

ACHILLES HEEL AND THE ANTI-SEXIST MEN'S MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT *An historical and personal account of the 1970s–80s UK anti-sexist men's movement and the journal Achilles Heel, together with an analysis of the movement's eventual end, using the theoretical concept of the 'Patripsych'.*

Key words: men's movement, anti-sexism, *Achilles Heel*, Patripsych

One of the prime instances of psychology and politics coming together must be the anti-sexist men's movement. It arose as a positive response to the critique of masculinity within feminism (Segal, 1990).

It was not until the early 1970s that men in England really became aware of feminism. It was an uncomfortable dawn. Instead of the old 'sex war' with its predictable mutual rows and standoffs, the new feminist critique was saying that men were a problem just by being men in a patriarchal culture. This was a much more global vision and it reduced men to a special subgroup, rather than just being the massive majority they were used to. Men's responses to this critique were varied but Clatterbaugh (1986) identified six main versions: the conservative; the profeminist; the men's rights; the spiritual; the socialist; and the group-specific (gay men, black men and so forth).

The radical men's magazine *Achilles Heel* came from the profeminist camp. The first thing to happen in the profeminist camp was that men's groups, paralleling the women's consciousness-raising groups, started to form.

The men's group I first went to in 1972 was very strong on theory. We all knew the theory of feminism as it had emerged up to that point. We had read our Friedan and our Greer, our de Beauvoir and our Firestone, our Maccoby and our Bern, our Figs and our Hacker, our Koedt and our Millett, our Mitchell and our Morgan, our Roszak and our Weisstein. We were enthusiastic about the theory; I had myself just written a chapter on sex differences for a book on social psychology (Rowan, 1973).

But of course all this theory was written by women, from a woman's standpoint, with women's interests in mind. It was challenging rather than helpful. We felt stimulated rather than satisfied. And the way the group had started did not help. Basically it had come from women – in my case my wife – saying to us something like this:

It is our belief that if men want to raise their own consciousnesses, then they should form their own groups and organize themselves – women have been trying for centuries to educate men to the need for a more equal society and are always having to put their energy into men's needs and wants . . . If the men . . . are so keen on being

educated then they should do some thinking themselves instead of sponging off women's output and strength . . . [They should] do something on their own, using their own time and energy. (Reply to a letter in a women's centre newsletter, 1985)

This is of course a perfectly legitimate message, but it makes for an uneasy start. It means that in such a men's group there is a feeling of absent women peering over one's shoulder. And these absent women knowing more, feeling more, sensing more, intuiting more, of what the whole thing was about. As if we were there to catch up.

In June 1973 there was a Men Against Sexism conference in London. It was pretty small and rather intellectual, having been organized mainly by politicians. But it was a start in bringing together the scattered groups and getting more of a feeling of being some kind of a movement. It led to the production of a magazine called *Brothers*, which contained a powerful and tense article by Keith Paton called 'Crisis and renewal', later reprinted in *Self and Society*. Keith was from an early date one of the most insightful and articulate men in the movement, pushing himself further and further all the time into the forbidden and painful areas that most people avoided.

For example, in this early publication Keith was talking already about 'the 60/40 game'. This is where a man living with a feminist admits that she is most often right about feminist issues, particularly when she confronts him on his own actions. He allows as how she has more insight, more feeling, more motive in such things. But in his head this gets translated into a kind of proportion or percentage. She can't be right all the time – no one can be right all the time. So maybe she's right 90% of the time, or 80%, or 70%, or 60%. Of course, this means that every issue still has to be argued

and fought out, because this might be one of the – admittedly minority – cases where he is right.

And all the other cases the same (funnily enough) so you don't give an inch. The 60/40 game is a heap of *shit*. You know it but you won't *break*. You insist on fragmenting your POWER, your BLOODY MINDEDNESS, into a hundred little issues – on each of which (once safely parcelled out) *you* are prepared to argue rationally, it's just that she gets so worked up. (Paton, 1974)

This rings as true today as it did then. And this is the sort of issue that kept on emerging in the men's groups. No wonder they were uncomfortable places to be, and no wonder that they kept on breaking down into small groups of shaken men huddling together for warmth.

In October 1973 a second issue of the magazine came out, this time under the title *Men Against Sexism*, and it seemed clear that more groups were forming and the movement growing. In November, a men's conference was held in Birmingham, and was again encouraging and productive. April 1974 saw a Leeds conference on men against sexism, and about the same time came out the third and very interesting issue of the magazine, this time under the title *Brothers Against Sexism*.

