, is so mild as to be scarcely memorable.

But now the gay issue again comes to the fore, this time because the fervor (or fever) of that 2002 exchange caused somebody a problem. This somebody, or busybody, is a very malcontent straight female named Natalie Hartmann who threw a grenade in my direction. Attached to that grenade was a note which, I must concede, has merit and deserves a response. So we here (belatedly) print her letter - followed by my response. True to my genteel nature, I generously pulled the pin on Natalie's grenade before tossing it back.

July 17, 2005

Dear Editor,

I really should just write, "Dear Boys," and then add, "Boys will be boys!" and leave it at that. However, I am really upset, so I am writing this to get it off my chest.

My boyfriend left me a few weeks ago. He moved off to Kansas City, Missouri, leaving me stuck out here in the middle of Nowhere, Kansas. He left me, and guess what else he left. A stack of your little magazine called Transitions. Now just tell me one thing. When my

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Editor's Comment

Shortly after I became Transitions editor, even before I could put out my first issue, I received some most distressing news. Francis Baumli was retiring from writing articles for Transitions and starting a publishing group called Viaticum Press International.

You can imagine how I felt. Francis had contributed so many well-written articles over the years. They were always a main event in the pages of Transitions. I felt like a coach who had just lost his MVP.

So it went until the summer of 2005 when I received a strange but humorous letter, written on bright pink perfumed

paper, from a woman named Natalie. The letter is reprinted in Francis's article. Francis had also received a copy, and he soon called me. He said that he was considering writing a response to the letter, and I assured him that I would print it if he did.

Now I am in the process of transferring the editorship to someone new, and this may well be my last issue. I'm very glad that Francis has come through and sent me his article, so I can print it before leaving.

I suppose I have Natalie to thank. I believe the readers will thank her as well. Francis has once again written a piece that needs to be printed. By examining homo-

and heterosexual couples, he has gleaned important lessons about relationships. I particularly found the anecdotes interesting. And the lesson that everyone has a right to sensuality in sex is one that every man needs to read.

Ever Yours in the Cause,

Jason Leatherman

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boyfriend left, he took everything. I mean everything except this stack of Transitions. I guess he decided I am worthless so he left me behind. Since he left Transitions behind too, this must mean he thinks it's totally worthless also. How does that make you feel?

A few nights ago I started reading those magazines he left. All of you are such whiners! It sounds like every single one of you is a complete loser. Why would women want to treat you better when every single one of you is a jerk?

At least your magazine was good for entertainment. Also it helped me understand why maybe my boyfriend left me. Now I think it's probably because he's gay. There you have it. The simple truth. He swore he wasn't leaving me for another woman. I didn't think to ask if maybe he was leaving me for a man.

When I had this insight, I went back and read something I had

sort of skipped over when I was perusing your magazines. It was those letters between a man named Rudolph Bold and that half-a-man named Francis Baumli. I have to admit one thing. Of the two, Francis Baumli is the better writer. He has obviously had a lot more practice. Being a better writer, though, doesn't make him righter. Rudolph Bold was correct in saying that gay men should put up and shut up and keep out of sight. Francis Baumli was wrong about everything, but he sounded so high and mighty with his fancy writing style. That's how he made it look like he was right. I saw through him and I saw how he slipped it right by all of you and no one caught him in the error of his ways. Just read what he wrote in Volume 22, Number 4. Here it is:

You may be surprised to know that I have learned a great deal regarding exactly what is perilous about

marriage - between a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman - by associating with married gay couples and noting the very marked differences in prenuptial expectations, role actualizations, mutual trust, as well as stability and longevity of such unions as they exist in coupled men and coupled women. The differences, which I will not here spell out, are nothing less than remarkable. Gay male couples and gay female couples are so utterly different from one another (generally speaking) that I can not but espy, in their habits and example, exactly how straight men and women view marriage differently. From these perceptions, I learned a great deal about the dangers of marriage, and I believe I was able, in

approaching my current marriage (seventeen years now), to avoid (or traverse while rectifying) most of those difficulties. The point being, Rudy, that my “straight” marriage is, I think, vastly more healthy because I learned lessons about marriage by associating with gay people who are married.

Okay. Stop and back up there, you gullible readers. Didn’t anybody notice what Francis Baumli didn’t do? He goes on about how he learned so much about love and marriage and how to make his own marriage work by paying attention to how gay couples relate differently from straight couples. Then he has the gall to say, “The differences, which I will not here spell out, are nothing less than remarkable.” Okay, Mister

Baumli, if they are so remarkable, then remark on them! (Talk about wimping out as a writer!)

So now is the time, dear editor, to make the remarkable Francis Baumli go back and remark on what he says is so remarkable. He snuck that evasion by everybody, but he didn’t sneak it by me. Go ahead and call Baumli’s bluff! Make him tell us about those great, wonderful truths he learned from “associating with gay people who are married.” I bet he’ll just have to concede the point, and admit he never actually learned anything. Or maybe he’ll wimp out again and say he doesn’t remember. Ha!

Sincerely yours,
Natalie Hartmann

Dear Natalie,

I have better things to do than spend my time replying to a female who thinks her snit warrants a public hissy fit. I am tempted to merely hurl a few insults back and be done with this. But since I am a gentleman I shall try to be civil.

Before you got around to insulting me, you insulted readers of *Transitions*, i.e., members of The National Coalition of Free Men. From your puny perspective every one of us is a whiner, a loser, a jerk. Such paltry vocabulary you have, Natalie. If you must insult people, can’t you at least do it with eloquence so your words are worth reading, even if your message is not worth believing?

As for your diatribe: You can’t imagine why your boyfriend

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TRANSITIONS

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Media Digest

Excerpts from recent news reports and commentary on men's issues

compiled by Mike Spaniola

Some are More Equal Than Others

by Stephen Baskerville

WorldNetDaily.com, October 9, 2007

http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=58038

The substitution of the re-titled "Women's Equality Amendment" (WEA) for the same old text of what was known in the 1970s as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is a real-life validation of George Orwell's fictional portrayal of the opportunism of extremist political movements and their tendency to turn high-minded ideals into the opposite of what they promise. In "Animal Farm," Orwell's allegory of the Soviet revolution, the pigs proclaim that "All animals are equal." Once they seize power, the pigs revise the principle: "But some animals are more equal than others." ...

In fact, if any group faces systematic discrimination today, it is males. And it is not trivial. Men routinely lose their children, along with everything else they possess (including their freedom), in divorce courts, because child custody is virtually automatic to mothers, even when the mother is the one breaking up the family. Feminists not only defend but celebrate this "divorce revolution" and resist shared parenting provisions that would allow children to have their fathers as well as mothers after divorce.

Rogue Prosecutors: the Rule or the Exception?

by Nathan Tabor

The Conservative Voice, November 12, 2007

<http://www.theconservativevoice.com/article/29221.html>

Last week, by a margin of 53-40, a divided Senate narrowly confirmed former federal judge Michael B. Mukasey as the 81st attorney general of the United States. Mukasey, had outraged many lawmakers and human rights groups by repeatedly

refusing to classify waterboarding, a simulated-drowning technique, as torture.

What was not focused on in the hearings or the senate floor debate was the Senators failure to find out what Judge Mukasey intends to do about rogue prosecutors within the Department of Justice he may lead, and how the damage they cause affects public confidence in the department and its mission. While Judge Mukasey's answer on water boarding may be important to the future of the country and the War on Terror, of at least equal importance is the whether Judge Mukasey would commit to taking strong disciplinary action against overzealous prosecutors by using all the tools at his disposal, including the Office of Professional Responsibility.

A once obscure topic, prosecutorial abuse has gained prominence in the minds of many Americans as a result of the Duke lacrosse case, and the actions of the prosecutor, former-District Attorney Mike Nifong. Although a local prosecutor, Nifong has become the poster boy of prosecutorial abuse on every government level. With a story line that included sex, racial tensions, and gender and income inequality, the Duke case captured the attention of the media and the nation. We now know that Nifong willfully disregarded evidence of the boys' innocence and, thanks in large part to enormous public attention and condemnation, he has been rightly stripped of his badge and the keys to his office.

Child Support: The Fallacy, the Fraud and the Failure

www.ifeminists.net, November 3, 2007

http://www.ifeminists.net/e107_plugins/content/content.php?content.252

Approximately 25,000 men committed suicide [in 2002]. While we do not know the exact reasons why, because they are not here to tell us, we do know that 80 percent of them were "recently involved" in a Family Court case. That, on average, is almost 400 men for per state. ... Thousands more men languish in jails for crimes

committed when they "snapped." Having your children stolen from you, your house and all your property, often losing your job and then being put in "debtors prison" has a way of driving even a "reasonable man" over the edge. ...

It is our children who are and will pay the truly hidden costs, both in taxes, and in the quality of their lives. These programs are systematically, and intentionally, disenfranchising children from their fathers because, well, because it is good for Big Government. Those who have an interest in perpetuating this system would have us believe that this is the fault of "bad dads" who don't care to act as good parents to their children. Of course, now we have more tax money being spent to encourage fathers to act like better dads, but have not yet recognized the true source of these problems never was the dads.

Most dads do care very much about their kids, but these government programs are very much designed to drive them away – in droves. Teaching "parenting skills" to a man who cannot afford to eat because of governmental extortions, is a futile scam, aimed solely at political pacification of "the masses" and not a purposeful address of the problems.

ed. note: ifeminists.net posted the commentary as "anonymous." However, Ken Wiggins wrote and published the essay on his Web site <http://www.amatterofjustice.org> in February 2004. Wiggins is also Webmaster for his <http://www.parentsforchildren.net>.

The Cure for PMS

by Marc H. Rudov

The No Nonsense Man, November 18, 2007

<http://thenonsenseman.mensnewsdaily.com/2007/11/>

Weighing all the input from others, and factoring in my personal experience, I've concluded that a man will face no female iceberg more destructive than PMS: princess mentality syndrome. PMS makes

a woman feel entitled to special rights, privileges, chivalry, and pedestals — just like a princess. PMS causes men to suffer headaches, cramped lifestyles, bloated expenses, low self-esteem, and bleeding of cash. Her PMS is nonsense and totally avoidable. If you suffer from it, you do so by choice.

What causes PMS? The two-word reflexive response men give to women: “Yes, dear.” In a nutshell, fathers initiate PMS; boyfriends and husbands perpetuate it. Allow me to illustrate PMS in its two basic forms: teenage girl and adult woman. Notice that, in each form, PMS cannot exist without a man’s endorsement. Do either of these scenarios look familiar to you? PMS is an iceberg that will sink your ship. Ignore it at your peril.

The next time you see a man in a TV commercial or TV sitcom being portrayed as a buffoon, remind yourself that such negative male depictions are direct results of millions of men tolerating PMS, by saying “Yes, dear.” Such obsequious male behavior is duplicated and institutionalized

everywhere from universities to corporations to newspapers to restaurants to bedrooms to courtrooms — all the way to the Senate floor, where Joe “Yes, Dear” Biden convinced his colleagues to enact VAWA and reauthorize it three times. The “VAWA Iceberg,” and all misandrist legislation, is directly derived from PMS.

Spoken Like a True Feminist

posted by RandomMan, Dec. 3, 2007

<http://news.mensactivism.org/node/8778>

We know and accept that feminists (and many women who happily suck up the fruits of feminism while disclaiming the label) hate us, even more than they hate most men. We have the temerity, the gall, the unmitigated nerve to stand up and say “enough.” We’re fighting a battle against a well-defended and long-standing enemy. . . .

The fact that the history of gender roles for both men and women wasn’t “oppression” or a vast conspiracy against anyone is never considered. Nor is the fact that men were even more bound by their

gender roles than women ever mentioned. The fact that men have always sacrificed themselves for women never enters the picture, either.

[C]onsider that feminists have been fighting a war against an “enemy” who never bothered to show up. Their “victories” have been against the very people who make their existence possible, and who have given them every single thing they have every demanded . . . Feminists are, at some level, deep in their reptilian brain stems, aware that the “enemy” has finally decided to have a look at the battlefield. We’re forming up, and bringing the guns out in order to restore the “equality” they have long-since surpassed.

And it scares the hell out of them.

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left you unless it was for someone else? Try considering the simple fact that you aren’t a very nice person, Natalie. Maybe your boyfriend, rather than leaving you for someone else, simply had enough moral decency to leave someone who is dependent, shallow, and hateful.

How tiresome to encounter one more self-indulgent exercise in homophobia. Such hatred is almost as offensive as it is boring. You think your boyfriend left you because he is gay? You are not alone with this female-serving attitude. Marilyn Monroe often said, “If a man isn’t attracted to me, I know he must be gay.” Females less celebrated than this famous blonde share her attitude. In high school I heard many a girl insult a boy who did not want to ask her out by calling him a fag. Years

later I knew a woman in her sixties who had been widowed for many years and wanted to marry again. She had established, she thought, a wonderful relationship with a “gentleman friend,” but when he abruptly terminated the relationship this woman concluded that he had to be gay.

It appears, Natalie, that you, like too many women I have known, look upon gay men as competitors who might succeed in getting the man you want. This attitude was in vogue even back in fifty-century B.C. Greece, where the high-class prostitutes, called hetairai, were, as Will Durant put it in *The Story of Civilization*, “scandalized to the very depths of their pockets” by homosexuality, and at every

opportunity ridiculed the practice and moralized against it.¹

The several reasons women are phobic about homosexual men are obvious. Women feel threatened sexually because they like the attentions of men and want all men to want them (or at least want to believe that, given the right circumstances, any man would want them). They feel threatened economically because male sexual interest is often the means toward a woman getting what she wants economically - whether on a date, or later, being supported by the man she lives with or is married to. Also, women feel threatened emotionally when a man chooses another man, rather than a woman, for emotional intimacy. In our culture women play

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the role of emotional caregiver. A man, who goes to a woman for emotional needs, becomes emotionally dependent upon her and this gives her emotional power over him. But when gay men provide this support, they to some degree take emotional power away from women. Threaten a woman's emotional power over men in general, or over one man in particular, and she is going to do what she can to regain that power. Hence, in our culture, women are covertly, constantly, and consciously waging a war against intimacy between men. Not only the intimacy of homosexual relationships, but other kinds of male intimacy too. I saw this in my mother. Back when I was about eleven years old, one evening, when the whole family was at a public outing, my father encountered an old friend he had not seen in years. For half an hour, with his arm around this fellow's shoulders, my dad took him from one person to another, introducing him and telling stories about their earlier years. When we got home my mother was furious. That night, and during the next several evenings, she ridiculed him constantly for putting his arm around another man. The verbal message was a constant variation on, "What did other people think, you putting your arm around a man like that?!" The implication was: "Don't you dare ever let yourself feel that intimate with a man again!" About eight years later, when I was first living away from home, an old high school friend named Roger would come and visit. I was 19 years old;

he was 16. We innocently slept together in my double bed. When my mother learned of this she let me know that she had strong suspicions that I might be homosexual because I slept in the same bed with Roger. She had "mentioned" this to my grandmother, and other relatives too, and had even talked it over with our parish priest. My ears burned at hearing this, and needless to say, matters were henceforth arranged by me so that Roger and I never slept together again. (In truth, a great deal in the way of sex had gone on between Roger and me. But all this was verbal - as we talked for hours about the girls we wanted to get it on with, or already had, or might, or wouldn't, or couldn't, or shouldn't, etc.)

