

#20 • Winter/Spring 1989 • \$4.50

# Changing Men

*Issues in Gender, Sex and Politics*



**Fertility and Virility • The Masks of Rape  
Masculinist Perspectives • Myth of the Sexual Athlete  
Men and Crying • We Are All Veterans**

## FEATURES

**Fertility and Virility: A Meditation on Sperm**  
by Richard Newman

2

**Masculinist Perspectives**  
by Kenneth Clatterbaugh

4

**The Profeminist Men's Movement:  
New Connections, New Directions**  
by John Stoltenberg

7

**The Recreant**  
by S. Kolankiewicz

10

**The Image and The Act: Men, Sex and Love**  
by Franklin Abbott

17

## GENDER AND HEALTH

### Men and Crying

by Clinton Joyce Jesser ..... 12

### Discrimination Against Male Nurses

by Helene S. Johnston ..... 13

### Reconnecting

by Tom Weiner ..... 14

### Mother Envy

by David Adams ..... 16

## ON VIOLENCE

### The Masks of Rape

by Lawrence J. Cohen ..... 22

### Warning on "Dating Contracts"

by Michael Biernbaum ..... 22

### When My Father Hit Me

by Bob Shelby ..... 25

### Spirituality and Violence

by John Beams ..... 27

### Boys and Nature: A Nonsexist Bibliography

compiled by Nancy Hargrave ..... 28

# Changing Men

#20

Winter/Spring  
1989

## DEPARTMENTS

### LETTERS

compiled by Timm Peterson  
..... Inside Front Cover

### POETRY

compiled by Daniel Garrett  
..... 20, 21, 24, 26, 27, 48

Notes on the Poets ..... 47

### NOCM NEWS

compiled by Randy Hilfman ..... 29

### BOOK REVIEWS

compiled by Michael Kimmel ..... 30

### SPORTS-MEN

**The Myth of the Sexual Athlete**  
by Don Sabo ..... 38

### BEFORE US

**How the East Was Won:  
The 1915 Report  
on Women's Suffrage  
of the New York Men's League**  
by Sally Roesch Wagner ..... 40

### MEN AND WAR

**We Are All Veterans**  
by Tony Switzer ..... 42

Cover illustration "Anguish"  
by Dickey Lee Stafford

*Changing Men* is a project of Feminist Men's Publications, Inc., 306 N. Brooks St., Madison, WI 53715. *Changing Men* is published twice a year, in June and November. The subscription rate for four issues is \$16 for individuals and \$30 for institutions (see inside back cover for complete subscription rates). We welcome advertising (ad rates available on request). Send inquiries and correspondence to the appropriate address shown on the opposite page. All material is copyrighted 1988 by *Changing Men* except where

noted. All rights are reserved. No material in *Changing Men* may be reproduced without written permission. *Changing Men* is distributed nationally by Carrier Pigeon, 40 Plympton, Boston, MA 02118 and Ingram Periodicals, 347 Reedwood Dr., Nashville, TN 37217. *Changing Men* is listed in the *Alternative Press Index*, P.O. Box 3309, Baltimore, MD 21218-0401. ISSN 0889-7174. *Changing Men* is archived at the Wisconsin State Historical Society, 816 State Street, Madison, WI 53715.

# Fertility and Virility: A Meditation on Sperm

By Richard Newman ©1988

Any serious consideration by men of the right of women to reproductive choice, a right which eliminates the traditional power with which patriarchy invests biological fatherhood [see R. Newman, "His Sexuality, Her Reproductive Rights, CM #19], should leave us with a question: what are—or even are there—male reproductive rights? While the existence of male reproductive rights may seem self-evident, most discussion I have heard or read on this topic begins precisely where it should end: after the egg has been fertilized. Certainly men are justified in our concern over how women's reproductive rights will affect our relationship to biological fatherhood. However, to express that concern in terms which negate women's reproductive rights—namely, that the presence of our sperm in their bodies gives us rights over those bodies—is to deceptively re-label patriarchal power as "Male Reproductive Rights."