It was in 1974 that two contradictory things happened, one positive and the other negative, which were to have profound consequences for the still young network of men's groups.

The positive one was that the growth movement started to get closer to the women's liberation movement. In January 1974 the Association for Humanistic Psychology ran a one-day workshop on sexual energy and gender identity, which I co-led with Maureen Forrester, using techniques I had picked up from Ed Elkin and

others. (Again the USA was ahead of us in these matters: in February 1973 there had been an article for men in *Ms* magazine by Warren Farrell, entitled 'Guidelines for consciousness-raising'.) In May there was a ground-breaking meeting put on by Quaesitor (the biggest growth centre in Europe at the time) aimed at bringing together therapy and politics. It took place at the Collegiate Theatre in London, and about 350 people attended. It was addressed by Jerry Rubin, who at that time was still political, and also very much interested in gestalt therapy; Stella Resnick, a gestalt therapist very close to him; Rick Carlson, a radical lawyer; Denny Yuson, who at that time was a group leader specializing in Synanon-influenced encounter marathons; and Brian Dempsey, a young group leader working with disadvantaged youth.

Some very moving speeches were made, both from the platform and the floor, and one of these latter, by Vic Seidler, a lecturer at Goldsmiths College, suggested that a group be formed to meet regularly on questions of therapy and politics. This did, in fact, happen and a motley assortment of people started meeting, at first calling themselves the Radical Therapy Group. Over a period of some months this group got smaller, tougher and more sure of what it was doing, and by the following year was known as Red Therapy. It focused on functioning as a leaderless therapy group for people involved in political struggles, although it was also interested in creating a political critique of the whole area of therapy, personal growth, counselling and the like. The biggest single contingent consisted of members of a small party based in Liverpool and called Big Flame, which later threw them out for being too interested in sexual politics and personal issues. Over the years 1974–7 Red Therapy flourished and

eventually produced a fat pamphlet about what we had discovered. Later still, two of the women in the group published a book (Ernst and Goodison, 1981) in which many of the lessons were spelled out. When the group broke up, some of the women joined the Women's Therapy Centre, and some of the men (including Vic Seidler) started the magazine *Achilles Heel* for anti-sexist men. One of the key ideas that emerged from this group was that of 'unconsciousness raising', and we shall come back to that soon.

All through 1974 the men's movement was growing, and five issues of a news sheet were produced in London, giving details of new groups being formed. A lively leaflet was produced by the men's group I was in at the time, and we gave this out at the Windsor Free Festival that year. It felt as though real headway was being made. But then in November disaster struck.

Up until that time, the groups had all been quite clearly heterosexual in orientation, because of the kind of origins I have been outlining. Gay men were very much in a minority, some groups having one and other groups none. On the whole, gay men tended to be far ahead of straight men in their understanding of patriarchy because of feeling some of the raw lash of patriarchal prejudice themselves. In a men's group they tended to have little to learn, and much to teach.

But in the big conference in London in November 1974 a group of gay men made its presence felt very powerfully. It complained of homophobic prejudice and lack of understanding in the conference itself, and denounced the straight men for being shifty and hypocritical about their position. It exposed all the most embarrassing features of the men's movement, along the lines of the following indictment, taken

from an anonymous article in *Brothers Against Sexism*:

Straight men derive privileges from being straight men as such. To be straight is to continue to derive those privileges irrespective of what one wills . . . You are trying to make heterosexual relations work. Why? For the sake of 'your women'? I doubt it. Surely for yourselves *because you don't want to make it with men*. Of course men won't turn you on if you don't *try* – you'll never make the transition in the abstract: you have to meet them, get close to them, start touching them, kiss each other hello and goodbye; it may take you weeks to get an erection with a man . . . But do you want to try? We fancy what is good for our egos; we're turned on by the ego boost, off by the threat. You may *like other men but you wouldn't depend on them for emotional support . . . you like what women have to offer*, which is the direct expression of their oppression; focus upon your ego-needs. . . . You claim to want to struggle against your own sexism and yet you refuse to make *central* and *primary* and *before everything else*, the task of breaking with *gender-roles*. You want to stop being men, but without stopping being men . . . If men can learn to relate to each other equally, really equally, then the problem of relating to women will be half solved; we'd be ready to relate to them properly (the other half is their responsibility). If, on the other hand, you are not prepared to abolish your gender role, then you are merely playing – devising more and more subtle ways of 'treating your women right' – they're still *women*, they're still *yours* – and you're still *men*. . . . ADMIT TO YOURSELVES that gay men make you freak and run for reassurance to your women and to your own particular world of straight men. Admit that you freak and then we, together, can deal with it . . . There are a thousand ways to deceive yourself. But in the end the only way forward is to *really* open yourself up to the mirror image of yourself and experience through another, *yourself as a man* (you are a male remember) – and build something from the ruins of your male ego that will result.