That innocence between Roger and me was lost. My mother had made sure of it. Innocent intimacy with later male friends was just as effectively sabotaged by girlfriends, my first wife, or any woman the other man might be involved with. As one of my best male friends put it, early on in our friendship, "There's nothing that comes between two men like one of their wives." A few years later, his wife, visibly jealous of our friendship, demanded that he end his association with me and he did. Shame on him. And shame on any woman who demands this kind of emotional control.

So you see, Natalie, your homophobia is personally disturbing to me even though I am not gay. Your homophobia puts an emotional straitjacket on all men because it

inhibits, even prohibits, their being intimate with one another.

Despite your cavalier, and malicious, prejudices, I must concede that your letter makes one valid point. I did indeed claim that, by observing what does and does not work in gay marriages, I learned valuable lessons which have helped my own marriage. Also, it is true that I did not proceed to spell out what these lessons are. My not proceeding to "remark" on these "remarkable" lessons was not, as you sarcastically claim, because actually I had nothing to say. Rather, I was aware that already our editor's patience had been severely taxed, what with giving so much space to (once again) argue the "gay question." Also, I confess that I was feeling rather futile about the stubborn Rudy Bold. It was obvious that I was not going to change his mind, and I was beginning to feel that anything further I might write would be wasted on him.

But now I will remark on those valuable lessons. Frankly I am not much interested in answering your challenge. I mainly am interested in articulating this matter in a way that will edify other readers. And in so doing, I shall here broaden the context. I will describe not only lessons I learned from gay marriages but also those I learned from single gay people. Also, let me clarify that when I refer to gay "marriage," I am aware that gay marriage per se is not legal in most states. So by gay "marriage" I am referring to what is usually called "gay partnering" - gay people who are coupled, i.e., united in a relationship which, except for the

stamp of legality, is like marriage or at least involves the kind of intimacy straight couples have when, even if not married, they are sexually or economically committed to one another and live together.

At the outset, Natalie, I must clarify that I did not make the claim that the truths I learned were, as you put it, "wonderful." Note the language I used. I spoke of learning what is "perilous about marriage." I referred to the "dangers" and "difficulties" of marriage. The truth is, Natalie, I have learned lessons not only from what is wonderful but also from what is ugly in gay marriages. In fact, I must admit (and perhaps this does not speak well of my character), I probably learn more from other people's mistakes than I learn from their successes. I recoil from the ugly more strongly than I draw nigh unto the good. Such is my temperament.

But please keep in mind that when I criticize gays and lesbians, I am not denigrating them; and when I praise them, I am not putting them on a pedestal. They are no worse, and no better, than straight people. Just slightly different. In most ways gays and lesbians are just as nice and moral as straight people; and in most ways they are just as difficult, unpleasant, and detestable. Not worse, mind you. Just equal. I am fair, you see, in my pessimistic assessment of the human race.

For a similar, though perhaps more kind, assessment of the gay personality, note what the great (gay) writer, Christopher Isherwood, wrote in a letter to the greater (gay, though quasi-bisexual) writer, Gore Vidal:

Now, as a matter of fact, it is quite true that many

homosexuals are unhappy; and not merely because of the social pressures under which they live. It is quite true that they are often unfaithful, unstable, unreliable. They are vain and predatory, and they chatter. But there is another side to the picture which you (and Proust) don't show. Homosexual relationships can be and frequently are happy. Men live together for years and make homes and share their lives and their work, just as heterosexuals do. This truth is peculiarly disturbing and shocking even to "liberal" people, because it cuts across the romantic, tragic notion of the homosexual's fate.²

This letter, though not published until 1996, was written back in 1947. What is the social picture now, over half a century later?

Let us examine this social picture in detail by listing - enumerating - the lessons I have learned from gays and lesbians, whether single or married, and show how I have profited from these lessons not only in my marriage but also in my personal life.

So here, below, I list these lessons: thirteen in all. My approach is to explain each lesson, illustrate it with real-life examples, and thus establish both its veracity and its relevance.

LESSON #1: HOMOPHOBIC HETEROS AND HETEROPHOBIC HOMOS: BIGOTRY IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Our society today, in many ways, is what is reflected in the movies. In *The Sum of Us*, the two main male characters are juxtaposed - one is entirely accepted by his father (his mother is dead), the other is entirely rejected by his father (the mother is passive). But the most poignant and revealing aspect of this movie is a small, though not quite peripheral, subtext within the movie wherein two women who had lived their lives together as lovers, having become old and infirm, are separated from each other by their families for the sake of giving them "extended care." The pain of their separation is like unto death, and in fact, actually hastens their deaths. In *Songcatcher*, the love of the two women is sensual, fervent, and joyous ... until it is discovered and assaulted. In *Brokeback Mountain*, the two young men feel great passion for one another, but society's prejudices inflict upon both of them a life of painful separation along with considerable ambivalence about accepting their own sexual identities.

While our predominately heterosexual society is ardent in its prejudices against homosexuals, homosexuals are often just as prejudiced against heterosexuals. Too many homosexuals contemptuously call heterosexuals "breeders" (even though homosexuals clamor for the right to have children - lesbians even conceiving children who will never

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know their biological father). Another example of homosexual prejudice was acted out at a party I attended when a lesbian, very drunk, said to me, "You think straight women make fun of men? You should hear what we dykes say about you!" I told her coldly, "No I shouldn't. Keep such ugliness to yourself." I later learned that, drunk as she was that night, she remembered what I said. Another example involves the time a fag (his word, not mine) said to me, "You straight men don't know what misogyny is. You should come to one of our parties and listen to us when we get going about how we hate women." I replied, "I've been to your parties, and when you get going - as you say - it's so boring I have trouble even paying attention." A fourth example: When my book, *Men Freeing Men*, came out, the gay curator of a small art gallery whom I knew told all my friends he felt "betrayed" because my book did not deal more with gay issues. I confronted him and explained my position. First of all, the book was about liberation for men as men, not about gay liberation. I reminded him that one could go into just about any alternative book store and find dozens of books about gay rights, but one could rarely find even a single book about men's rights. His scarcely eloquent response was to simply walk away. A fifth, and more humorous, example occurred when I began dating a woman who wanted me to accompany her when she went to see her counselor. I agreed, out of curiosity, and discovered that the

counselor was a very butch lesbian who obviously had no use for men (and not much approval for a female client who would date a man). By the following week, that nascent relationship was fast becoming terminal, but I accompanied her to the counselor again. This time I had an agenda. Midway through the session I feigned self-loathing, declaring to this butch counselor that I wished I were a woman since I couldn't stand men, but if I were a woman I would have to be lesbian since I could never stand being intimate with a man. The counselor lit up. She beamed, nodded, smiled, and for the first time was actually warm toward me. My "date" was bewildered, knowing about my many friendships with men, but she prudently kept her mouth shut until after the session. One last humorous anecdote is here worth recounting: It occurred when I myself worked as a counselor for a large counseling agency. One of our "outreach" programs was a shelter for battered women, which was directed by a lesbian named Vickie, and staffed by lesbians. The director of the umbrella agency, aware of tensions between the shelter staff and the regular counselors, called for a meeting between the two groups. The meeting would take place in the main building. The staff from the shelter arrived first and they were standing at the far end of the big meeting room. As we counselors from the central agency came in, we seated ourselves at the other end of the room, about twenty feet away from the "shelter staff." The first to speak

was Vickie, who loudly declaimed, "See how you seated yourselves? Without even realizing it you sat down as far away from us as you could! What does that say about your attitude toward us?" I was about to give her the truth, but one of the other counselors beat me to it when he said, "We realized what we were doing. None of us smoke. Every one of you is smoking a cigarette right now. There isn't even supposed to be any smoking in this room. We're just sitting as far away from the cigarette smoke as we can." There they stood, all seven of those lesbians, every one of them smoking a cigarette and holding a diet Coke in the other hand. Also, all of them were wearing shorts and thongs (flip-flops, as they now are called). They were the problem, not us.

These six examples illustrate a sad fact about human nature: gays can be just as prejudiced as straights. However, this observation does not warrant the conclusion that I am prejudiced against gays and lesbians. Quite the contrary. Not long ago a lesbian acquaintance named Susie attended a party at my place. Her lover heard about the party, and drove many miles to surprise Susie by showing up unannounced. The party lasted very late, and several couples spent the night, including Susie and her lover. The next morning, after breakfast, as all of us gathered in the living room while people were leaving, Susie said to me, "I don't know why it is, but last night I slept better than I have in weeks." I replied, "That's because you got to sleep with your sweetie."

Susie took her lover's hand. I then realized that the rest of us, five straight couples, were already holding hands with our mates. Susie and her lover had not been. Now they were. My statement had given them public permission. Sad, that such permission even had to be given. Right, that their host was perceptive enough to forthrightly extend this permission, i.e., invitation.

The main lesson I have learned from these several examples is the simple fact that an accepting attitude toward people of other sexual inclinations can metamorphose into a more relaxed acceptance of oneself. Moreover, the humility and generosity which go along with being tolerant toward people of other sexual inclinations can help mollify differences between myself and my own partner - differences which otherwise could sometimes seem overwhelming - into matters that can be communicated, negotiated, accepted.

LESSON #2:

SEXUAL RELATING SHOULD NEVER NEGLECT, SABOTAGE, OR ECLIPSE FRIENDSHIP

Another lesson learned from gay and lesbian relationships involves emphasizing the importance of friendship during the early explorings of sexual interest. Not allowing sexual intimacy to proceed at a pace which would sabotage the success of mutual friendship can help lay the foundation for a successful marriage. I am grateful for the fact that, with my wife, there was a year-long move toward friendship which preceded our being sexually intimate - an intimacy which would then

mature for another three years before we actually married. I had come to realize the importance of such friendship by witnessing so many failed romantic relationships between straight couples - who went to sex first and only then began assessing what level of friendship, if any, could actually exist within the relationship. But also I learned this lesson in a way that was both stark and undeniable by noting how the dating games which gay people play are so often a formula for failure.

Too much of the gay male dating scene happens in gay bars, and even in this AIDS era, in gay baths. There is a heightened atmosphere of sexual excitement - both apprehension and pleasurable anticipation - and the move toward sex happens so quickly because there are too few intermediate stages on the path toward intimacy. A highly charged sexual atmosphere accelerates past caution. Sex happens before the person even knows what he wants, and by the time he does figure out what he wants, the sex is over. In other words, sexual relating happens, but no sexual relationship gets established. As a gay man in his early twenties put it: "Straight men go into relationships hesitant and careful. This slows things down sexually, and girls put up resistance because they believe that's what they're supposed to do, and this slows things down too. So a straight man gets to move toward sex at a slower pace. But gay men, we might feel hesitant, but things happen so fast we don't get to hesitate. We may feel inexperienced, or unsure about what we want, but with the pace of our ways there's no slowing things down. The problem is, when you're

young and gay, you don't know exactly what to do. So you just do it. That makes for bad feelings afterward. You're awkward, scared, you don't establish a close relationship with anybody."

This sort of problem does not happen with gay men only. Gay women tell me they often experience a similarly difficult milieu. Angela, a long-time friend of mine, puts it this way: "We're gay, but since we're women, most of us act coy like ladies are supposed to act. But the fact is, we're all predators. Some of us are novices. Some of us are veterans. But it's all predators going after predators. That makes things more hyper than with straight people, when it's predators going after prey." I knew what Angela was talking about because some years ago I was in Atlanta for a week, visiting a friend, who at the time was doing city planning with a group of lesbians. This group was close knit, uninhibited, and I attended two of the meetings my friend needed to be at. I read a book during the meetings, but after each meeting - during the informal chatting - I merely pretended to read. And what I overheard was nothing less than chilling. I heard this group of lesbians talking about "DP" - a term I had never before encountered. "DP" stands for "dyke potential," and the purpose of these conversations was to suggest, analyze, then demarcate straight women they believed had dyke potential. Such a woman, once singled out, would be targeted by one or more women from this group. They would court her - take her out for coffee, invite her to their

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consciousness raising groups, criticize the men in her life. I overheard these women boasting a success rate of about fifty percent. They spoke of their many converts, some of whom by now were members of this very group. I wondered how any woman, won over to a new sexual identity by such manipulative methods, could ever hope to achieve a sense of relaxed trust and interpersonal respect with another woman in this group. A second incident took place nearly 20 years ago in a remote, secluded, and idyllic country setting. I and several men who were working in men's liberation attended a conference of lesbians who called themselves Mother OACC (also dubbed Mother OAK). After some initial tensions between the lesbians and the men, people relaxed and thenceforth all indoor meetings and outdoor playing was done in the nude. One woman there, in her early 30s and uncoupled, took an obvious sexual interest in a woman named Anne who was about 10 years younger. Anne, the most attractive woman there, was in fact stunningly beautiful. The older woman (I thought her name was Lenny, but would learn that she spelled it Len-E) obviously had her passions aroused by the young and beautiful Anne. We all had been at a small lake, swimming, but then most of us climbed out and were sitting on the bank. Len-E and Anne were still in the water, and Len-E began "putting the move on" Anne. She "came on" to Anne aggressively, splashing her with water, pushing her under, inflicting upon her the kind of

intrusive, aggressive, unwanted sexual harassment which I had never before witnessed except in young high school boys at supervised swimming pools (where such behavior was quickly halted). I sat on the bank, disgusted by this gruesome display of dyke courtship, wondering if my intervening would be viewed with hostility by the other lesbians, and also wondering why these women seemed to be enjoying the spectacle instead of stopping it. Finally Anne choked so hard she almost vomited. She started crying, then screamed at the older woman, telling her to stop and leave her alone. The older woman did stop, apologized, then began acting very tender and nurturing. It gave me considerable satisfaction to note, over the next few days, that Anne henceforth shunned Len-E's company.

