



Best of Vancouver 2012 communities: It's raining men who are addressing men's issues

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The images are varied and disparate.

There are elderly men smiling, boys being goofballs, guys of different ethnicities.

There are open letters from children to fathers, including one that says "I love my dad even though he's mean and not around."

There's a *Maclean's* cover story: "Are we raising our boys to be underachieving men?"

There are questions like "Why do some people feel more comfortable seeing two men holding guns than holding hands?"

This was all part of a nonnarrated visual presentation that program director David Hatfield showed to 16 men of diverse ages, ethnicities, and sexual orientations, at the start of [Manology](#) at the Roundhouse Community Centre on September 10. The congenial, laid-back Hatfield opened the floor up to the attendees, who questioned, analyzed, and discussed the images they'd seen.

The course is one of the few local opportunities for men from all walks of life to gather to address male issues in a participatory, thoughtful setting. Both male and female instructors lead sessions (some of which are coed) spanning topics such as fathers, feminism, depression, and even breathing and voice work.

"The commonality is that when men show up at Manology or any kind of men's stuff," Hatfield said in an interview at the *Georgia Straight* office, "they're ready to step back a little bit from the proscription around...masculinity or male identity...and use that distance as a kind of perspective to say, 'Well, I've got some questions about this'."

Hatfield, who created Manology, has maintained a long-term interest in the underdeveloped field. He moved to Vancouver in 1986 amid the first wave of North American men's work, which he found to be simultaneously open-hearted and aggressive. "There was a lot of pressure as well, like pushing men to be accountable, and there was a kind of edge to it that I wasn't that drawn to," he said.

After returning from New Zealand where he discovered men's organizations "far more advanced than anything I know about in North America", he found men's work here ran a limited range from expensive men's retreats (which he felt were doing some good work but excluded lower-income men, weren't integrated into daily life, and were sometimes shrouded in secrecy) to things such as court-mandated anger-management courses or marriage counselling. After a few experiments, Manology

found a following and is now in its fourth year. Hatfield is also the Canadian coordinator for International Men's Day, held on November 19, which has grown from 12 participating countries in 2009 to a current 60.

Hatfield's dream is to see a Vancouver Men's Centre created, one that would house various organizations and include a health-care component.

However, a campus-based attempt became a flashpoint for gender tensions earlier this year.

When the Simon Fraser Student Society recommended \$30,000 in funding for the SFU Men's Centre in April, controversy arose. Scholars and observers expressed concerns ranging from arguments that men aren't a marginalized group to worries that this would reinforce, not challenge, traditional patriarchal privilege.

According to reports, former SFSS treasurer Keenan Midgley and former SFSS president and current university relations officer Jeff McCann (who didn't respond to an interview request by deadline) stated that the centre would serve as a peer-support-based meeting place for men to potentially discuss issues such as alcoholism, drug usage, or emotional- and mental-health concerns in an informal setting.

While examples like this are often based upon a recognition of how male-specific problems are neglected, the resistance that leads to that neglect often comes from men themselves.

John Ince knows this all too well.

In May 2010, he and his project partner Mark Brunke launched [Vancouver Men's Groups](#). The nonprofit organization assists men in creating their own groups or "teams" of about six to 12 men to promote male bonding. After four moderated sessions by Ince or Brunke, the groups continue on their own, often meeting every two weeks. The groups discuss any subjects the participants consider important, such as relationship, health, or work issues.

Ince and Brunke have been involved in men's groups for 12 and 18 years respectively. Ince, who is also a nonpractising lawyer and Art of Loving co-owner, raves about them and how they improve relationships with women.

"There's a certain magic that happens when genders are apart, and when men know that they can be understood by other men, similarly with women," he said by phone. He adds that men learn to become more egalitarian and team players rather than alpha males, and that female partners often comment on how they seem refreshed and "more male" after returning from a group session. "Most men, surveys indicate, are really intimate with women and even more condensed into one woman often, their lover. And I would experience this, how overly dependent I would become on my lover because she was my key person that I found emotional sustenance with. And I didn't have as diversified an emotional world. And when I joined a men's group...a lot of that started to change."

Unfortunately, Ince acknowledges that "the vast majority of men are uncomfortable with this whole concept."

After two years, which included advertising in publications and fielding regular inquiries from interested men, Ince and Brunke have only produced one group. Undaunted, he said he's "in it for the long haul"; they're holding the next orientation session on October 1.

Although Ince's groups have primarily consisted of straight and bisexual men (all sexual orientations are welcome), both he and Hatfield know what they're up against: homophobia.

Homophobia doesn't just target gay men and isn't just about sex; it regulates straight male behaviour and deprives straight men of deeper emotional intimacy with each other.