Reading this is one thing – easy to avoid its message in any one of a hundred ways – but being faced by a group of men confronting you with it on the spot is different and much

more scary. I have quoted it at length because the experience of this conference virtually shattered the men's movement for three years. The guilt was just too much to bear.

True, there was a sexuality conference in Brighton in January 1975, and a big meeting in London in the same month. And in February of that year the most ambitious workshop yet put on by the growth movement took place, with straight men, straight women, gay men and lesbians all in the same group, and four facilitators, of whom I was one. But in Spring 1975 the last issue of the magazine came out, under the title *The Pig's Last Grunt*, expressing the complete demoralization that most of us felt.

There were some men who kept the flame alight, however. A group of men started the East London Men's Centre in Redman Road, and began to write material that later became the basis for the magazine *Achilles Heel*. These men, some of whom were in the Red Therapy group already mentioned, did not lose heart and hung on and kept the faith, so to speak.

Of course it is possible to think up all sorts of good answers to the position put forward by the gay men, but the discomfort remains. It was even made worse by some of the women, who pointed out that gay men were still often very masculine:

Masculinity is not just heterosexuality. It is power-seeking, it is being closed-up, competitive, drab, insensitive, interested in things and goals rather than people and processes. Most male homosexuals are 90% masculine in their general behaviour. (Anonymous)

So if being straight is being oppressive, and being gay is still being oppressive, what place is there for a man at all? Some men at this time took this all the way. John Stoltenberg wrote an essay in 1974, reprinted in Snodgrass (1977, 36), entitled

‘Refusing to be a man’, in which he referred to himself as not heterosexual, not homosexual and not bisexual: ‘I intend to live as a moral androgyne. I am genitally male, but I endeavour with my heart to rid my life of male sexual behaviour programming.’

Some men went further down this line and wrote ‘The Effemist Manifesto’ (again in Snodgrass, 1977) in which they said that their purpose was to change themselves from non-masculinists to anti-masculinists, using effeminism as the means.

But even this was not acceptable to the feminists they were supposed to be supporting. As two of them said (also in Snodgrass, 1977):

As you yourself point out, ‘all men are the enemies’ (and one of us, Karla, was one of the Redstockings who formulated that theory), so in the end you are as much of an enemy as the rest. All the male privileges you so eagerly give up are immediately handed back to you by the male power structure. (Jay and Rook, 1977, 122)

No wonder that the men’s movement crumbled, when the reception by women of even its most heroic and extreme efforts was as negative as this.

So instead of the continued growth of men’s groups, what happened was an increasing integration of sexual politics with ordinary political activity. This particularly happened in Big Flame and IMG (International Marxist Group), but also in various libertarian groups not affiliated to any one organization. Some of the IMG men brought out a pamphlet called *Sexism, Sexuality and Class Struggle* halfway through 1975. It said things like this:

It is glaringly obvious how great a reactionary force sexism is both within the revolutionary class and within revolutionary organizations. We cannot afford to willingly hold back the

development of revolutionary class consciousness because we are not prepared to challenge the motor force of sexism within ourselves.

This was fine, a good extension of awareness of the problem, but it offered no new solutions.

One of the most interesting attempts to link sexual politics with ordinary politics came from a new organization called Alternative Socialism, which had a close link with the long established magazine *Peace News*, and produced a pamphlet mainly written by Keith Paton. There was a big meeting in York in 1975, and two big meetings in August 1976, one in London and one at Laurieston Hall. A newsletter was started about that time.

Alternative Socialism had the basic idea of putting together three things – the struggle against patriarchy, the struggle against capitalism and the new thinking on ecology and alternative technologies. It introduced new concepts such as Malemployment, and pointed out that no matter how many people were unemployed, far more people were malemployed – working on projects which are not socially beneficial. But most of all it emphasized the *centrality* of the struggle against patriarchy. It pointed out that:

All of us have been deeply damaged by sexism in different ways, men even more so in some ways since they still imagine they are superior and that they stand to lose from respecting women’s autonomy, learning from them and re-owning the repressed sides of our personalities . . . Men need to own and come to terms with all sorts of irrational fears and hatreds against gay people, women and their bodies, menstruation, etc.