A third incident taught me much about courtship rituals among gay women, and how such rituals can forever sabotage possibilities for friendship, because in this instance the rituals involved violent behavior. Let me recount the story of Bully Bull. This lesbian (whose real name was Sandy) had always called herself Balls until one night at a party when a very small man became angry at her and, with his face shoved right in hers, screeched, "I may be just a little fag, honey, but I've still got more balls than you do!" The next day Balls was making everybody call her Bull. Before long people were calling her Bully-Bull. Bully-Bull was a bull-dyke who wore combat boots and army fatigues. (And before

any feminist reading this come looking for me with a gun, allow me to note that Bully-Bull was a self-described bull-dyke, and she really did wear combat boots and army fatigues.) Bully-Bull had several lovers at the same time, and called them her harem. They were a motley assortment of college-age girls, some who occasionally had sex with each other, but paid a big price for such transgressions if Bully-Bull found out. During the year I knew this group of people the size of the harem ranged from about four to ten in number. I knew Bully-Bull and her harem because I was a sophomore at the same college they attended. Bully-Bull was majoring in art, but was so bad in art as to be laughable. I was majoring in philosophy, and a woman named Sue, also majoring in philosophy, was Bully-Bull's main lover. Majoring in philosophy too was a friend of mine named Steve who was madly in love with Sue. But Sue wanted only to be "just friends" with Steve, so kept it that way. Now and then Sue would show up with a black eye, or a busted lip, and she would confess that Bully-Bull had punched her. If one of Bully-Bull's harem showed interest in a man, or had sex with any woman but Bully-Bull (except when Bully-Bull gave permission and either watched or participated), or if the woman just happened to be there when Bully-Bull was in the wrong mood, then Bully-Bull might do some damage. But the worst beating was one that almost happened but didn't. Steve heard that Bully-bull and her harem were going to go to the river for some

nude swimming. So he decided to show up, maybe believing that a casual visit would be welcome. (Also I think he naively hoped that, in the flesh, he could do visual competition with the short and stocky Bully-Bull and perhaps gain the affections of Sue.) It was fortunate that when he arrived at the river Steve had not taken his clothes off, because the moment Bully-Bull saw him she raised a howl of rage and ordered her harem to kill him. Screaming at her harem, she drove them from the river, and they set out in pursuit of Steve who was already running. He didn't even make it back to his car. Instead he cut through the woods, all the way to the highway, and when he realized they were not pursuing him there, he walked the five miles back to town. There he reported the incident to the police, who did not believe him. Steve laid low for several days, while several people tried to intervene with Bully-Bull. But Bully-Bull refused to retract her death threat. Steve went to the police again, and this time they merely laughed at him. Finally a friend of Steve's, a Vietnam veteran, went to see Bully-Bull and calmly informed her that if Steve got harmed or even so much as felt threatened he would shoot her between the eyes with his forty-five. I knew this fellow well. He was as courageous as he was crazy, and Bully-Bull knew a true story when she heard one. With him sitting there, she promptly phoned Steve, apologized, and assured him he was safe now. After that year I lost touch with Bully-Bull, except to see her one more time some years later, at a party in another city. She did not recognize me, and seemed to be lacking her harem, though she still wore that butch cut, army fatigues,

and combat boots. It was an all-dyke party except for a male neighbor and his best friend - me. One of the dykes had a little boy with her, and I heard her say to another woman, "He's so quiet and nice you'd think he's a girl instead of a boy." Hearing this piece of sexism, I promptly left and went to a grocery store, returning with a pack of cigars and a fifth of Jack Daniel's Black Label whiskey. The rest of that evening Bob and I sat on the couch, sucking cigars and sipping whiskey, while the dykes smoked their cigarettes, drank cheap wine, and glared at us. Bully-Bull had mellowed, it seemed, but the whiskey was mellowed.

LESSON #3:
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS AN
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
DESTROYER

Bully-Bull is an extreme example of violence within the lesbian community. But perhaps I err in referring to Bully-Bull as extreme. When is violence ever not extreme?

The fact is, domestic violence is rampant within the gay and lesbian communities. A major newspaper article, published in Saint Paul, Minnesota (which has a large, vocal, and highly politicized gay and lesbian population), presented some alarming news about domestic violence in lesbian relationships. Pam Elliott, a lesbian staff member of the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, made the claim that domestic violence is, "the number one problem in the lesbian community." Statistics were released which show that about a quarter of all lesbians have been abused at least once by a lover.³ Approximately two

years after Pam Elliott's alarming news, a book entitled *Violent Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships* by Claire M. Renzetti gave the results of several separate studies on this issue, all of them pointing to the same disturbing trend. One study, for example, revealed that in 25 to 65% of lesbian relationships one partner batters the other. Some of these battering relationships that were studied involved as much as five years of constant abuse. Another study, which looked at only 90 lesbian couples, characterized 47% of them as violent. A third study surveyed "self-selected" lesbians, i.e., lesbians who volunteered their responses. Of these, 26% had been the victim of at least one act of sexual violence, and 59% had been the victim of at least one act of physical violence, within a lesbian relationship. Even another study found that 52% of the respondents had been abused by their female lover or partner, and of this 52%, more than half had been abusive in return. Professor Renzetti, having reviewed these several studies by other researchers, did her own study and found that 65% of the respondents had been in a gay relationship that was abusive from one to five years. Renzetti's study looked at other parameters within lesbian households, and discovered that "it was not uncommon for the respondents' partners to abuse others who were present in the household." Of the lesbian households studied, in the ones where there were children, almost 30% of the children were also abused by the abusive lesbian partner. Moreover, "38% of the respondents who had pets reported

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that their partners had abused the animals.”⁴

These statistics about what goes on inside the households of lesbian partners do not provide the whole picture. Sexual harassment by lesbian staffers toward nonlesbian staffers in a shelter for abused women was reported in *Transitions*.⁵ This article, “Shelter Needed from Shelter,” described a “refuge” in North Mankato, Minnesota, which had fired nine employees because they complained of being sexually harassed by senior lesbian staffers who touched them inappropriately, subjected them to lewd proposals, and told them that any woman who does not admit to her bisexuality is merely denying it. Closer to my home, about 25 years ago I personally knew a woman named Annie (out of respect for her privacy I shall not give her last name) who accepted an executive position directing about two dozen battered women’s shelters in the Saint Louis area. After a few months she quit in disgust because so many staff members were lesbians. I asked her what she had against lesbians, and she replied that she didn’t care if they were lesbians. But the women seeking shelter, often with their children, were there for safety and emotional support. Instead they were subjected to a constant barrage of man-hating lesbian propaganda: All men are shits, all men are abusers, only women can be trusted to love you as you deserve to be loved. Many of these women seeking shelter, Annie reported, would decide that if this environment was the alternative

to the one they had just left, then they might as well go back. After all, they didn’t want to be in a lesbian relationship, and if it really is true that all men are equally bad, then why not just be content with the one you already have? Annie, in short, got tired of lesbians and lesbian ideology driving women away from the safety they had sought and back to the abusive partner they had tried to escape.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of how ubiquitous domestic violence is in lesbian relationships comes from the fact that more than 18 years ago (as of this 2008 writing) the “battered spouse syndrome” was used as defense in an unusual criminal trial: A 30-year-old woman, having killed her 32-year-old lesbian lover, claimed that during their 11-year relationship this lover beat and humiliated her repeatedly.⁶ When a murder trial involving lesbians warrants the “battered spouse syndrome” being brought in as excusing evidence, one can only surmise that there is, within our society, a vast infrastructure of domestic lesbian violence lurking in the background - an undercurrent of social praxis which, if relatively covert, must be very well entrenched if defense attorneys believe that its overt dissection could garner an exonerating defense in a criminal trial.

Domestic violence afflicts not only lesbian households but also the households of gay males. The afore-mentioned Pam Elliott, who stated that domestic violence is the number one problem in the lesbian

community, also wrote, “And, after AIDS, this is perhaps the most serious problem in the gay [male] community.”⁷ Less research has been done on battering between partnered gay males than on lesbian couples, although one statistic is trenchant: “Only 12% of gay men have been forced into involuntary sex by their gay partners compared to 31% of lesbians that have been forced into involuntary sex by their lesbian partners.”⁸ This statistic might suggest that since sexual violence, i.e., rape, between gay male partners is less frequent than rape between partnered lesbians, then battering occurs less frequently also. While evidence for supporting this suggestion is not yet available, I can report from my years of experience, both as a counselor and as a supervisor of other counselors, that it certainly is the case that in the population which I have encountered in my counseling work with gay men and lesbians, violence between partnered lesbians is more frequent and much more severe than violence between gay male couples. This happens, I believe, because of male chivalry and how men’s training in chivalry, as young boys, teaches them to exercise some degree of control in violent, battering behavior. If this seems paradoxical - that a battering man places limits on his battering - consider how this very paradox is utilized within the counseling programs which attempt to rehabilitate battering men who are heterosexual. One of the first barriers, which must be broken down, is a batterer’s conviction that

he can't be held responsible for when he flies into a rage and beats his wife or partner. "I just can't control it," he says. The counselor insists that he can, the batterer insists that he can't, and the counselor then pursues a line of questioning such as the following:

"You didn't kill her, did you?"

"Of course not."

"You used your fists. You admitted that. Did you pick up a club?"

"No. I wouldn't do that sort of thing."

"Why not?"

"I just wouldn't go that far."

"Wouldn't go that far? Doesn't this mean you have some degree of self-control?"

"Well, maybe, but I can't control my temper, and I don't have enough self-control to keep from hitting her."

"But you stopped hitting her when she fell to the floor."

"Yeah."

"And another time, you stopped hitting her when she started crying."

"Well, yes."

"So you see? You exercised enough self-control to not use a club. You exercised enough self-control to stop hitting her after you knocked her down. Another time you exercised enough self-control to stop hitting her when she started crying. These are three times you exercised some degree of self-control. Right?"

"Well, yeah, I guess so."

"So let's not say you don't have self-control. You do. You have some self-control, and what we need is to show you how to exercise it sooner."

The point here is that while the male batterer obviously is not so chivalrous as to not beat his female partner, he nevertheless has absorbed, however crudely and insufficiently, some degree of training in chivalry. This chivalry is manifest toward women ("Don't ever make a girl cry!") and also toward men ("No hitting below the belt and no poking in the eye!"). The result is: When two men are in an abusive relationship, the forces of chivalry are two-fold. Albeit insufficient to entirely prevent abuse, the presence of chivalric training in both partners nevertheless places some degree of inhibition upon both the frequency and intensity of battering. In women, chivalric training is absent. Hence, in an abusive lesbian relationship, the restraints of chivalry, even if only partial in most male battering situations, are entirely absent, with the result that lesbians abuse more frequently and more severely than do partnered gay males.

This examination of violence in gay and lesbian partnerships shows that I have witnessed such violence, read a great deal about it, and have dealt with it in counseling situations. How did this unsavory side of gay partnerships help me build a better marriage with my wife? It didn't. But that unsavory side certainly caused me to steer away from potentially violent relationships before I met the woman who would become my wife. In more than one intimate relationship, during my early years, the woman seemed to feel it was socially acceptable to hit or slap me (relatively lightly) in play, and to do the same if she was mildly disappointed, aggravated, or angry.

When this happened, I exited the relationship immediately.

From witnessing, and thinking about, the violence in lesbian relationships, I learned that the forces which might deter an angry man from violence are not the same as the forces which would curb the violence of an angry woman. In women the only deterrent to angry violence is a strong sense of morals, decency, kindness. I learned, from what I knew of the violence in lesbian relationships, to avoid any woman who was lacking when it came to these virtues, and as a result I approached any potential partner with no small degree of wise vigilance, banishing any tendencies toward illusory romanticizing or delusive preconceptions. As a result, when I did come to love, then later be "in love with," and eventually marry, the woman I now am with, I had already made all due assessments about matters of trust versus violence.

LESSON #4:
BEAUTY AND THE BODY:
KEEPING PERSPECTIVE,
SETTING PRIORITIES

Another lesson gained from gay and lesbian couples - in this instance, from how they interact both before and after coupling - involves their attitudes toward bodily appearance. In this arena, gay men are both more troubled, and more complicated, than lesbians are. Lesbians seem to possess a very tolerant attitude when it comes to the appearance of a lover's body. The body is accepted as it is, with all its blemishes and imperfections. Once

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the two marry, or couple, this acceptance seems virtually complete. Before coupling - during the dating game - lesbians are, to some extent, drawn to a youthful, ideal body; but such attraction seems quite minimal compared with straight people, male or female, and much less than with gay men.

The attitudes gay men have toward the body are troubled, complicated, even perilous. When scouting out sex partners or potential mates, gay men tend to pursue bodies that are youthful, sleek, muscular. Their magazines and advertising emphasize these traits even more than the fashion magazines for straight women. In my opinion there is no group of people which has a greater tendency to treat one another as sex objects. Even the movie, *A Very Natural Thing*, which set out to portray gays in a positive light, uses as its main characters men with beautiful, perfectly shaped bodies. The idealization of the male body by gay men means that, in the dating milieu, they often find themselves unable to mesh their idealized preconceptions of what a man's body is supposed to look like with the reality of what an ordinary man's body does look like. Men, in counseling sessions, report: "He had a paunch. I couldn't stand that." Or, "He looked so muscular, with his clothes on, but his butt wasn't firm and that unsettled me." "I'd sort of forgotten that some men have hair on their back and that really grossed me out." "I like men with muscles. Where are men I can date who have real muscles?" When these gay men

consider their own appearance, counselors hear: "I work out all the time and I just can't seem to get real shoulder muscles." "My legs are skinny, and I worry about what a man I'm having sex with thinks." Or, "I'm getting a bald spot, which makes me look old. I don't think I'm going to attract young guys much longer." These attitudes all embody considerable fears about aging. "There's nothing sadder than an old queer," is a maxim in the gay community, and during their younger dating years, gay men do little to forestall this fate. Men in their twenties complain about having to compete with men in their late teens when it comes to getting dates; they resent this, but have to admit that they themselves are attracted to younger bodies.

