



Manology course prescribes community among males

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BY VANCOUVER COURIER JANUARY 15, 2010

It's been 11 years since feminist author Susan Faludi wrote *Stiffed*, her lament to rudderless males in postindustrial times. The '90s wave of gender identity work for men, from drumming circles to Robert Bly's muscular verse, may now seem as dated as the grunge scene. Yet confusion over gender roles seems greater than ever. Male parental figures are often portrayed in television sitcoms and dramas as either well-meaning dolts or outright buffoons. Cable television outlets like Spike offer a violent menu of military bling and stuff "blowing up real good." And in the spirit of the film *Fight Club*, mixed martial arts have gone from the status of human cockfights to big-money professional sports.

For men today, the options are few, says Vancouver facilitator David Hatfield. There are courses in anger management for fuming wage slaves, or custody advocacy for divorced men--and tranquilization through pop culture, alcohol, and pharmaceutical drugs for the rest. As for men's retreats, they are often "too expensive, away from home, and just offer a one-time experience to draw from," says Hatfield. What Vancouver needs, he insists, is a brick and mortar Vancouver Men's Centre with "males specific health care," as there are in other parts of the world, along with male studies, which don't yet really exist.

Hatfield is not talking about reifying or endorsing existing models of masculinity, but reexamining them for a changing world. "For example, we know all about men working too much and not seeking help. I'm past talking about this as an academic thing. That's common knowledge. We know this but we don't act like we know this. I'm trying to act like I know and build a new piece of social service/educational

infrastructure that goes after this stuff head on, and builds community around it."

In his latest effort for engaging local men, that's both informative and community-minded, Hatfield has initiated a drop-in course called "Manology" at the Vancouver Roundhouse, with sessions led by a changing round of facilitators.

"In all the work I've done, the underlying story that I hear regardless of a man's level of self-awareness is one of wrestling with the script of masculinity, the role expectations. That's where we find a lot of joy, groundedness, sense of self--and lots of confusion, restriction and frustrations. It's not good or bad exclusively. It's about navigating it. In identifying this script, men speak about it with much more clarity."

A lot of men are part of communities, through work, faith, family, friendships or sports. But Hatfield doesn't see that there's a sense of community here among men. "That's what I want to see. I've experienced it in men's circles in New Zealand. It was great to see a thriving men's network with thousands of men involved."

It doesn't stop with men's work, he believes. The level of complexity of food security, globalization, and climate change is so vast that communities will have to be strong and cohesive to deal with it. And that's never going to happen if the men are isolated, he adds. "This isn't just about men getting their act together and unlearning some crap we been through and doing some healing work...There's bigger trouble, and we need to be ready, we need to be engaged. It means we're available, we're conflict effective, we've freed ourselves from some of the illusions we've been told about what it is to be male. So we can react to the chaos that's already here and to what's coming."

The authoritarian male scripts of the past are now resurgent, Hatfield notes. Violence has now become a standardized tool to employ in conflict situations, from school hallways to foreign lands. "Beyond peace rhetoric, the message is clear that any 'justifiable' violence is OK. Clearly, new ideas, vision and leadership are needed."

Hatfield feels the time is now for a new approach. "The 21st century masculinity we're exploring and creating at Manology is moving beyond the narrowness, rigidity and isolation of the male role scripts we were given. We're having a great time dropping baggage and connecting."

To check out the ongoing course at the Roundhouse, go to: <http://masculinity21st.wordpress.com>

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