Biologically speaking, men provide the sperm which fertilizes the egg. Nothing more, nothing less. Therefore, it seems to me that our reproductive rights lie in the control we can responsibly exercise over our sperm, in our right to say to the women with whom we have sex: "This is my sperm. If I do not believe that you will do with it what I want to be done with it, I will not agree to put it in your body." However, to arrive at the place where this statement is more than a platitude, more than just a defensive response to women's reproductive choice, we must rethink male sexuality in order to redefine what it means to be a man.

Traditionally, women have had too much of men giving them our sperm. The conventional patriarchal view of childbirth as evidence of male virility (as opposed to fertility, a distinction which will become important later), coupled with the image of motherhood as that which would absolutely fulfill every woman's life, meant that sperm—from the male perspective—was a "gift" which every woman should be glad to receive again and again. The gift, however, was also a danger. If a man wanted to have sex with a woman, he had somehow to

convince her that, should she get pregnant, he would not abandon her. His patriarchal privilege to her sexual availability carried with it, for him, the specter of just about the only "power" which she could have over him: that, should she get pregnant, she and the child she carried were his responsibility. The social meaning of sperm, then, has hardly been a benign one. Both genders have had, within the context of patriarchy's sexual "ethic," good reason to fear the consequences of "unprotected" sex. Artificial birth control has certainly made it easier for men and women to have sex without worrying so much about pregnancy. But not even the pill with its nearly 100% effectiveness has done much to

## Abortion threatens virility, not fertility.

alter our basic perception of sperm as, at worst, dangerous, and at best, an inconvenient residue of male sexual desire.

### The Sexuality of Virility

But what are the consequences for men of this perception of sperm? Because such a perception relates our sperm only to the ova they fertilize and not to ourselves, it means that we live out our sexual lives, which means our entire lives, without any awareness of ourselves as biologically fertile, as beings inherently able to reproduce. Women, of course, carry and give birth to children, but children would not be possible without our sperm. Still, that does not prevent women from feeling their reproductive capability as a source of power. It is a power which derives from within themselves, which is defined by their bodies and so requires no Other to dominate.

Fertility lies as much in the potential as in the fact of reproduction. Virility lies only in having reproduced. Men, by privileging virility, by investing our sense of sexual validity in the effect our bodies can have on the bodies of women, have created a situation in

which our feelings of sexual self-worth depend upon the presence of women. Only when they give birth, or in the precautions they, and we, must take to neutralize our sperm can we see ourselves as fully sexual, fully human beings. Once women refuse to be present for us—as the women's movement has encouraged them to do—once they step outside the boundary of the authority we have claimed as ours, our power dissolves, our world seems empty, and we feel helpless to do anything about it.

And boundaries are precisely what I am talking about here. The fertilizing nature of sperm is dangerous—as opposed to simply a fact—only as long as no one sets a limit beyond which the sperm's potency is meaningless. The military aspect of our phallic symbolism grows directly out of the patriarchal concept that male sexual power transcends all boundaries, and that the places into which our power reaches become extensions of ourselves. Traditionally, women have functioned as sexual extensions of men, as objects for our use. However, with women's victory in claiming their right to reproductive choice, to draw a physical line beyond which men have no power, we have been faced with the loss not simply of the object that made possible our virility, but of the sexuality which depended on both.

### Reclaiming Our Fertility

Since you can only lose something that is not yours to begin with, and since the fact remains that human beings are sexual by definition, men cannot lose that sexuality which inheres in our bodies, which is our birthright and which depends on no other for its existence. It is a sexuality rooted in the facts of our biology, in the rhythms of the penis, the fertility of our sperm, the fact that each hard-on, each orgasm, expresses the power of the male body to reproduce itself. It is a sexuality limited by the reality that our bodies end, both in space and in time. Therefore, it is a sexuality over which we have certain rights, one of those being the right to demand that anyone with whom we choose to share it must respect how we want the consequences of that sharing to be dealt with.