And yet, when gay males couple, they often do so for reasons that in no way pertain to idealizing one another's bodies. Once coupled, bodily imperfections seem to be abruptly accepted; even the fixation on youthful bodies seems to fall away. This is evidenced by the considerable age difference so often present in coupled gay men. Commentary throughout the last two millennia has noted that, in an enduring physically intimate relationship between men, very often one man is much older than the other. He tends to assume a mentor role, while the younger man gives vigor and spontaneity to the relationship. Such complementarity seems to suggest that when gay men do finally couple, they look upon it as a transformational experience. Issues

of physical looks are not as important as how their personalities nurture one another. Remarkable also is the fact that when gay men couple, sexual relating with one another often becomes quite secondary in the relationship. Expectations regarding sex are lowered, and in many gay male couples I have known, sex soon drops out of the picture entirely.

Witnessing this variety of attitudes toward the ideal body in gay men has given me cause, in many ways, to assess my own attitudes when it comes to the ideal female body. Yes, a young woman of perfect proportions can turn my head. But maturity advises me to look, not away, but more closely. Even the "ideal" body, up close, has its imperfections - usually hidden by clothing and makeup. Also I keep in mind that every ideal body will be assaulted by (and eventually succumb to) the infirmities of age. So when a supposedly ideal body gains my attention, I remember that this body also deserves a shrug of the shoulders. Learning to love a body, and love that body despite its imperfections, and even find loveliness in those imperfections because they mirror mortality - all this is the task, and the reward, of love that is true.

LESSON #5:

THE COMPLEXITIES OF LOVE, BEING "IN LOVE," AND THE VAGARIES OF JEALOUSY

It is unlikely that I have learned more about love from gay people than from straight people, but

the lessons learned from straight people are so numerous they almost become clichés, whereas when I learn something from a gay person the lesson stands out in my mind. One such lesson - a most valuable one - came from a young lesbian many years ago. When talking about the difficulties a person has in a homophobic society, she stated earnestly, "Being gay isn't defined by who you have sex with. It's defined by who you can have sex with and also fall in love with." That was a profound insight. I have known many gay women who have had sex with straight men, especially during their younger years when hoping to prove to themselves that they were not gay. Many gay men I know have had sex with straight women, often as a kind of experiment - to see how they feel and thus once again confirm whether they really are gay. I have even known many gay men who occasionally enjoy sex with women, and gay women who sometimes enjoy sex with men. But they gravitate back to a homosexual lifestyle, and often are not sure why. But that young woman's words, for me, clarified the entire matter. "Going straight," though an option for some gay people, even an enjoyable option, remains an option rather than a commitment because they do not "fall in love" with people of the opposite sex. Keeping in mind this young woman's fervent conviction might help many gay people, who are questioning their sexual identity, move in the direction of self-knowledge. This young woman's avowal, in fact, is the very touchstone which has caused me for many years to be entirely lacking in ambivalence about my own sexual

identity. I have been in love with several women during my life. And I remain in love with the woman I have been married to for more than two decades now. This means, clearly, that I am straight, not gay. This conviction even stayed with me during a time, in my younger years, when I was very much in love with an older man. (I can sense people who know me wincing as they read this, while at the same time hurrying ahead with voyeuristic interest.) Yes; I was in love with an older man, but, I felt nothing for him sexually. He was decades older than me - in his early seventies, very famous, and graced with great charm and charisma. He took a strong liking to me, we spent much time together, and I loved him and also felt something more than love - I felt "in love" with him: his body busy and robust, yet aging and so fragile I felt a tender protectiveness toward this body, much as a parent feels for a newborn infant; his mind agile and so ingenious, yet I would see him weary quickly, and I was always too aware of his mortality. I was inspired by the power of his personality, even as he revealed to me how a great grief he had incurred as a child had oppressed him all his life. He had been gay the entirety of his life, had slept with famous political leaders and well-known artists, but during the last half of his life he became partnered with, not one, but two men of humble station. The three of them lived together, happily for the most part, and I was welcomed into their family. The man I loved asked me if I was interested in him sexually. I told him I wasn't, but that I loved him as one would love a father, a brother, and a son all at once. I will never

forget his laugh when he said, "Then love me as well as you love me strongly! As for sex, it doesn't matter. At my age it's like beating a dead horse anyway." I loved him, I was even in love with him, but I did not want to have sex with him. And I never had doubts about my sexual identity because of those wise words from that young woman in Columbia, Missouri: "Being gay isn't defined by who you have sex with. It's defined by who you can have sex with and also fall in love with."

Anyone who has been in love knows that sexual jealousy is an impediment which now and then clamors for a reckoning. I have noted that lesbians, when they partner, make a strong presumption of monogamy and are jealous if their partner shows even the slightest sexual attraction toward someone else. Issues of control then cause considerable tension. Gay men are usually more flexible. They seem to understand that sexual interest in other men outside the partnership is normal. And there is considerable negotiating with regard to this jealousy. This negotiating, if not easy, is recognized as necessary. What is allowed, or acceptable, to each partner outside the marriage may vary a great deal. I knew one couple (back during the pre-AIDS era), named Victor and Howard, who worked out very different sexual expectations with one another. Howard, the younger man, felt fine about Victor doing "stall jobs" or "quickies" but would never tolerate Victor having non-anonymous, intimate sex with another man. Victor, however, felt okay about

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Howard occasionally having sex with another man if it were in a safe domestic setting where the two could relate in other ways, but he would never tolerate Howard having anonymous sex. These two men negotiated very different expectations with each other, and were able to accept one another's different behavior. In the movie, *Brokeback Mountain*, one of the two lovers was very jealous of his partner having sex with other men; the other partner felt no jealousy about his lover having sex with other men because he seemed to trust that he was number one, and for him this was enough. Yet neither man was at all jealous of the other having sex with women. I have known other gay men who, once partnered, soon stopped having sex with one another, but accepted the fact that sex with other men would be a part of their relationship. Most often, though, these partnering relationships between gay men carried the expectation of monogamy - but this was an expectation that came about over time. They both grew into it, and they negotiated (not always easily) this level of commitment each step of the way. The generalization here is: lesbians presume monogamy; gay males negotiate toward monogamy or negotiate for an entirely different arrangement. Presumption versus negotiation.

Jealousy is a poorly understood emotion, saturated with pain and rife with blame. Uncontrolled, it can undo an intimate relationship faster than anything. It can take on new levels of intensity

quite unpredictably, it may go into complete remission for a while and then suddenly require assurances of commitment, or it may become quirky and selective as to what rouses its ire. I have learned, from noting how differently jealousy is dealt with by gay men and gay women, the importance of respecting jealousy's magnitude, idiosyncrasies, and possessiveness. Moreover, I have learned that jealousy can be both a destructive force between people who refuse to reckon with it honestly, while also it can be a constructive guide in helping people actualize themselves with one another. Recognizing that jealousy is a multi-faceted feeling which can unpredictably afflict my own marriage, with or without identifiable cause, and that such jealousy is a call for negotiating a more trusted intimacy, is a lesson I learned from noting the different ways lesbian partners and gay male partners deal with jealousy. In my own marriage, monogamy was not a presumed scenario; rather, early on, before marriage, it was negotiated and firmly established. If it was, at first, a rule, it soon became a repository of what then, and is now, actually felt and desired.

LESSON #6: WHY MEN SUFFER FROM DILDO ENVY

A very different lesson learned from gay and lesbian behavior applies to the arena of phallogentricity and sensuality. Big words, these, but they refer to

intimate terrain. Let me begin by telling about a friend who works in airport security. He is not one of those people who stands at the gate screening luggage and checking passengers. He works in the back, in a high-security area, where luggage containing suspicious items is examined. In his work there is a certain item which announces itself so often that it has almost become routine. ("Except in this job," he explains, "you can't assume anything is routine.") This item is the female "personal vibrator" which is battery operated. When these vibrators (usually penis-shaped) get jostled in luggage, they not infrequently get switched on. So when a suitcase goes through security, and something inside is buzzing, it has to be taken to the area where my friend works. There it is placed inside a special container which can confine a moderate explosion, and it is left there until it stops vibrating. Then there is an added wait of two more hours. During this time, the owner of the suspicious suitcase stands outside the area, which is enclosed in bullet-proof glass, and my friend (as bored with his job as the woman is anxious to get on the next flight) steps out of the area and chats with her. "They always say it's a portable iron, or a hair dryer, or something like that. Maybe, once in a while, they admit it's a vibrator, but they always call it a massager or a muscle relaxer or something like that. Or they say it's a toy for a niece. Why don't they just admit they can't take a trip without taking along their dildo diddle? It's usually dykes - you

know, women with butch haircuts and dressed butch. Finally when we open the suitcase and find the vibrator they just about always say exactly the same thing: 'How did that get in there?' Sometimes it's a straight, feminine woman. But usually it's a dyke. And I always know beforehand when it'll turn out to be a vibrator because they don't get mad. If it's a toy going off, or an alarm clock, they get angry because we're holding them up. But when they act embarrassed, I know it'll turn out to be a dildo. Vibrator. Whatever. We've actually considered putting out a notice asking women to remove the batteries from their vibrators, but the people higher up think this would be a bad idea."

In my opinion, the bad idea here is how feminist and lesbian ideologies have duped the American public, especially the American male, about the so-called evils of "phallogentric sex" or "phallogentricity." Feminists and lesbians impugn and ridicule the male sex organ. They claim that intercourse is an act of oppression, that the penis is an organ of penetration and violation, and that the clitoris is a woman's true sex organ. This entire message has been a vast program of intense propaganda since the 1970's. If the public didn't exactly swallow it, feminists and lesbians got by with promulgating it. Yet, if indeed phallogentric sex - sex which involves a penis - is so evil and repulsive and taboo in lesbian and feminist ideology, why do these very women, upon rejecting the penis, so often go looking for a penis substitute? Read the lesbian literature and note how they extol the merits of their dildos. There are double

dildos so they can do it together - each of them thrusting with this double penis while at the same time being penetrated by it. There are small ones which can be carried discreetly in a purse. Large ones that can be prominently displayed in the bedroom. Tandem ones for vaginal and anal penetration at the same time. And many of these dildos are vibrators - with small, built-in electric motors to make them more stimulating.

It was lesbian women who first called my attention to how ubiquitous is the practice among women of using vibrators. They captured my attention because of the afore-mentioned contradiction - impugning the penis, and then procuring (and using) a substitute penis. But the fact is, straight women use vibrators too. They romanticize about them in conversation. They buy them in designer colors. They use them in the bedroom not only when alone but also when making love with a man. They joke about it. They expect their men to joke about it too. One woman I once knew joked how every Christmas her husband, at her asking, bought new batteries for her vibrator. When she first told me this, I jokingly asked how she would feel if her husband asked her to get him new batteries for his artificial vagina. "That would be perverse!" she said sternly, and changed the subject. So over the next few years, whenever I heard a woman praising, joking about, or blandly discussing her vibrator, I made it a point to ask how she would feel about her man, or men in general, using artificial vaginas - often called "artificial pussies" or "electric pussies." Two of the women

I asked did stop to ponder, and remarked that although they found the idea threatening, they had to admit it was only fair that if women could use a substitute then men should be allowed one too. All the other responses (probably at least a hundred) ranged from dismay to shock to righteous indignation. "That's disgusting!" "A man doing that would be like a sex crime!" "That would be an insult to the woman he's lovers with, or to any woman he might eventually be lovers with!" And so on.

In other words, when the sexual revolution began in earnest for women, they wanted it all. First there was the clitorimania. Shere Hite, in *The Hite Report*, told us that very few women can orgasm with intercourse alone; they also need direct stimulation to the clitoris during intercourse.⁹ Clitorimania was soon all the rage ("all the rage" here meaning both trendy and also a matter of angry demands on the part of feminists). This clitorimania metamorphosed into the idea that women don't need or want intercourse; what they want is stimulation of the clitoris. With so much attention being given to the clitoris, vibrators were manufactured for the sake of stimulating that clitoris. But then, ever so discreetly, ever so clandestinely, these vibrators came, more and more, to resemble penises, i.e., artificial penises which, just like real penises, could be inserted into the vagina. Rarely did these vibrators look exactly like penises. Women were too coy for so blatant an admission. Rather, they were bullet shaped, and they were

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called vibrators instead of electric dildos.

So women thus merrily proceeded on their way to having it all. They had vibrators for clitoral stimulation, and these same vibrators could be used as penile stimulation. But they, especially straight women, wanted even more. The importance of getting enough foreplay from their men was also being trumpeted. The cry went forth that men are selfish. They do not want to give to women. Men merely want to take - have their orgasm, then roll over and fall asleep. So women, along with getting all the penile stimulation they wanted - either from men or from their vibrators - were also demanding both clitoral stimulation and more foreplay. And very soon women were getting exactly what they wanted. Men, out of chivalry (if not always out of generosity), began giving these women all the foreplay they wanted. Men gave them clitoral stimulation. Men even acquiesced to women using vibrators during lovemaking. Everything became centered on the woman's sexual pleasure: her orgasm, her multiple orgasms - her right to demand from men not merely sexual pleasure but a sexual marathon. And the real hypocrisy of all this was the fact that women wanted not just more foreplay from men, they also wanted the right to lie back and get foreplay while not giving any in return.

This was what the feminist sexual revolution was all about: The right to receive all that sensual and clitoral and vaginal stimulation, the right to make men work hard at

giving women multiple orgasms, while women could lackadaisically avoid the work of giving anything back.

Working as a counselor, over and over I would hear a woman angrily denounce her embarrassed husband - who was present - for not giving enough foreplay. When I would gently suggest that the man might enjoy giving foreplay more if the woman gave it in return, the reaction was usually one of shock. "A woman doesn't do those things to a man's body!" one wife loftily said. She and her husband never returned to therapy after that session. Another woman actually jumped to her feet and yelled indignantly, "That would be disgusting, doing to his hairy body what he's supposed to do for me!" I tactfully suggested, "Maybe he senses your disgust, and maybe that is why he feels reluctant about giving you what you want." This particular couple never returned either, which was too bad, considering that they had finally come to therapy after the husband lost his temper during sex and threw the woman's vibrator against the wall. Another woman responded to my suggestion with, "A man does the doing. A woman is supposed to be the receiver." I replied, "But you are asking him to change. Maybe you could make some changes too." Her answer: "No. Never." Fortunately there were other women who were open to this suggestion. One woman, in her early fifties, said she felt like writing a book about how much her sex life had improved since she started giving to her husband what

she had been demanding. Another couple, in their late fifties, both said that after the woman started giving to her husband what all the sex manuals were telling him to give to her, sex was better than back when they were first married. "Every night it's better than our honeymoon," the woman said, a true youthful excitement in her voice.