Alternative Socialism had more insight into patriarchy than any male-inclusive political grouping before or since. But it was fatally flawed by being a mixed movement led by men. Even though Keith

Paton, who later changed his name to Motherson, was far ahead of most men in his own anti-patriarchal development, he was still a man. And this produced tensions, which led to the destruction of Alternative Socialism within quite a short period. Some of the Alternative Socialism women wrote an important pamphlet called *Is it Worthwhile Working in a Mixed Group?* (Long and Coghill, 1977) to which the answer was basically *no*. One ray of hope was held out – that in a mixed group working on patriarchal issues both the men and the women need their own separate single-sex support group. Then it may work. But of course this is quite hard to arrange.

Another reason for the demise of Alternative Socialism may have been the fact that, like many similar groups, it had a lot of hangups and reservations about any kind of structure or planning. This made it impossible to arrive at any very strong identity or centre. I am not sure about this: it seems to me now that the time was not right for it, because the narrowness and negativity of the 1970s was already drawing in. In any case, the problems of Alternative Socialism are not quite the same as the problems of men's groups.

There is a curious difference between a men's group and a women's group in this context. I have done a lot of investigation of this, and have found consistently that women's consciousness-raising groups are basically rather warm places, with a lot of lightness and joking and positive energy under the sadness and oppression; while men's groups are basically rather sour and dour and low-energy places, with a lot of depression under the positive aims. I wrote a satirical piece about this, entitled 'Minzies and Frongs', which was incorporated into my first book about men (1987), now sadly out of print.

In 1978 there was a resurgence of the

men's movement. A conference took place in London, attended by about 150 men, which was very encouraging on the whole. It saw the publication of a new magazine called *Achilles Heel*, produced by the same collective which had brought out Paul Morrison's moving book of poems entitled *Pregnant Fatherhood* the year before. In the summer there was a men's camp, and in Manchester a series of meetings on men's politics. In London a new men's centre was started in Islington.

In April 1979, after a disconcerting change of date, there was a national conference – really the first one ever – and about 300 men attended. This was the biggest turnout yet, and the event was successful, and the heart began to come back into the movement. Another issue of *Achilles Heel* came out just in time for the conference, and there was a lot of good feeling around. The pamphlet *Red Therapy* was talked about a lot at this conference, because it seemed to show how men's groups fitted in to the whole picture of the relationship between politics and therapy.

In 1980 there was another big conference, this time in Bristol, and here there was a lot of talk about what came to be known as the 10 commitments. These were drawn up by a group of men including Keith Motherson, who felt that the men's movement was too vague about its relationship to women and the women's movement. They wanted men to commit themselves to some definite undertaking to support feminist ideas and practice, spelt out in some detail (see Box 1).

At the Bristol conference the men seemed to feel that this set of commitments was too pushy and premature. There is a definite whiff about it of the guilt-inducing 1974 argument, because it seemed that hardly any men were even doing the first item on the list, never mind any of the

Box 1 – notes and riders towards 10 commitments

1 *Commitment to the group* – men against sexism politics recognized as important, not a hobby or poor-relation political commitment – gripfulness – thought between meetings – consideration for our brothers expressed in punctuality, regularity, consistency, giving reasons for non-attendance or leaving – holding together through difficult patches – switchboarding and introducing new members well – being able to count on each other to do what they say they’ll do between meetings.

2 *Consciousness-raising done rigorously* – intimacy and risk – based on personal experience and gut feelings (therapy and bodywork necessary often) – generalizing from shared experience – cumulation of insights into male conditioning, patriarchal culture – CR as central and continuing, not just parallel to or prior to action, but linked to it and nourished by it.

3 *Support for the women’s liberation movement* – creches, food preparation, duplicating, fundraising where requested – sharing of money – support for campaigns, protests – hassling to communicate with men referred to us by anti-rape groups – not letting put-downs of women pass in everyday life without a struggle, e.g. with men at work, on the street, in pubs.

4 *Support for gay liberation* and our self-liberation as gay – support for gay struggles against heterosexist oppression – wearing gay badge – acknowledging exclusive heterosexuality as a deep hangup imposed by patriarchal society, not ‘biologically given’ – social

links with the gay community.

5 *Sharing childcare* – both in the routines of our lives and in connection with men’s events, camps, outings, etc. – availability for babysitting – links with Women’s Aid houses – becoming ‘goddessfathers’ to children of friends – raising issues about respect for children and childcare in other contexts, events.

6 *Learning from gay and feminist culture* – reading literature, studying theory together, films/theatre/art/music/dance – in turn contributing to a gynandrous, feminist-identified people’s culture from our own specific experience as men.

