

Robinsons on Parallel
Marlboro Men are not born; they are made!

Some remember the macho Marlboro man that was used in the olden day to advertise “manly” cigarettes? He has come to represent a former ideal of masculinity a **Big Impossible** as G. W. Linden, Professor Emeritus, at Southern Illinois University, pointed out in the class he taught at the International Adlerian Summer Institute. Mostly women attended the class called Gender and Men’s Issues. Women have lots to learn about men, as nearly 100% of us would agree (and vice versa, too)

The North American culture has set men up to strive for what the Fox Native Americans called the **Big Impossible** from birth. Studies show that mothers treat boy babies differently from girl babies as to schoolteachers, adult friends, and relatives. We train our little boys not to cry when they are hurt physically or emotionally, but it is OK for little girls to show their feelings. Additional studies show that boy babies are “fussier” than girl babies. Mothers favor babies that make their job easier. Some studies show that when little girl babies expressed pain and discomfort, mothers responded 22% of the time. However, when little boy babies expressed pain, mothers ignored them. What interesting studies! Of course, studies are valuable but not true for every single mother

Mothers mimic a baby girl’s joyous responses. But with boy babies they tend to keep their baby boy’s contented and thus control their son’s emotions. Therefore the authors of the studies maintain that little boys learn to keep their feelings inside within the first few months of their lives and by age two they are walking and become their father’s sons. Is it any wonder that men do not live as long as women? Is it any wonder that men have more heart attacks than women? Keeping one’s feelings buried is not a healthy activity!

So Dads teach the little boys “to be a man” to take pain, not cry, stifle fear, and push down compassionate feelings. Fathers often keep their emotions toward their son and family buried. Their goal, of course is to teach their sons to be strong, risk-taking, self-reliant, and assertive. When knocked down, a boy is not to come up with tears but with a fistful of dirt. Fathers overprotect daughters and neglect sons emotionally. Dr. Linden stated that **girls develop with emotional empathy and boys with action empathy**. Thus, when a challenge crops up, girls see a difficulty to be shared, and boys see a problem to be solved. Is this not very interesting?!

Faced with the necessity to appear competent, modern men do not take care of themselves. We who study Adlerian Psychology adhere to the mantra: **Have the courage to be imperfect** Whether you are a man or a woman, this cheer gives hope to go for the goal even if we cannot do everything perfectly. The Big Impossible/Marlboro man is not useful any more. Admitting that a body is not perfect is not a sign of weakness and vulnerability but FLEXIBILITY.

In a typically positive vein, Dr. Linden, led us toward a solution for all of us, for we women take much of the responsibility for supporting the Big Impossible stereotypical male. He cited Ronald Levant (1996) who had us take a look at **male virtues**:

1. Willingness to sacrifice personal needs and desires to provide for dependents.
2. Willingness to withstand hardship and pain to protect loved ones.
3. Willingness to take on and solve others' problems
4. Expressing love by doing things for others
5. Demonstrating integrity, steadfastness and loyalty to commitments

6. Determination to stick with a difficult problem until it is solved
7. Ability to think logically, take risks and stay calm in the face of danger.

Studies cited include these:

1. Dreikurs R. (1971/1983) Social Equality: The Challenge of Today.
2. Haviland, J. & Malatesta, C. (1981) Gender and Non Verbal Behavior.
3. Kindlon, D. & Thompson, M. (1993) Raising Cain.
4. Levant, R. (1996) Masculinity Reconstructed: Changing the Rules of Manhood-at Work, In Relationships, and in Family Life.

By bringing to our class the research he had done over the years and by demonstrating how to live a compassionate and caring life in spite of the influences of culture, Dr. Bill Linden led us to new awareness of what is useful in terms of men/women relationships.