What an interesting lesson all this was for me. And I learned this lesson from lesbians first because I heard them verbally rejecting the male phallus, while availing themselves of a phallic substitute. I learned this lesson again from straight women when I heard them complaining about how men are nonsensual and machine-like in sex, not giving them foreplay and clitoral stimulation, then going out and using vibrators - loud, mechanical, buzzing, hard contraptions made of plastic and metal which use batteries or plug into the wall. Contraptions which are not merely machine-like, they are machines!

The lesbian feminist Betty Dodson even began giving masturbation workshops for women (and occasionally for men), so they could learn to orgasm.¹⁰ This was not, mind you, private therapy. It was group therapy with naked women using vibrators. Consider that we do not defecate in public. We do not fight in public - or at least we aren't supposed to. We do not discuss our personal finances in public. Yet, women were learning how to masturbate in public. Sex was no longer private or sacred; it was a matter of public instruction. And

once learned, this public instruction was recommended as an exercise in public exhibitionism. In Betty Dodson's book, *Liberating Masturbation*, she dreamily and glibly wrote:

I have a sexual fantasy about my old age. There are thirteen feminists living together in a collective. Our ages range from seventy to ninety. Every night we gather in front of our closed circuit T.V. to watch our pornographic video tapes. We light incense, get stoned, put our earphones on and plug in our vibrators for several hours of ecstasy. The rocking chairs creak, the vibrators hum, and we occasionally nudge each other, smiling and nodding, "Yes" after a particularly good orgasm.¹¹

She tries to wax romantic in describing what is, actually and blatantly, a circle jerk for geriatric women. As for sex being sensual (which is what women want, isn't it?), can you imagine how irritating it would be, sitting in a room with that many vibrators humming and clattering? Not to mention how depersonalized it surely would feel, sitting there having sex with yourself, while watching another woman gawking around the room, doing her best to catch everyone's attention by nodding and smiling, just so she could broadcast her glee about that great orgasm she just had? In this scenario there is nothing soft, sensual, or erotic. It is all clitoral fixation, machine worship, and public exhibitionism. Thank you,

feminists and lesbians, for showing me what you actually do so gruesomely in the name of sexual liberation. I did the opposite. Quite erotically and discreetly, I enjoyed intercourse with women, but also, in my journey toward sexual self-actualization, I focused on and thoroughly enjoyed sex that was not fixated on the penis.

LESSON #7: MY RIGHT TO SENSUALITY IN SEX

One of my advances, along this journey, involved learning to stay away from women who would not give me the kind of sensuality, in love making, that they wanted. Take, for example, Lisa. She had gorgeous brown eyes, a nice body, and she was very direct (liberated?) when she initially showed interest in wanting to get together with me. She was equally direct, on our first date (dinner at her place), as she quickly moved toward being sexual. How refreshing this all should have been, and would have been, had the scenario not changed utterly the moment we were in bed making love. I was - well, let me just sum it up with: giving her foreplay. Was she returning the favor? No. She was lying on her back stimulating her clitoris with a finger. This, truly, was all she was doing. Diddling herself while passively lying on her back. All genital fixation while I was generously giving to her entire body. Things moved toward something more intense and I gave to her orally. She orgasmed, and then began returning the oral favor. After a couple of minutes she stopped and asked if something was wrong. I told

her no, nothing was wrong, it felt very nice. "So why are you taking so long to come?" she asked. "I'm just taking my time and enjoying the journey," I replied good naturedly. She abruptly became angry. "Taking your time? That isn't fair! How long do you expect me to do this?!" She certainly had taken her sweet time with her own orgasm. A lot longer than I had taken so far, and longer than I ended up taking, since I put myself in high gear and moved in the direction of getting it over with.

The next morning, the obligatory conversation, though strained, nevertheless succeeded in being polite until I noticed some pornography magazines on a chair by her bed. I had already heard Lisa talking about her strong feminist values. So why this porno? I asked if she was doing research on pornography. She explained that she wasn't. Rather, even though she was completely heterosexual, she found pictures of women's breasts stimulating, and these magazines focused on women's breasts. She showed me, and sure enough, there was nothing but page after page of women's breasts. I asked her how she could feel okay about using pornography, when pornography is considered by feminists to be oppressive toward women. She blandly asserted that her use of pornography could not oppress women because it involved a woman using the pornography. Needless to say, that conversation came to a quick end, as did the relationship.

With Lisa I experienced what I had encountered many times as a therapist: a woman expecting the man to give her sensual sex, but not

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willing to return the same kind of sensuality.

But this problem comes up not only in heterosexual relating. It also marks homosexual relationships. Let me relate the story of a lesbian I have known personally for many years. This woman has struggled with her homosexuality. She is a strong Christian, considers homosexuality to be against her religious beliefs, and over the years has many times tried to forsake this sexual identity and pair up with a man so she could raise a "normal" family. Each time she tried the sex worked but the love didn't work, and she ended up going back to women. The result is that, now in her late forties, she has had a great deal of sexual experience with both women and men. Once, during a frank conversation about sex, she said to me, "The worst lovers are young men and older lesbians. Young men because they're clumsy, and they orgasm, and they think the woman should have an orgasm and then it's over. Older lesbians because they know what they want and all they want is an orgasm. They get theirs, they give you yours, then it's all over and they go to sleep." Susie had found that the best lovers were older men because they gave a great deal in the way of foreplay, and young women because they, being shy, proceeded slowly. Their uncertainty involved exploring, which itself is a kind of sensuality.

What Susie conveyed to me was essentially what I had already figured out: Women want cuddling from men because they know that

performance-oriented men will give it. But women don't want to give it back to men because foreplay is too much work. And women who make love with women, if experienced, know that giving foreplay is a kind of work, and (except with women like Susie) they do not want to be bothered with the work and the time involved with sensuality. They want their orgasm; then they're done with sex.

A third example is in order here because a woman I know, named Kate, claims to be speaking on behalf of all men. Kate is a pretty, very successful businesswoman, married to a man even though she is vaguely bisexual. Also she is a veteran of many sexual affairs, and privy to many conversations with her peers, about men. I had been curious about something I had come across in a psychology text - that in pornography films it is common for a man to come on a woman's face. I told Kate about this, and asked her why this is a common theme in porno films (which I know nothing about). Kate was sure she knew. "Because it's something most women would never allow, so they put what is taboo in porno. What a man knows he can't have is what turns him on." I asked her to explain. "Think about it Francis! A man wants to feel accepted, yes? So he wants to think his dick and his balls and even his cum are desirable, right? So coming on a woman's face, or better yet, a woman wanting him to come on her face, makes a man feel good about himself. Men may watch porno for a turn-on, but what goes better with a

turn-on than feeling good about yourself sexually?" I asked her what the thinking is, among the women she knows, about a man coming on a woman's face. "The general consensus among women is that male fluids are bad! Coming on a woman's face, that would feel sticky and uncomfortable. And women don't like to swallow the stuff. Maybe they take it in the mouth, but then they spit it out on the bed sheets. The taste and smell always vary, depending on what the man has been eating. Sometimes it tastes bad. Maybe sort of okay. But generally we women don't like it. Fluids are bad."

Fluids are bad? Yet feminists have been telling men that female fluids, whatever their origin or color or smell, are supposed to be treated like divine nectar. A man is supposed to want oral sex with a woman even if she is on her period. Even if she has a yeast infection. A woman's sexual fluids are sacred, and a man is supposed to drink them in as if they are the elixir of life.

Once again, the double-standard: Women demand that men treat them sensually, even in the realm of bodily fluids. But men's fluids are bad.

Do my examples define the norm among straight and lesbian women? Probably, although there are some lovely exceptions. I knew a woman named Angela, very lesbian, who spoke of how she would make love for hours with women - how she loved introducing them to slow, languorous, sensual love-making that involved the whole body and not just the genitals. Many years ago I knew

a young woman from France who would make love with me in a slow, sensual way that could go on for an entire day. (When we had the time. We both were busy graduate students.) There is that lovely scene in the movie, *Songcatcher*, when the two women are making slow, sensual, nongenital love in the woods (just before they are discovered and everything turns tragic) and I think that this scene would likely not have been filmed were there not some experience, in the writer's or director's mind, upon which this was based.

To sum up: I have learned that I do not want to participate in the pseudo-sensuality which feminist lesbians hypocritically extol and which too many straight women demand but will not give. Thus I learned not only from lesbian partnerships but also from many straight female lovers what I would never put up with in a marriage of my own.

Allow me to give one more example for the sake of vouchsafing the selectiveness I learned to practice. This woman's name was Cathy. She was one of those women who, during intercourse, could have one orgasm after another. Two dozen? Ten dozen? Who was keeping count? Such a boost to my male ego, she was. With this woman there was no doubt but that I was performing splendidly. All the while she would just lie back, giving nothing in return, except the opportunity for me to boost my ego because I was performing so well. But one hot afternoon, after she had gone through her redundant repertoire and seemed to be approaching the end of her responsiveness, I sat up and told her

I wanted our way of making love to change. I was doing the giving - all that thrusting while on top of her - and she was doing the coming. And our love-making always followed the same pattern - I would give her all those orgasms, then I would get my one orgasm at the end. I wanted a change. I wanted her to give to my body just as sensually, just as actively, as I was giving to hers. She knew what I meant, and her response was: "But I don't want to! The way we're doing it makes me feel good!"

"The way we're doing it doesn't make me feel good anymore. It just makes me feel tired, because I'm doing all the work, all the giving, while you just lie there enjoying your multiple orgasms."

She sat up and, truly distressed, said, "But the way we've been doing it is how they do it in ...," I thought she would say, "... in the movies," but what she said was, "... in poetry. In novels. You know, the great lovers and their, uh, love!"

My comeback was, "I guess that means you aren't on the same level as the great poets." She was a poet - or poetess - as she insisted on calling herself.

So was I supposed to make love to her the way poets say it is done? No; I wasn't about to feel that kind of obligation. But, come to think of it, I had probably read as much poetry as she had, and likely many more novels, and I hadn't exactly learned from fine literature that the man is supposed to do all the giving while the woman does all the getting. As I got out of bed Cathy actually had the gall to say, "I wasn't through coming."

My reply: "You came at least twenty times, which is more than I did, since I never came at all."

"That's your fault," she said.

"No, it's yours. Because you didn't arouse me enough to come."

That put a hole in her ego. And I meant exactly what I said. All my focus had been on her. All of her focus had been on her. I was being a giving machine, not a sensual man making love with an eager, generous, erotic woman. And so ended another sexual relationship. I gracefully abandoned her and her greed while also abandoning the gratification of my sexual ego. I opted for self-respect and eros over hydraulic lovemaking.

LESSON #8: MY RIGHT TO SENSUALITY IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE

During this time I was inclining toward a new appreciation for sensual enjoyment not only in sex (the eros of which is the true melding of sensuality and sexuality) but also with regard to other aspects of the world. Pursuing this broad, pervasive sensuality was something I first learned about by watching what goes on in the homes of gay male couples I know. They certainly have learned how to be sensual - sometimes overly so. For me, suntanning in the back yard every afternoon seems too self-indulgent. Who has - or deserves to have - that much idle time? Spending two hours a week, as did one gay man I knew, getting his nails done in a salon would, for my lifestyle, be ridiculous. Still, I realized that what these overly self-indulgent gay men were doing was no different from

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what many straight women do on a regular basis. My inclinations toward gaining more sensuality were not that extreme. I wanted a sensuality more attached to the basics of self-care.

From gay men, especially partnered gay men, I learned that a little bit of sensuality goes a long way toward a healthier lifestyle. Knowing that I could never succeed at not being a workaholic, I did at least set aside more vacation time. And I took a nap occasionally. When I cooked I put more effort into how the food would taste. I tried getting massages, which I definitely did not like; so I began giving them, which I liked very much. In my home I listened to more classical music, put up more paintings, and paid attention to home furnishings. Not much interested in "decorating," I spent many hours over the course of four summers making twelve gorgeous pieces of furniture. On some days I would dress carefully, choosing colors and attire not for the sake of a special occasion but just to please myself. I bought colored underwear, and when my old bathrobe wore out I replaced it with a beautiful, very elegant red one. I avoided the company of women who approached sex with a narcissistic attitude, and instead chose women who would appreciate a man's body - not just his eyes, chin, and such, but also his legs, ass, even the shape of his penis. If a woman enjoyed making love with me, that wasn't enough; I wanted to hear her say so. I wanted, at times, to be languorous and receptive in bed. I wanted women to give me as much foreplay as they expected me to give.

I settled for nothing less, and I was fortunate with several women to find what I wanted. And I am also grateful for what I now have, in the broader aspects of my sensual life, and I am quite sure I would never have been attracted to this broader sensuality - might never even have known about it - had I not learned about it in the homes, and through the conversation, of gay men.

LESSON #9: HOW TO APPROACH MARRIAGE AND STAY MARRIED

Observing the sensual proclivities of gay men helped me personally, and observing attitudes toward marriage or partnering in the gay and lesbian communities helped me interpersonally-teaching me many lessons about marriage. Over the last several decades I have known many coupled gays and lesbians quite well. I think this is because they know that I accept such unions; hence they are open to me about their marital (or partnered) status. Thus being in a position to observe many gay marriages, I have noted a marked difference in how gay women and gay men approach marriage. Gay women are more likely to marry (or partner), and they tend to partner without a long period of "courtship." Not surprisingly, these relationships are likely to come part. Gay men, however, seem much less likely to partner. They approach a potential marital union with more caution than do lesbian women, but once they do couple, are much more likely to stay

together. I realized that the different ways gay men and gay women approach marriage actually reflects how straight men and straight women view marriage. Straight women inject a great deal of romance into the wedding itself - the engagement, the rings, bridal gown, flowers, etc. The man is less romantic, more realistic, more attuned to the practicalities that go along with getting married. Women's excessive romanticizing about marriage can occasion their undoing when the realities and demands of life puncture their fantasies. This phenomenon is so common, in fact, that it prompted Florence and Fred Littauer to write a very fine book entitled, *After Every Wedding Comes a Marriage*.¹² In straight marriages, the woman's romantic rashness about the wedding is reined in by the man's realistic reluctance about the marriage, and a kind of compromise, or synthesis, takes place which can lead to a pleasant balance of romance and reality. But in lesbian marriages, romanticizing comes from both partners; hence, the marriage happens too quickly and is too fragile. In gay men, there are two men with practical concerns, and as a result many unions which might have turned out to be healthy and enjoyable are prevented from ever happening because of the plethora of practical objections. But, when two men do partner, their union will likely be healthy and long-lived.