7 *Action on our own behalf* – devised independently but, where necessary, ‘cleared’ with women’s or gay movement – questioning publicly the value of patriarchal assumptions and instructions concerning being men – men and work campaigns for part-time, flexi-time, shared work and paternity leave – men and medical matters action, etc.

8 *Propaganda and outreach programmes* (linked to actions) to reach specific groups of men, especially ones who haven’t heard of Men Against Sexism and whose experience we are in need of to complement our own – use of media – making our own pamphlets, leaflets, films, plays, etc. – not being a closed ‘in-group’.

9 *Link-ups with other Men Against Sexism groups* locally, regionally, nationally, through special interest groups, etc. – participating in and dialogue with more general men’s groups – links where welcome with women’s and gay movements, readiness to support their leads in wider political culture.

10 *Renunciation of violence* (physical,

(contd)

Box 1 (contd)

emotional and verbal) towards women and oppressed people, children, etc. – cultivation of a nonviolent spirit in negotiation of differences with women, gay people and brothers in Men Against Sexism groups – not interrupt-

ing, listening, not caricaturing opposing arguments deliberately, etc. – not intimidating people with displays of anger when crossed – asking forgiveness when we violate others and where relevant making restitution.

others. It was as if the list of 'shoulds' induced apathy rather than enthusiasm, as nagging usually does. If the 'commitments' had been pushed through at the conference, as perhaps they might have been, another collapse of the movement might have been predicted. But rescue came in the shape of an alternative statement, more in tune with

the current mood, drawn up by Paul Morrison (later published in several places), which met with almost unanimous approval from the assembly. It seems worthwhile to give it in full here, because it is the nearest thing to a manifesto that has come out of the struggle to define a male anti-sexism (see Box 2).

Box 2 – a minimum definition of the anti-sexist men's movement

This conference of men places itself unequivocally in support of the women's and gay movements in the struggle against sexism. We realize that men's power in our society means that we are not an equivalent or 'parallel' movement. We are certainly not a competitive one.

Yet we have discovered that the power we have over women and other men also cripples and distorts our own lives. Learning how to give up this control and grow out of our masculine straitjackets is a frightening but very positive process.

We are traditionally expected to be unemotional, tough, aggressive, individualistic and not to admit weakness. Yet we all contain the opposite qualities – gentleness, co-operativeness, lovingness, receptiveness, which we can reclaim and allow.

The main vehicle for our personal

changes has been men's groups, in which we can look at our negative patterns of relating to women and other men.

Becoming close to and drawing support from other men reduces the exclusive emotional burden that men have traditionally placed upon women. Recently some men have found therapy and co-counselling valuable tools in helping to resolve deep patterns and oppressive blocks in themselves.

We want to change our relationships with children, to take our full and equal share of responsibility for childcare. We have been discovering the positive benefits of being close to and learning from children. This means looking to change patterns of work and pay that are dominant in our society, and confronting eventually the huge gulf between the workplace and domestic labour and life.

The main public expression so far of our support for the women's liberation movement has been in helping to organize

(contd)

Box 2 (contd.)

creches for women's events, and in attending mixed demonstrations. We would like to find other ways of supporting women's movement campaigns and demands, when invited, and in developing the particular contribution we can make as men – for example, in confronting rape and male violence, and in support of a woman's right to choose, equal pay, adequate nursery provision, and so forth.

The many of us who are heterosexual are committed to exploring our prejudices against gay men and lesbians, and our fear of our own gay feelings. We would like to find ways of linking up with and supporting the gay liberation movement and specific gay movement campaigns.

We have been developing ways of reaching out to other men, and confronting the sexism that we meet in other men in our lives and workplaces. We want to create a positive anti-sexist culture that men can draw support from in their changes.

We want to develop campaigns in our own interest as anti-sexist men – against media stereotypes of men, around unem-

ployment, men's health, for well-paid part-time work, for job-sharing, paternity leave, etc.

Patriarchal culture has become synonymous with the 'conquering' of the natural environment. We want to live in harmony with the natural world, including our own bodies, and to redirect our skills and technologies in such directions as to make this harmony possible, eliminating poverty and enabling each individual to live to her or his fullest potential.

We realize that in our society sexism is inextricably linked with class and racial oppression, and with imperialism. We are working towards a society free of all these.

The anti-sexist men's movement is small in number, and it is young. We are only now beginning to feel confident to move out of relative isolation. We need to recognize our limitations, *as well as our very real strengths*.