And so we return to the statement with which I began: "This is my sperm. If I do not believe that you will do with it what I want to be done with it, I will not agree to put it in your body." As a reproductive right, this statement does not seem to amount to much. After all, what keeps a woman from agreeing and then going back on her word? That people are human, that the reality of being pregnant might actually, and for very legitimate reasons, change a woman's mind about what she intends to do with her pregnancy, is something no one can change. All that men can do is impress upon women how seriously we take our biological fertility, and how potentially dehumanizing of us is any decision on their part that does not respect our wishes. (If you think about it, this is the position women have always been in: What keeps a man from failing to take his responsibility should she get pregnant?) It does seem to me that a pregnant woman who knew her partner's feelings about having children before they had sex, who chooses against his wishes to have the child they both conceived, forfeits any right to hold the man accountable for that child; the decision to have the baby will have been hers alone. It is her absolute right to make that decision; but, in the situation I have outlined above, the right to sue him for support does not follow, since he would not have had sex with her if he had known she would choose to have the baby. (I also think that the man should *voluntarily* assume some responsibility for the child, not for sentimental reasons, but simply because no child should go in any way unprovided for.) In the case of a woman who chooses to abort a pregnancy she originally said she would carry to term, once men stop thinking of childbirth as proof of virility we may find that the fate of each individual sperm no longer carries the entire weight of validating ourselves as men: abortion threatens virility, not fertility.

### Living Our Manhood

Sperm is not only the genetic product of our bodies, it is also the physical product of our masculinity. Just as patriarchal power enables men to deny the biological specificity of pregnancy and childbirth, and so deny women their womanhood, a woman who does not respect a man's feelings about his sperm denies him his manhood. And just as women have asserted the self-evident validity of their womanhood by reclaiming their sexual biology and

the right to determine its meaning, men too can begin to redefine our manhood. We can consciously claim our sperm and give it significance congruent with the limits of *our* lives, thereby changing the patriarchal meaning we have, until now, given it. The point is not to play tit for tat with so-



Bert Provoost

cial/sexual power, nor to look for ways of blaming women for the same kind of power strategies of which men have been guilty. The point is to learn how to live our manhood in such a way that a statement like the one with which I began, because it grows from our deepest convictions about ourselves, will bespeak our own self-respect and, therefore, leave our female lovers no choice but to take us seriously.

But what does it mean to "live our manhood?"

It means to live fully *in* our bodies,

to commit our lives first to what we can know *of and with* our bodies. Just like a woman's body, ours also has a reproductive cycle, and we go through it, whether alone or with a partner, every time we orgasm. Nor does it matter that we do not ejaculate inside a vagina. For men, biologically speaking, there is no difference between erotic and reproductive sex. To accept this, to live it, to make it a part of the rhythm of our lives, is to alter irrevocably what it means to be a man; is to assert that men, simply by living consciously aware of the biological limits our nature imposes on us, are masculine. Masculinity becomes, then, not something we must prove *with* our bodies, but the perpetual condition *of* our bodies.

For example, men often feel threatened by lesbians. What lesbians themselves would probably call a simple lack of sexual interest is felt by some men as an active assault on our sexuality. To the degree that we allow ourselves to define our sexuality in patriarchal terms, the threat is real. Female homosexuality is a boundary which patriarchal power cannot cross except by force. However, once men begin to live our manhood as an inherent, self-evident quality, once we see ourselves as fully and reflexively sexual, someone else's lack of sexual interest—be they male or female—cannot threaten us because the *meaning* of our sex resides within ourselves, not in how another person sees us.

A sexuality so deeply grounded in a physical masculinity contains the potential for a new phallic symbolism, non-violent and non-hierarchical. Rather than a representation of sex as power, as existing within the dichotomy of potency and impotence, the positive-negative polarity of the hard vs. the soft penis, we might instead develop a symbolism of the continuum between dormancy and activity, of sexuality as an embodied process. Such a sexuality, because it would be self-contained, would not be predatory, would not require the subservience of another for its fulfillment. It would recognize that we are all embodied individuals; it would form its community with others who also live embodied lives; and it would always insist first on its own integrity, on being faithful to the body which shapes it and to which it, in turn, gives form.

*Richard Newman is a poet currently teaching English as a Foreign Language in Seoul, Korea.*