I witnessed these differences in gay men and gay women, and from them I learned lessons in how better to consider, approach, and commit to

marriage. My wife and I were friends for over a year before we became lovers. We were lovers for almost three years before we married. There were intense discussions about practical matters which took precedence over romance, but there also was due importance given to romance - always, however, with an awareness that this romance should involve our actual love, and not delusions about love's immunity from the travails of the real world.

LESSON #10:
NEGOTIATE, RATHER THAN
PRESUME, THE SEX
WITHIN A MARRIAGE

From gay men I also learned how one's attitudes toward both sexuality and sensuality can achieve increasingly mature stability within a partnering relationship. I observed how gay men, whose early dating years often involved immersing themselves in an uninhibited, impersonal, even anonymous sexual frenzy of men pursuing men, made a strong choice to do things differently in their marriage. They might still have sex outside the marriage if this is negotiated and acceptable, and they might occasionally enjoy mingling in the same social milieu where their sexual frenzy of yore took place. But now, taking their marriage commitment seriously, the sex frenzy of the gay dating milieu is not allowed inside their home and will not be allowed to contaminate their union. In fact, my impression is that the importance placed on sensuality, within the gay male household, to a considerable degree comes about because that commitment to sensuality - personal

and shared - is intended to serve as a bulwark against over-emphasizing the sexual part of their union, thus making sure that sexual indulgence is not used as an artificial palliative for emotional conflicts, and also making sure that an emotionally balanced life is not infringed upon by the sexual mania of other gay men.

I have also noted that as gay and lesbian marriages endure over the course of several years, there is much less emphasis on sex. In fact, I have noted that after a few years, most gay marriages have no sex at all. In gay male marriages, this seems to be negotiated and acceptable. In lesbian marriages, it seems to be unnegotiated but eventually accepted with sad resignation. (It does not require a wit, or a sardonic cynic, to here observe that something similar happens within most heterosexual marriages: After a time, as boredom and acrimony set in, there is little or no sex. This is rarely negotiated, or amiably accepted, or resigned to wisely. Initially it is a source of anger, fighting, and private grief. Only with time is it eventually accepted because it has become the norm.) The lesson here which I learned: One should never be passive about one's marriage, letting it drift to unforeseen, and unwanted, terrain. If eternal vigilance is the price of freedom, then constant communication - negotiating generously about emotional and physical changes, as well as clear and firm assertions of one's needs - is what forms the axis of a successful marriage.

Keeping all this in mind - the fact that sex ceases to be as important in, or disappears altogether from,

most marriages, whether straight or gay - causes me to wonder why there is such a furor by the public about accepting gay marriage. Marriage, after all, has relatively little to do with sex. It is primarily a public statement to one's community - family, friends, work associates, residential neighborhood, even probate court - so this entire community will recognize that these two people's lives are twined. This twining is based on economic ties and intimacy, and this intimacy is present as a kind of love; however, this love, even though it likely began with a sexual component, might never have contained any sex at all even though it has endured as love. Moreover, this relationship may very well continue to endure as congenial intimacy even if the love itself comes to an end. (I set forth this variety of possibilities because I knew a non-gay partnership between two women which lasted for almost fifty years. One woman's husband deserted her during the depression, and she had children to raise. The other woman's husband died of a heart attack, so she moved in to help with the children. These two women were proud - even patrician - in bearing, prim and prudish in all matters, and certainly asexual with one another. But as the decades went by, their lives became so conjoined that people thought of them as a couple, and when the two of them were in their mid-eighties, and one woman died, it would have been very much in the best interests of the other woman if they had been legally married, since the dead woman's legal heirs came forward with claims that posed an economic hardship for the surviving woman. If

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those women could have married - proclaiming to the world that theirs was not a gay marriage but merely a same-sex marriage, then they could have ensured legal protection for their economic union, and could have been spared much trouble during the times they tried to establish joint ownership of their house and other belongings. Not to mention the practical difficulties - many involving true suffering - endured by the surviving "widow" of this couple.)

LESSON #11: THE WORD "PARENT" : NOUN OR VERB?

Of all the lessons I learned from gays and lesbians, the most valuable had its beginnings in an interaction with two male partners. I knew them well, had invited them over for supper, and we all - the two of them, my wife and myself, our teenage daughter, and our son who at the time was only 14 months old - were having an enjoyable time. These two men, Bob and Bill, were talking about how much they would like to adopt a child. They lamented the prejudices against gays - especially a gay male couple - and spoke of how these prejudices had kept them from even exploring the adoptive process. They spoke of what they felt they would miss, and waxed eloquent about how they wished they could be parents to a little child right now. An hour earlier, they both had been complaining about how boring their weekends had become, and how they had no plans

for doing anything this coming weekend. So I jumped at what I thought was an excellent opportunity. My wife and I seldom got to go out because a babysitter was difficult to find and our daughter was busy with school projects on weekends. So I suggested to Bob and Bill that they keep our little son one night this coming weekend. This way my wife and I could go out to eat, take in a movie, then drop by to get our son before the hour got late.

They both sat there, slight grins on their faces - grins that contained both embarrassment and shame. They said not a word. I prodded them. Still they said nothing. By this time they weren't even grinning. The expression on their faces made them look like a pair of dogs that had just been caught after shitting on the carpet. It slowly dawned on me that they really didn't want to adopt a child. How could they want to, when they didn't even want to spend an evening with a child? They just wanted to talk about adopting, and make people feel sorry for them. They wanted to fantasize and romanticize about being parents, but they did not want to do the work of being a parent.

Inclined toward tact, I said something jocular, and cheerfully changed the subject. But I will never forget that look on both their faces, and I will never forget the lesson I learned that night: Many people think they want to be parents, but not enough of these people actually want to parent. To them "parent" is a noun only, not a verb.

Since I learned this lesson I am better able to understand why people succeed, or fail, as parents: If people want to have children there are three questions they should ask, and their success as parents largely depends on whether they can answer all three questions in the affirmative. These three questions are:

1. Do I want to have children?
2. Do I like children?
3. Do I want to raise children?

Of course most adults want to have children. Having children is very much the norm, people approve of you if you have children, and there is the oft-stated maxim that, "They will be a comfort to you in your old age." Wanting to have children is easy. But that next question is more difficult. Many adults do not like children. Maybe they enjoy being with a child on rare or brief occasions, but they do not seek out the company of children, and they do not enjoy, i.e., like, them very much. There is nothing wrong per se with not liking children; this doesn't necessarily mean actually disliking children. It simply means not quite liking them. When these adults do consider the fact that they do not much like children, they usually are quick to say, "But I know I'll like my own!" But the problem is, this rarely happens. When adults do not like children in general, they do not much like being with their own children. These parents may love their children, and enjoy them somewhat, but too often they are impatient, inattentive, or absent. In other words,

they end up doing a terrible job as parents.

But even adults who like children, who enjoy their company, are not thereby automatically disposed toward carrying out the manifold of tasks involved with raising children. Raising children - parenting them ("parent" as a verb) - is a demanding job which along with its many rewards means losing sleep when the child is an infant, losing sleep when the child is ill, and losing friends who do not want to be around you with your children. It also means compromised finances, lack of privacy, time taken away from hobbies and reading. It means balancing work with daycare, postponing dreamed-of vacations for years, and discovering that prolonged, uninterrupted love-making is a thing of the past. All these difficulties go along with the task of raising children, and one has to be able to say that, despite these sacrifices, the joys of raising a child are still desirable. The sad fact is, not many people can say this honestly. The result: Parents who do not enjoy parenting usually do a miserable job of raising their children.

And I am either so bold, or so pessimistic, as to make the claim that most parents do a miserable job of raising their children. The wonder is that so many children turn out as well as they do. Next time you are trying to understand why a child took a gun and blazed away at classmates, read between the lines of the news reportage, and ask yourself, not whether these parents loved their children or wanted their children, but where the evidence is that these parents liked children or were actively involved in raising their

children. Review the evidence with an ungenerous eye, and in virtually all cases you will see that it is chilling. Moreover, you will understand one fact very clearly: For a mature person, the word "parent" is more a verb than a noun.

So thank you, Bob and Bill, for setting me on the path toward figuring out the three questions an adult should ask before becoming a parent. You, as a gay male couple, with your frivolous fantasizing about being parents, put into stark relief something every potential parent needs to think about. However, you are no more guilty of frivolity in this arena than most straight couples are. They often become parents glibly, without thinking the matter through. They vaguely want to be parents, mainly because they vaguely considered that first question and flippantly answered it in the affirmative. And they probably never even considered the other two questions.

LESSON #12: HOW JOINT CUSTODY AFTER DIVORCE CAN WORK

From gay people I also learned lessons about shared custody after divorce. Gay couples do sometimes have children, often through adoption, sometimes (in lesbian couples) through donor insemination. But gay couples sometimes divorce, just as straight couples do. And I have observed that when gay couples divorce, they invest tremendous commitment and energy toward establishing true shared custody. They are this strongly motivated, I am sure, by an awareness that given the prejudices

of our society, gay rights in custodial matters if closely scrutinized by a court are tenuous at best. Hence, a divorcing gay couple knows they had better cooperate with one another and make the best of a difficult situation. And I have observed that they almost always succeed. The lesson here is that, in almost all divorcing situations between heterosexual couples, when joint custody does not work it is because the parents are not working together on behalf of the children.

With straight couples, the main problem which gets carried into a joint custody situation is mutual hostility. And it is almost always the mother's hostility which sabotages joint custody because society in general and chivalrous judges in particular forgive a straight woman her transgressions and side with her against the father. But the fact is, if this same mother were divorcing a woman, she would well know that a society already regarding her with suspicion is not going to side with her against another woman. As a result, she would quickly realize that it is in the best interests of the children, as well as in her own best interests, to be civil, cooperative, fully invested in making joint custody work. Since gay women can so successfully make joint custody work given that they have to, heterosexual mothers should be made to behave responsibly instead of having their bad behavior excused on the chivalrous grounds that women's transgressions are appearance, not reality.

Misgivings

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LESSON #13:
SEXUAL PROCLIVITY
INVOLVE BOTH INCLINATION
AND CHOICE

There is one more lesson worth recounting which I learned, not from a gay marriage per se, but from a gay woman married to a straight man. My friend Debbie is slender, cute, and lively, with a boyish figure and a young girl's laugh and a face that any man could fall in love with. She is also very practical minded, as is evidenced by her marriage. She tells me that she, like several women she knows, is basically gay but chose to not lead a gay lifestyle. She has never actually been "in love" with a man, but she was in love with several women during her younger years, though with only one after she became an adult. This last woman was the only woman she ever had sex with, and this happened before she married. Debbie, like many gay women, wanted the traditional lifestyle: husband, children, house, respect from community, acceptance by family. So she married a man. She decided, early on, that even if sex with a man is not what she prefers, she was aware that she cared for this man, chose him, so it was her duty to act as if she liked the sex even if she didn't. She also realized that if she truly cared for her husband and for their marriage, then it was her duty to not just pretend she liked having sex with him, but to learn to actually like it. Maybe she would never succeed at being in love with her husband, but if she were to have

a happy marriage and a happy life, then she would work hard at love. She would love her husband, please him sexually and in other ways too, and in pleasing him, make it obvious - something she knew she could not fake - that she could actually find real pleasure in being with him sexually. Basically, Debbie worked hard at learning to enjoy sex with her husband, worked hard at loving him, and succeeded even though she is not "in love." Debbie contrasts her own marriage with other marriages. Most other marriages, Debbie declares, are miserable because the man is not getting sex. The husband and wife are straight, but the sex is gone from their marriage; so the husband is unhappy, while the wife, even though she is getting what she wants-which is to not give or get what her husband wants - is miserable too. Debbie points out that the success of a marriage is the result of how much effort you put into it, and how much you push yourself to do what is necessary to make the other person happy - while also pushing yourself to become happy.

Surely many of those straight women—wives, who have fallen into the tried and true (though stale and bitter) rut of wielding control over a husband by denying him sex, could live happier lives (with happier husbands) if they were wise enough to do as Debbie does. If Debbie, a gay woman, can push past the defines of her gay identity and find sexual happiness (if not complete fulfillment) with a man, then those many straight women could and should push past their paltry angers

and petty resentments to make the best of a union toward which they are already heterosexually inclined. Similarly, I myself have used Debbie as an example when certain impediments have presented themselves to me - not so much in my marriage, but in other aspects of life, e.g., work, relationships with members of my extended family, and difficulties with friends. I have, like Debbie did in her marriage, pushed myself harder - realizing that moving in the direction of a certain kind of behavior, and doing it cheerfully, often is exactly what I need for bringing about a healthy, productive, and satisfying change of attitude.

* * *

It would behoove me, and the reader also, to here remember that this lengthy exposition began as a response to Natalie Hartmann. Can I hope that she (if she ever reads this) would change her attitudes? No. I have learned that people do not readily change on the issue of gay rights. Usually a major life crisis must be traversed, e.g., discovering that one's own child is gay, before a person becomes more tolerant on this issue. I do hope, however, that my response could convince Natalie of two things: first, that I am fair-minded enough to concede that I did avoid remarking on the lessons I learned from gays about marriage, and second, contrary to her gleeful suspicion, I certainly am capable of remembering those lessons.