In coming to take collective political initiatives, we don't want to create new hierarchies of leaders and led.

It can be seen that the 'minimum self-definition' and the '10 commitments' are not far apart, and what they have in common is the heartland of the men's movement. They both see the necessity of therapy as a part of the process, for example. It seemed that at last we had a clear statement of identity and a better sense of purpose to go with it. And for a while it did seem as if this worked. Some of the strongest and best issues of *Achilles Heel* began to come out, now concentrating on one theme per issue – No. 4 on men and work, No. 5 on masculinity and violence and Nos. 6/7 on sexuality. Some good

issues of the *Anti-Sexist Newsletter* came out at the same time. But quite soon it became obvious that all was not well. Newsletters came out more haltingly, no more big conferences were held (there was a small one in Manchester and another small one in London) and the intervals between one issue of *Achilles Heel* and another also became longer. The reasons for this became clearer in the Summer of 1983, when the *Newsletter* printed seventeen pages on accountability. This magic word 'accountability' turned out to be the commitments writ large, and with much stronger undertones. The argument was

basically a simple one, and went as follows:

Despite our differences we are united in our support of those women who argue that men against sexism should be accountable to women and the Women's Liberation Movement, and we are concerned to explore ways of putting this commitment into practice. We want to challenge the assumption that men are anti-sexist just because we call ourselves anti-sexist. We want to see the development of a genuine anti-sexist practice among men which is clear and constructive in response to women's demands. And we want to see men begin to give up the power and privilege we gain at women's expense, and to challenge the power and privileges of other men. (Anti-Sexist Newsletter, 1983)

This is the guilt-provoking attack that was so effective 9 years before. Only now the whole thing is dressed up in a much more sophisticated outfit. The authors take up the question of guilt, saying that 'Guilt is largely a place of total inaction. It sucks in energy and usually hangs on to the status quo like grim death. However for me there is a positive place for guilt in that it can cut through complacency.' They also take up the question of therapy:

It is not the concept of therapy, massage or male support I am criticising – indeed I think they can be very effective ways of us becoming clearer about our feelings and motivations. What I am critical of is the frequent complete absence of how they relate to changing the nature of male power in us, in other men and in male dominated institutions. I suspect that they often encourage the further development of male bonding between sensitive men and as a result support male power and are not anti-sexist. (Anti-Sexist Newsletter, 1983)

But for all the appearance of taking difficulties into account, and doing justice to possible objections, the message is the same in the end:

We are often too afraid to confront, to challenge and to criticise other men for fear of disrupting 'the brotherhood' and of being labelled competi-

tive, heavy, a politico, or simply divisive. And when we do challenge this 'brotherhood' it is seen by other men as a threat to the creation of trust and honesty among men, or a form of guilt-tripping. I firmly believe that this is a defensive reaction on the part of men who wish to avoid criticism and, ultimately, to avoid women's demands on men to take responsibility for our behaviour. And this is why 'anti-sexist' men have seldom *publicly* criticised other men about their misogyny, or challenged the institutions of male supremacy and violence. (Anti-Sexist Newsletter, 1983)

The point is that, whatever the truth of this position, and whatever its acceptability to feminist women, it simply paralyses men. They are not energized and made more potent in their anti-sexism by this kind of message.

And I think the reason for this is that it secretly implies a total repudiation of all that is masculine or male. Indeed, the repudiation is not even that secret: one of the quotes in boxes that decorate this issue of the newsletter is from our old friend John Stoltenberg, who we met earlier. It says:

To take seriously in one's 'consciousness' the fact of sexist injustice would have to mean for men, as it already does for many women, a *total repudiation of masculinity*. All 'Men's Liberation' which in form and content is masculinity-*confirming*, is thus an escalation and permutation of masculinist aggression. (Stoltenberg, 1977a, 80)

Now this really says that there is no place for a man, no place for a man at all, in a feminist world. But the magazine *Achilles Heel* was not to be eliminated so easily. Its basic message was that men and feminism needed one another. There had to be a way of living in the same world for ever.

ACHILLES HEEL

One of the major achievements of the anti-sexist men's movement was the production over 20 years of the magazine *Achilles*

Heel. So let us see what the politics and the psychology of this was.

Between the years 1974–8 there flourished a group called Red Therapy. It focused on functioning as a leaderless therapy group for people involved in political struggles, and was also interested in developing a critique of the whole area of therapy, counselling, personal growth and the like as already stated.

When the group finally came to an end, some of the women joined the Women's Therapy Centre, and some of the men started the magazine *Achilles Heel*. This continued until the year 2000.

