

Robinsons on Parallel Men's Issues

Why are men like that? Why are women like that? How in the world do they ever get along? What issues do men face? How have they been reared? How did they relate to their mothers? Their fathers? Did they have masculine role models? Did they have any role models? George William Linden, Professor Emeritus in Philosophy and Adlerian Psychology at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville taught us GENDER AND MEN'S ISSUES at the International Adlerian Summer School (ICASSI) in Switzerland in the summer of 2011.

Wisdom gleaned from his class of Romanians and North Americans, men and women, are the source for this article. Bill Linden is a published author who shared his research and publications during the course. As a philosopher, Bill knew some Greek and shared a most interesting concept with us, ALEXITHYMIA. Alexithymia is the inability to get in touch with, identify, and express emotions.

He used this concept to describe the American male, including a denial of feelings, emotionally inexpressive, and a "numbing down of the American male." The male has been trained to not feel what he feels. It is easy to understand why many American males become alienated from others and even themselves. Often men cannot bond with males beyond boyhood, cannot relate to women well, cannot share feelings with others and may very well lead an emotionally lonely life.

"How did men come to be this way?" Bill asked. Not because of excessive testosterone, or a single aggressive gene, or an inherited defect. The most likely explanation is that he learns his masculine role through socialization. A little boy learns how it is "to be a man" from his parents, his siblings, and eventually his peer group. He learns to suppress positive emotions and transfer all of his emotions into the only accepted "male" emotion: ANGER. R. F. Levant and colleagues published these traditional norms of males raised in the post-war era in **The Journal of Mental Health Counseling** in 1992:

1. avoiding all things feminine
2. restrictive emotionality
3. strength and aggression
4. self-reliance
5. pursuit of achievement and status
6. non-relational attitude toward sex (meaning sex disconnected from intimacy)
7. fear and hatred of homosexual (homophobia)

These male traits were valuable during the building of the Panama Canal, two World Wars and the Great Depression. Being self reliant and stoic were socially and practically useful during that era. Now, however, we have shifted to a technological society, with industrial downsizing and the rise of women's equality, these male traits are useless and dysfunctional! Wow! The sense of community and belonging to the team, traits that women have been encouraged to cultivate are more valuable than total self-reliance.

“Treating the Modern Male,” Bill’s article from which these ideas were drawn started out with this description: “He is powerful and solitary. He develops an outer coat of massive armor and believes himself to be invulnerable to the assault of predators of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. He is not merely asocial, he is often anti-social and appears to wander with a perpetual chip on his shoulder. He has a very short fuse, and when he senses any difficulty, he responds with anger and hostility. He charges forth aggressively with no concern for the consequences. He is extremely shortsighted. Thus, he can focus on short-term goals, but long-range goals are beyond him. His life expectancy is several years shorter than his female counterpart. He appears to be devoid of tenderness or conjunctive emotions, and the female, to his near-sighted eyes, exists for only one purpose: sex. He does not trust other males and is a neglectful father.” What male beast has Bill Linden described? If you thought RHINOCEROS, you are correct. If you thought the “STEREOTYPICAL AMERICAN MALE, you are also right.

Such food for thought! Such meat to chew on! The entire class was an education to both men and women; we all learned and were challenged by the traditional roles imposed on men and women. We in the world of men and women and their relationships have a way to go. O, but what a joyful journey~