I have not, I readily admit, given an account as eloquent as the

one Christopher Isherwood (very gay), conveyed to Gore Vidal (omnisexual, and therefore, sometimes gay):

Certainly, under the present social setup, a homosexual relationship is more difficult to maintain than a marriage, but doesn't that merely make it more of a challenge and therefore, in a sense, more humanly worthwhile? The success of such a relationship is revolutionary in the best sense of the word. And, because it demonstrates the power of human affections over fear and prejudice and taboo, it is usually beneficial to society as a whole - as all demonstrations of faith and courage must be: they raise our collective morals.¹³

The fact is, marriage or partnering - whether straight or gay - has many dismal failures on record along with many admirable successes. In this society I have learned most of my lessons about marriage from straight couples, but there was no need for me to list those lessons here, given that they are so numerous, and so available for anyone's inspection. As for listing those lessons I have learned from gay marriages or partnerships, it perhaps has come as a surprise to Natalie for her to learn that when I said those lessons were "remarkable," I was not suggesting they were always laudatory.

Allow me to emphasize that I do not for one moment believe that gay people are any more disposed

toward human ugliness than are straight people. I am so unprejudiced on this matter that I can claim, without reservation, that when it comes to the crude art of being morally repugnant, straight people can and do behave just as badly as gay people ever do.

But please, Natalie, don't get me started on the sins of straight people. I am not disposed toward writing about the obvious. Besides, my doing so might cause you to realize that you (in company with the likes of Rudy Bold) are looking in a very accurate, very unflattering, and quite unforgiving mirror.

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Book Reviews

By J. Steven Svoboda

The Father Factor: How Your Father's Legacy Impacts Your Career

By Stephan B. Poulter, Ph.D. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2006. www.prometheusbooks.com. No cover price but website gives price as US \$18. 239 pp.

Psychologist and father Stephan B. Poulter's *The Father Factor: How Your Father's Legacy Impacts Your Career* addresses an issue I do not believe has been given book-length treatment before — the impact on your career of your relationship with your father (whether you are male or female). Poulter believes — and demonstrates — that regardless of how you interacted with Dad, even (or especially) if your father was absent from your childhood, the effects on your success in your work life endure. Poulter includes a number of illuminating and just-plan-fun-to-read case studies, each drawn as usual from a mix-and-match operation on the stories of real-life people. As the author phrases it in describing one exemplary case study, some of us are probably more like our fathers at work than we could imagine, want, or guess.

Does that mean we are stuck with the cards we were dealt when we were little? Not at all. In Poulter's words (and using his italics), "*Your life is in front of you, not behind you.* Your concern now is what you can do to improve your career prospects and job performance." The author evinces a vibrant yet grounded optimism that with enough determination and awareness, anyone can overcome limitations inherited from our early years. However, the fact that it is possible to get there does not mean it's a free ride. One roadblock can be a belief that we exist only in the here and now, which paradoxically can give past events more power.

The author outlines four basic attachment styles of fathers — intermittent, avoidant, depressed, and secure. Each style is associated with career issues that their children typically find themselves

addressing, as well as with questions that Poulter suggests we ponder. For each attachment style, concrete steps are laid out to work on compensating for negative effects of your father's style. The author might have been well advised to have noted a bit more clearly that a given attachment style may not automatically result in that person's child experiencing the precise issues Poulter lays out. In my own case, I noticed that although my father had a predominantly avoidant style, I seem to have little difficulty with emotional self-expression, which is one of the foci of Poulter's suggestions for workers with this style of father.

The author shows us that seven father factor issues in all careers are related to the father factor: shame, self-doubt, lack of focus, motivation, personal responsibility, emotional immaturity, fear of failure. In Poulter's words, "The only way significant change can occur in your career is to fully and completely understand, to the best of your ability, the career impediments that you have struggled with at one time or another in your career path."

Chapters four through eight, the heart of the book, each explore in depth one of five different styles of fathering — super-achieving, time bomb, passive, absent, and the ideal, the compassionate-mentor. Poulter devotes some time to discussing the impact your father's father had on your childhood by influencing your father! Action steps are laid out to healing whatever emotional legacy you may have from your dad's fathering style.

This book manages to stay upbeat. The author seems to sincerely believe in our potential to reach beyond any limits we may feel were laid in when we were little. But the past must be addressed first, and only then can we prepare ourselves to move beyond it. Words of encouragement are thoughtfully provided to those of us (90% or more) lacking the guidance of a compassionate-mentor father.

You hold the keys to your own future, Poulter believes, or at least you will

hold them once you talk to Dad and take the keys from his hand. The author walks us through a self-talk exercise in which we take our life back, regardless of whether our father is still alive. Ten qualities you need to incorporate into your work life to prepare for success are laid out in detail. Poulter's seven steps to success are make a commitment to change (identify five goals for your career and personal life), improve your self-awareness (keep a journal of emotions), identify your triggers, don't allow your mistakes or career setbacks to derail your commitment to change, be aware of old familiar father factor habits, get a support system in place, determine what success looks like and set your goals for achieving it.

The ultimate goal of this book is probably to demonstrate Dad's importance in our work life. One very powerful exercise invites us to focus on the rules with which we grew up and to update any rules we no longer need to live by. Then we create an updated rule book regarding the rules we are living with now.

Poulter never once suggests that the applicability of this book may extend beyond careers to encompass all phases of our life. But I think this wonderful work cannot help but expand our own horizons in all directions. As soon as I finish writing this review, I am planning to open the book again and get to work on the various exercises.

What's Happening??

National Coalition of Free Men News

SAN DIEGO CHAPTER REPORT

By Harry Crouch

DONATIONS FOR THE BAR ASSOCIATION EDUCATIONAL EXHIBIT: For those of you who were able to help us with funds for the upcoming San Diego Bar Association Semi-Annual Family Law Conference, thank you very much. Thanks to a contribution yesterday we are close to our goal. Kevin Young, NCFM-SD VP, is attempting to negotiate with the SDBA. If they reduce our \$400 entry fee we will have our educational exhibit. I'll send out a more detailed Thank You with relevant information when available.

FAITH BASED DV PROGRAM AND ACCESS CENTERS: The Safe Place Faith Community domestic violence education, information, and referral planning committee met yesterday. After presentations in Oklahoma, Kent Peters reported that numerous congregations there are anxious to participate in the program. Two more congregations in San Diego will be launching programs soon with a third congregation hoping to come online this summer.

I introduced information about the Children's Rights Council's access centers. It's my understanding that the CRC houses all or many of their access centers in faith based facilities. There is a strong need in San Diego for reasonably priced services for non-custodial parents to spend time with their children when "visitation" (or ac-

cess) is court ordered supervised. Second, such access centers seem a logical adjunct to the outreach and services provided by SPFC programs. There is no doubt some incidents of family violence, real, perceived, or contrived have to do with children being denied access to a parent, particularly in cases of parental alienation and court order. I'm hopeful that members of the planning committee will read the CRC materials presented, see the benefits, and help establish faith based facilities access centers within a year or so.

GENDER STUDIES CLASS: Last week I spent two hours with a gender studies class at the University of San Diego. My initial thought was to wear a white T-shirt with a large dart board printed on the front. Not necessary. We had a great discussion, the students asked compelling questions, were seriously concerned with numerous issues, and were very open to all the information I provided. One topic was Warren Farrell. Knowing this earlier facilitated NCFM-LA arranging for Warren to send 20 copies of *The Myth of Male Power*. The students were genuinely pleased with the free book. I had a great time, learned a great deal, had my faith somewhat restored in the upcoming generation, and was treated to a very good lunch by Professor Deborah Sundmacher. Interestingly both Deborah and I were assistants to Warren, though I think her tenure was much longer than mine, the later being a matter of months versus perhaps years for

Deborah. Deborah initially asked Warren to speak to her class. Since he moved from the San Diego area that was impractical so I became the consolation prize.

TOLLING PROJECT: We've been working on implementing a child support suspension program for incarcerates (Tolling Project) for close to two years. Things bogged down several months ago when an attorney within the Department of Child Support Services arbitrarily decided that law students were not needed to help inmates complete the forms necessary to file a motion of modification of child support. During that lull period the Chief Attorney for the CA Depart-

NEWS continues next page

ncfm now has coffee mugs for sale!

Chapter Reps: These mugs make a great fundraiser! Discounts are available for chapters purchasing 5 or more mugs.

These mugs are made by MWare and are high quality regular sized coffee mugs. Choose a Cobalt Blue or Hunter Green mug. Each mug sports the NCFM logo, name and the scripted motto: Giving Men a Voice Since 1977.

Price per mug is \$12.99, including shipping to the 48 contiguous United States.

Contact Deborah Watkins at **NCFMdfw@yahoo.com** or **(214)-485-1512** to place your order. Please allow 2-3 weeks for delivery.

News

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ment of Corrections contacted us for information at the bequest of interested Correctional administrative staff in Sacramento, one of whom literally overheard about our efforts a conference last year. James Pauly, twenty year regional director of Mentors in Parole program and friend of the Men's Center, arranged an appointment for me to meet with the counseling staff of the County Correctional System this morning. County houses roughly 5,000 incarcerates daily and processes 100,000 a year. The state system houses roughly 170,000. The County is very interested, will discern the number of incarcerates who may benefit from such a project, and review internal procedures. Then we'll get together again to iron out more details toward actual implementation of the project. Later in the morning I received a call from the Department Directors from CA Department of Corrections. She was the official who overheard me explaining the project last year at the conference. She has been interested since then and I believe is one of those who received the green light from Corrections Chief Attorney. Here, of course, the incarcerated population greatly differs from the county incarcerated population wherein inmates are more transitional. That is, they may be in a County facility pending bail, case determination, trial, pre-sentencing, sentencing, or transfer to another facility to serve their sentences. State facilities are "prisons" where inmates typically serve longer sentences than inmates serving time in County "jails". Hence, while there are over-

lapping similarities with respect to a tolling project there are stark differences necessitating strikingly different approaches. Regardless, for this discussion, important is the fact that the interest level appears high at both County and State levels.

EQUAL PARENTING: Two months ago a new group formed under the Men's Center umbrella — Californians for Equal Parenting. Unlike the failed 2006 California Initiative for Sharing Parenting and ineffective piecemeal lobbying, the CEP effort will approach legislative reform much differently. We will be one issue oriented, understand success can come with limited resources and proper planning, and rely on the power of like and similar groups. The organizational process is well underway and will be shared as we bring more and more individuals and groups into the process. Right now, for a number of reasons, including fending off nay-sayers, there is not much information we can share.

UPDATES: Thanks to NCFM-SD member Joe M., our chapter this year became eligible for the Combined Federal Campaign. The CFC is only program through which donations can be solicited directly from Federal Employees. Consequently, I gave several presentations to Navy, Marine, and Border Patrol personnel. I also passed out hundreds of NCFM brochures and thousands of copies of other informational brochures and articles. If anyone signed up to support NCFM-SD the first donations arrive sometime in March and then quarterly. We have to reapply each year.

In late November, Michael McCormick, Executive Director of the American Coalition of Fathers and Children, flew in from the east coast to do some business in California. He spent an afternoon at our Men's Center discussing various issues and ways ACFC and NCFM might work together.

In December I attended a grant writing class. Patricia Overberg, past Executive Director of Antelope Valley Domestic Violence Council and more things than I can possibly remember, is working with us to develop programs and secure grants. I'm slowing her down because there's only one of me and it's hard to find the time needed to get her all the information she needs.

Just before Christmas we were invited by Safe Faith Place Communities to set up an informational table at a dinner to raise funds for their domestic violence outreach, education and referral program. They raised several hundred dollars and the spaghetti was pretty good.

NCFM-SD Larry Kerkman, President of the Children's Rights Initiative for Sharing Parents Equally (CRISPE) with the help of others from NCFM-SD, the Children's Rights Council San Diego Chapter (CRCSD), and Coalition of Parent Support (COPs), developed a PowerPoint presentation about the need for equal parenting. The presentation was unveiled in West Virginia before advocates and legislators from several states.

We formed a new working group, Californian's for Equal Parenting (CAFEP), comprised of

members from NCFM-SD, NCFM-LA/F4J, CRCSD, COPS, CRISPE, the Men's Legal Center, and others. The object of the group is to develop equal parenting legislation, substantiate the need for such legislation, solicit endorsements from like minded organizations and individuals, find legislative sponsors, and facilitate passage of the legislation; or, some major part thereof. Other such efforts throughout the country have failed for a myriad of reasons, including two or three attempts in California. Advocates in Michigan, West Virginia, Washington, and other states are moving forward with similar efforts. In fact, our legislation is based on pending legislation in West Virginia. Earlier attempts in California not only had a more hostile legislative environment (not that ours is particularly friendly) but suffered from lack of resources and poor planning. They tried to do too much with not enough. Well, other than ourselves we have few resources as well. However, the public is generally more aware of related issues. Politicians have heard from concerned parents for years. Awareness is higher. Second, I hope we don't publicly launch our effort until we have all the proverbial ducks in order, which includes a massive endorsement drive. We may not have money, but I believe we have sufficient support to cause considerable discomfort to legislators, particularly in an upcoming election year. I believe the effort will likewise be newsworthy which helps.

The "Tolling Project" made progress and took a kick in the mouth all in the same week. James Pauly, Director of Volunteers in Parole Mentors San Diego, arranged for a

meeting with County correctional counselors. They were excited about the possibility of being able to help incarcerated suspend (or, "toll") child support payments while incarcerated. Until then it appeared that the San Diego Division of Child Support Services would facilitate the process, though earlier commitments waned. A few days later I found out why. Apparently, they don't want to do the paper work. Just before leaning this I finished a phone call with Del Sayles-Owen, Director of Division of Community Services, Department of Corrections, State of California. It seems Department-of-Corrections attorneys green lighted my proposal and information from DCSS San Diego about the legality of the process. We don't agree on methods, but the State has contract case workers who Del Sayles-Owens believes should help inmates complete the necessary paperwork. I believe we need third year law students so they can represent with some limitations the inmates. Hence, hopefully ensure the paperwork actually gets properly processed. Two years I've been working on this and we are just now starting to see serious movement at the State level and nothing more than a bad bowel movement at the County DCSS level.

NCFM-SD member John Van Doorn has filed to run for County Supervisor. In the past few months John has taken classes on how to effectively run a campaign. He is already an accomplished speaker before the Board of Supervisors. He regularly attends meetings to tell the members what he thinks about Child Protective Services, his experiences with Family Court, and distaste for the refusal of

the County to concern themselves with certain injustices foisted on John and his children. I think his opponent is in for a rude surprise. John ain't no dummy and is one heck of an articulate speaker; that is, when he's not red-faced with frustration.