Hatfield said homophobia is one of the most powerful areas he has learned about in his 15 years of work in this field. "I think homophobia discussions around men is one of the most radical things we can be doing, because it's out there, our press plays on it, it's a feature in comedy shows and films and TV, but there's almost no real discussion about it [outside the gay community]," Hatfield said. "It's something that all men are affected by, in different ways, admittedly....But the force itself is actually designed to keep us apart and suspecting each other and fearful. So talking about it helps break that down and melt it."

Although a men's movement has existed since the 1970s, it has never become a societal force on par with feminism, queer rights, or ethnic-minority movements. Like all movements, it has various facets, including men's and father's rights groups and pro- or anti-feminist stances. While other movements have arisen due to oppression, injustice, or discrimination, examples like Hatfield and Ince's work suggest that for men, the catalyst needs to be inherently different.

"We do need a movement of men to come together to question, to celebrate, to heal, to stretch and grow and try things differently, to ask for change, to make amends, and to work on some of the places that our current way of thinking about that part of our lives is clearly not working that well for us in many ways," Hatfield says. "It's not to say it's all wrong. Masculinity itself is not the problem. There are elements to it that are difficult, challenging, or questionable as well as positive and beautiful. It's navigating and negotiating through all that stuff, but not trying to do it alone. We're just trying to do it with your female partner or your female friends. They have a role to play and that's a beautiful thing that needs to be a part of it."

Best reason you have no excuse not to check up on your health

In spite of numerous troubling male-related health statistics and mortality rates, it's only in the past decade that a male-specific health movement has arisen. UBC's department of urologic sciences and Vancouver General Hospital launched the [Men's Health Initiative of BC](#) in 2009 with a website to consolidate information about men's health issues and conduct awareness campaigns. Beyond penis and prostate issues, the site covers everything from lung and kidney problems to anxiety and eating disorders.

The organization is separate from the similarly named [Health Initiative for Men](#), which provides a comprehensive range of sexual-, physical-, mental-, and social-health programs (plus two sexual health centres) for all men who have sex with men.

Meanwhile, the [UBC Men's Health Research Program website](#), run by UBC School of Nursing

associate professor John Oliffe, provides information about a range of current research topics, including depression and masculinity, smoking, and the health of Canadian immigrant men.

Best helping hands

Working Gear, a volunteer-powered nonprofit organization (which has moved to 1249 Kingsway), ensures that men re-entering the work force have the proper clothing that many can't afford for their jobs. The organization provides everything from business attire to construction wear free of charge to men with referrals from community agencies. Want to volunteer? Have money or clothing to donate? Visit www.workinggear.ca/.

Meanwhile, the [Vancouver Native Health Society's Dude's Club](#), based on a traditional aboriginal model of sharing, provides hot meals plus guest speakers, contact with health-care professionals, and more to aboriginal men in the Downtown Eastside.

To help out the up-and-coming generations, there are youth-mentoring programs like [Big Brothers of Greater Vancouver](#) and [KidStart](#).

Other organizations or programs that provide male-specific support or outreach include [Hustle: Men on the Move](#) for male and trans sex workers and the [BC Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse](#), which provides victim services and therapy.

Best reminders that Father's Day is every day

[The Fatherhood Involvement Network](#) began in the 1990s to share information about father-related resources and research and now boasts 400 members. While traditional family-support work has focused on mothers, the network recognizes male parenting as unique and encourages men to become more involved as fathers.

The nonprofit immigrant organization MOSAIC offers several male-specific programs including [Connecting Fathers](#), a free program that teaches immigrant men the essential elements to becoming an effective father.

On the work front, [Bettermen Solutions](#) assists companies in developing cost-effective strategies to help new dads adapt to the workplace and avoid burnout, thereby retaining and attracting top employees who are working fathers.

Best support for your sexuality

If you're a guy questioning your sexuality, a man who has sex with men (but doesn't identify as gay, bisexual, or queer), in the closet, or an out queer man in need of support, there's the aforementioned HIM as well as [Qmunity](#). B.C.'s queer resource centre offers support groups for bisexual and closeted men, gay men's social groups, and a peer-support phone line. Qmunity and HIM have also teamed up to present Men on Men: Born This Way, a weekly discussion group about queer men living in a world designed for straight men.

Most feisty flap about foreskin

You've undoubtedly heard about it by now. The [Canadian Foreskin Awareness Project](#) aims to increase foreskin education and take political action regarding circumcision. CAN-FAP even launched its first annual [Foreskin Pride March](#) on August 4 and also marched in the Vancouver Pride Parade the next day.

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