Achilles Heel was produced by a collective of men firstly in London, then in Sheffield and then back in London again. It aimed to challenge traditional forms of masculinity and male power, and support the creation of alternative social structures and personal ways of being. Some of this is really very simple and human:

It's been five years since I recorded. I wanted to give Sean five years of being there all the time. There's a price to pay for giving attention to children. If I can't deal with a child, I can't deal with anything. No matter what artistic gains I may get, or how many gold records, if I can't make a success out of the relationship with people I supposedly love, then anything else is bullshit. (John Lennon, TV interview)

This is not the whole story by any means, but it is an important part of it. The upsurge of interest in issues around masculinity has been very noticeable in the last few years. However, very little of it is critical in any political way. The 'new man', seen by *Achilles Heel* right from the start as media hype, has given way to the 'new lad', without much real change in attitudes or behaviour.

Books and articles on 'the problem of men' abound, some of them very good, especially when they restrict themselves to

health or some other narrowly delimited area. The picture that emerges is more complex than ever before. I have myself contributed to this discussion (Rowan, 1997). Men do need to learn to be aware of and express their feelings more, rather than denying the uncomfortable ones. On the other hand, some men's preoccupation with emotions translates all too readily into 'I want my emotional needs met but I'm not prepared to reciprocate.'

Similarly, men need the space to redefine ourselves, to uncouple misogyny and masculinity. Men basically still need to understand and question and dismantle the excessive and aggressive power we wield. The newly-green-affluent-consumerism doesn't exactly challenge the fundamental inequalities of our society.

The magazine began in 1978, and the first few issues were very varied in content, and appeared at irregular intervals. The circulation gradually built up to about 500, and another 500 were sold at meetings and conferences. The sixth issue was to be on sexuality, and it proved to be very demanding in terms of time, effort and emotional commitment. In the end it was decided to issue Nos 6 and 7 as a bumper double issue on sexuality.

Then came a disastrous interlude. Ken Livingstone had taken over at the GLC and it seemed as though there was a lot of support for political initiatives such as a radical men's magazine. We drew up a very convincing proposal and submitted it through the right channels, and waited for the support to come through. We had several discussions as to how we could best spend the money. But time went by and nothing happened. News trickled through that it had gone to the women's committee, who had rejected it because it was not about or by women. It then went to the community committee, who had rejected it

because it was national and not community based. None of the other committees came even close to choosing it. But of course all this was a very slow process, and in fact it was hard to get any news at all. Four years went by, and all the people who had been involved up to that point went their ways and got on with other things.

At the end of that time, four of us decided that we would start again without GLC funding, and just get on with it on the original basis. We produced No. 8, entitled 'Re-Emergence', and it once again became known as a going concern. After a few issues, a group in Sheffield agreed to take it over, and a new day dawned. Unfortunately, the circulation was now down to about 350, the meetings and conferences of the early years were not happening any more, so only about another 50 copies of each issue were sold. After a few issues, the magazine came back to London again.

Achilles Heel got much better in the last few issues, with a more professional appearance, better layout and style, and seriously stimulating content. They featured articles by Peter Baker, Steve Banks, Richard Collier, Mick Cooper, Jeff Hearn, David Jackson, Kieron Jecchinis, Michael Meade, Richard Olivier, Joelle d'Oraison, John Rowan, Andrew Samuels, Vic Seidler, Derek Shiel, Andrew Stephenson, John Wadmore and Paul Wolf-Light.

Special issues became the norm. They focused on such topics as sport, men's groups, men and women, families, fatherhood, sex, mothers, crime, rage, work, fear, power, music and dance – the whole gamut of men's activities and concerns.

The magazine aimed to interest all men (and we know a number of women read it too) who were concerned with the place of men in today's world, where we can no longer take for granted the old certainties and the old roles.

Achilles Heel was always fairly clear on its message. It was about anti-sexism. Sometimes there was a socialist tinge, sometimes an anarchist slant, sometimes an ecological message, but it never fell into any of the possible pitfalls of 'men's liberation', such as the fulminations against child assistance legislation and so forth. It was consistently about honesty and a genuine facing of the problems for men in hewing to the anti-sexist line.

Vic Seidler (1991) edited an *Achilles Heel* reader. As he says in the introduction, when people came across anti-sexist men they tended to stereotype them as somehow lacking in energy and activity:

It helped to isolate anti-sexist men as if they were to be despised or pitied for not being 'real' men. This unwittingly captured something significant, for in the denial of masculinity there was often a denial of vitality, anger and strength. It was as if the failure to engage with inherited forms of masculinity meant that men had often failed to discern what was positive and life-enhancing within this inheritance. It was only as masculinity was redefined, not through reason alone but also through an emotional exploration, that we could begin to re-evaluate different aspects of ourselves.