NCFM-SD member and NCFM National Secretary Kevin Young is sorting out information from the Registrar of Voters Office about judges soon up for re-election, at least those that may run unopposed. In San Diego County the names of judges running unopposed don't even show up on the ballot. However, with a mere 100 certified citizen signatures we can force the names on the ballot. We are preparing to do this, as soon as Kevin gets all the information sorted out.

Roughly two months ago NCFM-SD volunteer Nancy F. arranged for us to be able to provide emergency shelter on a space available basis in conjunction with several sober living facilities. Since we do not have intake and assessment capabilities we are not promoting

NEWS continues next page

Help the Men's Center!

The **California Men's Center** is an outstanding resource for men and for NCFM. It's also now the home of NCFM's national office! You can help the Men's Center expand its programs and help more men by making a **MONTHLY PLEDGE**. Even as little as \$10/month will help greatly!

For more information about the Men's Center, please visit
www.californiamenscenters.org

To set up your monthly pledge, please contact Deborah at
NCFMdfw@yahoo.com or
(214)-485-1512.

News

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this opportunity, at least yet; or, we would be overwhelmed with work. However, we have thus far sheltered two men, offered shelter to another, and offered shelter to a single woman who was referred to us by another Women's Shelter program. We provided the makings of a Christmas dinner for 12 residents of one facility. Hopefully, next year we will have sufficient funds to provide food for all the facilities.

The Men's Center over the past quarter has fielded hundreds of telephone and email inquiries from around the country and Canada, as well as several walk-ins each week. Typical inquiries concern a wide range of circumstances centered around paternity, paternity fraud, parental alienation, child custody, child support arrears, domestic violence, false accusations, and requests for referrals for further assistance.

NCFM members John Van Doorn, Kevin Young, and myself serve on the State Department of Child Support Services Advocates Advisory Group. The State just asked us to review and comment on a package of proposed changes to the Parental Opportunity Program — you know, the program that gets men to say they're fathers of newborns, whether they are or not. This should be fun.

Last, thank you to the NCFM members that financially support our men's center. Without that support there is no way we can do what we do. Absolutely no way.

TWIN CITIES CHAPTER REPORT

By Will Hageman

In late September, to mark Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October, the Twin Cities Chapter sent a mailing with information about domestic violence against men to all 87 county attorneys in Minnesota and 14 in western Wisconsin. The mailing directed the county attorneys to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control's fact sheet on intimate partner violence (www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/ipv_factsheet.pdf), Indiana University Law Professor Linda Kelly's article "Disabusing the Definition of Domestic Abuse" (www.law.fsu.edu/journals/lawreview/downloads/304/kelly.pdf), California State University Psychology Professor Martin Fiebert's bibliography of studies on domestic violence (www.csulb.edu/~mfiebert/assault.htm), and the article "Domestic Homicide of Male Spouses by Females: A Review for Death Investigators", written by Lt. Cynthia T. Ferguson (www.forensicnursemag.com/articles/391lifedeath.html).

In October, the chapter had a booth at the annual conference of Education Minnesota, the state teachers association. This was the fourth straight year that we have been at this event, which is always one of our busiest. We distributed many copies of literature about the school system's bias against boys, and articles with suggestions on how the school system could be changed to serve the educational needs of boys

as well as it already serves the educational needs of girls. We also distributed articles about the severe shortage of male teachers and male role models in the schools.

Also in October, the chapter had a table at the annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota. Many of the attendees visited our table to ask questions and take literature.

LOS ANGELES CHAPTER REPORT

By Marc Angelucci

NCFM-LA was very busy between October and December 2008.

NCFM-LA was quoted extensively in domestic violence articles in the campus newspapers of Virginia Tech (10/2), California State University Northridge (10/9), University of North Carolina (10/18), North Dakota State University (10/23), University of California at Irvine (10/29), University of Connecticut (10/31), Purdue University (11/9), and Webster College in Missouri (12/6). All of these are linked at our media page at http://www.ncfm-la.org/media_coverage.html

NCFM-LA's president appeared briefly on the Dr. Phil Show as a consultant on paternity fraud, responding to Gloria Allred's false claim that paternity fraud is "rare." The show has aired numerous times including on 10/29, 11/5, 12/25 and other dates.

NCFM-LA's president was a guest speaker at UCLA Law for a Human Rights and Sexual Politics

class (11/5) and at a gender studies class at California Lutheran University (11/20) on behalf of NCFM, handing out free copies of *The Myth of Male Power* to all students in both classes. He also was interviewed extensively in person by a USC Journalism graduate student about NCFM-LA and male victims of domestic violence for her master's degree thesis on the topic.

NCFM-LA member Ray Blumhorst was a guest speaker at the Libertarian chapter of the San Fernando Valley (12/13).

NCFM-LA's Ray Blumhorst took to the streets and government centers with his NCFM-LA truck sign and handouts on 10/31, 11/1, 11/8 and other dates.

On October 17, the *Capitol Times* (Wisconsin) asked Gloria Steinem about NCFM-LA's position that male victims of domestic violence are being ignored. Steinem falsely said it's a small percentage and mostly elderly men. On October 22, 2007, the *Capitol Times* printed NCFM-LA's reply to Gloria Steinem.

NCFM-LA and Fathers4Justice held picnic/rallies at Sherman Oaks Park on 10/18, 11/25 and other dates.

On November 10, NCFM-LA's president was interviewed about paternity fraud on a California State University Dominguez Hills network station.

In November, NCFM-LA donated 20 copies of *The Myth of Male Power* to Harry Crouch of the NCFM-SD for distribution to students in a gender studies class at UC Irvine that he participated in.

On December 16, NCFM-LA held activist training seminar called

"Warfare for Men's Rights Activists (MRAs)," put on by NCFM-LA member Joseph Miranda.

NCFM-LA printed numerous letters to the editor, mostly in response to biased domestic violence articles, including letters in the *Catoosa County News* (10/3), *Victorville Daily Press* (10/4), *Kansas City Star* (10/8), *Argus Leader* (10/9), *Lansing City Pulse* (10/10), *Broward Times* (10/12), *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* (10/14), *Seattle Times* (10/14), *Red Bluff Daily News* (10/14), *Herald Banner* (10/17), *Capitol Times* (WI) (10/18 and 10/22), *Wilson County News* (10/19), *Baltimore Sun* (10/23), *Glendale News Press* (10/25), *Long Beach Gazette* (10/26), New York State University of Buffalo (*The Spectrum*) (11/1), *Chicago Sun Times* (11/2), *Park Rapids Enterprise* (MN) (11/6), *Oregon Daily* (11/13), *Tri-Cities News* (11/13), *Detroit Lakes Tribune* (11/14), *St. George & Suteherland Leader* (11/16), *Northwest Florida Daily News* (11/23), *Aspen Times* (11/24), *Southern Highland Times* (11/25), *Antigue Sun* (11/29), *The Star* (Malaysia) (12/2), *Palm Beach Post* (12/16), *Calgary Herald* (Canada) (12/17), *Irish Independent* (12/17), *Outlook India* (12/17), *Providence Journal* (RI) (12/18), *News Wales* (12/20), *Fosters Daily Democrat* (NH) (12/21), *Alameda Sun* (12/21), *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (12/23), and the *Miami Herald* (12/27).

On several occasions we saw people had printed thank you letters in response to our letters to the editor. For instance, on 11/25 the *Detroit Lakes Tribune* printed the Lakes Crisis & Resource Center's "thank you" to NCFM-LA for pointing out

correct statistics on male victims in response to the Center's incorrect claim that domestic violence is "less physical" when it's committed by women. And on 12/18 the *Irish Independent* printed a letter from an Irishman agreeing with NCFM-LA and challenging the newspaper for ignoring male victims.

NEW GENDER STUDIES BOOK PUBLISHED

By Steven Svoboda

I am pleased to announce that Oxford University Press has published *Does Feminism Discriminate Against Men?: A Debate* (by James Sterba and Warren Farrell with Steven Svoboda). The book is a university-level gender studies textbook structured as a debate between Dr. Warren Farrell and pro-feminist Professor James Sterba. Each chapter of the book addresses a different topic, for example: "Why Men Earn More", "Does Popular Culture Discriminate Against Men?", "Are Schools Biased Against Girls or Boys?", and "The Future of Feminism and Men".

Warren is of course, in addition to being on the NCFM Advisory Board, the only man ever to be elected board member of the New York City chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) three times. He has gone on to become the most popular and the pre-eminent author on gender-equal gender studies topics. I first met Warren in 1996 when I interviewed him and since then I have published reviews of a number of his books, tapes, and DVD's. Last year, Warren asked me to work with him on this book.

Letters to the Editor

Editorial Policy: *NCFM and the Transitions staff welcome letters from readers and will print them as space allows. We reserve the right to edit letters for editorial style and space restrictions but will continue to publish letters in their entirety when possible. Send article responses, corrections, or other comments about the newsletter itself to the editor: Jason Leatherman at transitions@ncfm.org. Letters sent directly to him will be addressed "Dear Editor". Send opinions, stories, requests for advice, or other letters to our webmaster: Michael Rother at ncfm@ncfm.org. Letters sent to him will be addressed "Dear NCFM".*

DEAR NCFM:

Yet again in the news today I read about a female teacher's illicit sexual relationship with a young male student. I was having a conversation with a female co-worker about this situation that keeps appearing around the country and was very surprised when she stated that "It's not as bad when a female teacher does this as when a man does..." going on to say that the boys involved are usually consenting with the teacher and that girls are always the victims in such cases.

What is your organization doing to force the judicial system to punish ALL teachers who molest their students REGARDLESS of their gender? These female teachers keep getting light sentences or probation for this type of crime whereas a male would be sent to the slammer for an indefinite amount of time in a blink of an eye.

I have heard no public outcry on behalf of men's rights in the media, and of children's rights to attend school without being preyed on by teachers, male or female.

Aaron

NCFM:

Thank you for contacting NCFM. We are in total agreement with you on this issue. It is a blatant double standard that women get light sentences for this crime while men get the book thrown at them.

NCFM has handled this issue in

much the same way we handle most men's issues — by writing letters, by protesting, and by offering information at conventions and gatherings. We are an educational organization, and our activities are designed primarily to educate legislators and the public about men's issues. Since we are not a law firm, and we typically do not get involved in litigation, we have not pursued this route. However, if a law firm out there does want to pursue the issue through the courts, we would be happy to help provide supporting data and materials.

I have had the fortune to hear SOME outcry about this issue in the media. It is always a mixed bag, but I would say that our views are being represented in the discussion. The media isn't supposed to "take sides", so they often present our views in the context of a larger discussion that includes opposing views.

At any rate, I do agree with you on this particular issue. Please take the time to peruse our website, and, if you find yourself in agreement with us on more issues, I hope you'll consider joining our organization!

DEAR NCFM:

I'm wondering if you folks have any suggestions of web sites or publications that offer activities or group structures for educators to draw on when planning a workshop for teenage boys. Preferably they would be activities that are dynamic, creative, fun, and educational and deal with issues ranging from homophobia, sexuality in general, dating, relationships with fathers, and everything in between.

Any suggestions or leads? Thanks for all of your good work.

Jonathan

NCFM:

Thank you for contacting NCFM. Great question! I've been searching the web for information about this, but haven't come up with anything directly on target. However, I do think you can find useful and rel-

evant information on these topics in the book *The War Against Boys* by Christina Hoff Sommers. A brief skimming of the books reveals it to be the closest thing to what you're asking for. So, I wish you luck in pursuing this information, and I hope this book helps you. If you find other resources in this topic, please share them with us, if you don't mind, and we'll be happy to share them with others on our website. Good luck!

DEAR NCFM:

Would you have any suggestions of resources on the Internet where I can locate men's gatherings taking place on the West coast, Pacific Northwest to be specific. Bly, Meade, conferences in general, etc...

Jonathan

NCFM:

My first suggestion would be to go to our website, www.ncfm.org, and go to the Links section. If you scroll down to section 19, Mythopoetic Men's Groups, you'll see a couple of links to other organizations that might interest you. The Mankind Project appears to have activities all over the world, so I would think this would be a good place to start. Good luck!

DEAR NCFM:

We have just published in the UK a relationship book aimed at both men and women which includes sections on NPD and borderline personality disorder as well as physical abuse and what to do to protect yourself against women who become malicious. So many of the men we have interviewed are utterly devastated by the actions of such women and really don't know where to turn.

It is a very serious book. One of the co-authors founded and has run a charity in Ireland for male victims of domestic violence (www.amen.ie). The other co-author is a former BBC TV news reporter and anchorman in the UK.

In the UK where the book is published it has a rather controversial title – *That Bitch: Protect Yourself Against Women with Malicious Intent*. In the USA we are seriously considering renaming it *Venus: The Dark Side* as we feel that the title may be perceived as being too blunt or even offensive – but it really isn't. We feel that the Venus title is more politically correct. Please visit our website www.venusthedarkside.com where you can find out more about this book and cast your vote.

Would your members be interested in knowing about this book? If so would somebody be willing to add it to your list of recommended books? Even though it is not officially published in the USA yet, Amazon.com actually has them in stock for immediate dispatch.

Peggy Williams
Centre Publishing
Bath, UK

NCFM:

Thank you very much for your suggestion. Yes, we are interested, and we will be happy to add a link to your book in our online bookstore. But I wonder if we should wait until it is officially released in the US? At any rate, I am NCFM's webmaster, so I am the person to contact about this. I will keep any eye out to see where this goes.

Transitions Needs Your Talent

Transitions is always looking for your contributions in writing on issues affecting men. If you have an article or essay, please submit it for publication. Email your work to the editor at transitions@ncfm.org. Use a good Subject line to distinguish it from spam. Please see www.ncfm.org/write1.htm for more information.

Volunteers Needed Please Help !!

ASSISTANT EDITOR OF TRANSITIONS - The editor could use some help in the production of Transitions. You would start by calling potential authors and soliciting articles. You would take on more tasks as your time and interest allow. This could include proofreading, graphical arts, or pursuing any other ideas you may have for improving Transitions. If interested, please contact Jason Leatherman at transitions@ncfm.org.

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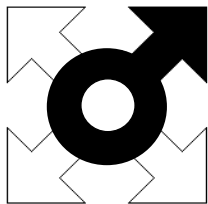
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