We rejected the Robert Bly (1990) solution of reverting to a 'deeper' masculinity, because this seemed to be based on a highly suspect manipulation of mythological and anthropological ideas to suit a new population of men who had not been through the feminist fires of the 1970s, and basically did not want to know about them.

The end came with another of those very demanding and difficult topics that we had not tackled before – the question of race and prejudice. As with the issue on sexuality, the process became very personally demanding. We recruited four black men to join the collective, and endeavoured to find common ground and common concerns. At

first it seemed as though we were succeeding, but then a curious thing happened. Instead of having a number of articles to be worried over and picked apart, as had always happened previously, no articles appeared. People would talk about articles, but no actual articles were in front of us. Then came three meetings in succession when no one turned up except the host.

It gradually dawned on us, one by one, that *Achilles Heel* was dead. One or two people talked about producing an issue on therapy, but nobody came to that meeting either.

Trying to draw the threads together on this, it seems that *Achilles Heel* experienced similar social currents to those that brought about the end of *Spare Rib*, *Wingspan* (USA), *Working With Men* (London), *Man!* (Texas), *Mentor* (Oregon), *Changing Men* (San Francisco), *Activist Men's Journal* (Seattle), *Brother to Brother* (Nevada City), and many others in many different countries.

The times seem not to be good for feminism or for the men who are inspired by it. This seems not to have been analysed very much.

THE PATRIPSYCH

In an attempt to pursue this analysis, some writers have been using the notion of the Patripsych – an internal constellation of patriarchal patterns. This is a structure inside, which corresponds to oppressive structures outside, each supporting the other. The internal structure arises out of a set of movements towards, against and away from a symbolic patriarchal figure or set of figures, and is held out of consciousness by the usual defence mechanisms (Horney, 1968), this time in the cultural unconscious. The tendency for men is to have unconscious *against* patterns, with idealized glorified images of aggressive

mastery; and the tendency for women is to have unconscious *towards* patterns, with the glorification of morbid dependency as love, motherhood, and so forth; while the tendency for both may be to have unconscious *away from* patterns, glorified as private living, religions of withdrawal, and so forth. All these unconscious patterns would then be seen as defences against messages coming from the Patripsych.

Now if we see one of the key political issues as patriarchy (or to put it more generally, dominance cultures – Eisler, 1995), and one of the key psychological issues as the Patripsych, anything we do on one level will feed into whatever we do on another. Patriarchy forms a good lead in to all the problems of domination and submission in our social system; I have spelt this out in some detail elsewhere (Rowan, 1987). And the Patripsych forms a good lead in to all the problems of internal self-oppression which affect us most inwardly. This is similar to what Hogie Wyckoff (1975) has called the Pig Parent – an internalized form of cultural oppression. Most importantly, the insights we get on one level can be applied directly to the other level.

We can do serious work on the Patripsych using the group workshop methods of psychotherapy as outlined by Hogie Wyckoff, Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison (1981) and others, and in this way can get a lot of feeling for the kind of work we are going to have to do to change patriarchy on a large scale. We shall get a much better sense of what is possible, what is important, what works and what doesn't. And as we do this, we can start to find new ways of working, which do more justice to the fact that the person within the person *is* the person behind the person. I have myself done a lot of work with men on male consciousness, which bears directly on these points (see Rowan, 1997, Chapter 13). And there is no

reason why we can't think of many new ways of working, once we have the basic insight. The whole thing opens up. As the feminist Laura Brown succinctly puts it: 'I do not see it as either a- or anti-political to attend to internal, nonconscious manifestations of oppressive phenomena' (Brown, 1992, 244)

Similarly, we can start to look at other things in the same way. We can look at situations, and see from a dialectical point of view that in order to understand the situation, we have to look at the situation behind the situation – history, class interests, alliances, power structures, economic resources, and so forth – and at the situation within the situation – interpersonal relations, norms, shared experience, attitudes, and so on – and then see that the situation behind the situation *is* the situation within the situation. But this would take us too far away from our central concerns here.

This analysis also makes it clear as to why the women's feminist movement weakened over time. It turned out that to be a feminist was harder than anyone had expected. The reason for that, if the above analysis is anywhere near right, is that the power of the Patripsych was underestimated.

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