

JAMES ZANK

Role of men in society narrow

This summer some friends and I planted a big garden. Although I had helped with my parents' garden a little bit while growing up, this was a much different experience.

For one thing, I had never had to till sodded soil, as my parents' gardens always were previously defined areas. This was a new garden, and the workload was about triple what I'd previously experienced.

Despite the back-breaking labor, this garden was a lot of fun. It wasn't until later that I realized why.

Since then, I learned about what has been dubbed the men's movement. This movement — or movements, as there are a variety of opinions on the subject — addresses the role of men in our culture and how this role affects men's identities.

When I first learned about this movement, I was a bit skeptical. Why did men need a movement? The women's movement has had an impact on our society, with good reason. Women have been oppressed in our culture and have been struggling to gain equal rights, and they continue to do so.

The more I thought about it, however, the more I came to realize that the men's movement was just as important as the women's movement and that both had beneficial goals.

Much of the drive behind the women's movement is to give women a choice as to the type of life they lead. For women, that initially centered on being allowed the same opportunities for employment, wages and a chance to decide what to do with their lives instead of being compelled to live a Donna Reed lifestyle that the social values of America once imposed.

In a similar fashion, the men's movement seeks to free men from the burden of their role in society.

Opponents are quick to point out that the white male has the best position on the social totem pole in America. They subsequently wonder why men are complaining.

In the book "Iron John," one of the leaders of the men's movement, Robert Bly, identifies some of the problems that men suffer. A man is expected to work 40-plus hours a week in a post-



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Industrial-Revolution job. That often alienates him from his family, leaving his children largely fatherless, building a wall of resentment between him and his wife but still requiring the man to be tough, to hide his feelings and to avoid quiche.

Although this is an extreme depiction, it is rooted in some essential truths of our culture. With these sorts of demands, is it any wonder that men are more likely to be alcoholic, commit suicide or become homeless?

The current role of men in our culture helps to inhibit both sexes. Fathers are expected to be the "good provider" in the family. Even after numerous years of double-income families, men are still being expected to work long, exhaustive hours.

In this way, women have it a little better than men. It is far more acceptable for a woman to choose to stay at home after bringing a child into the world than it is for a man. Some women are able to both work and care for their families by flexible work scheduling or working from their homes. True, women often are cheated fiscally in the bargain, but their choices are a bit more humane.

Bly's fundamental assertion is that men need to reach into their souls and find the Iron John, a sort of wild man within.

Iron John is not a macho, earth-scorching, war-mongering beast but a man who is in touch with the world around him, who husbands the land,

who is nurturing and in tune with those he loves, a man who also is assertive, takes action and acts as a protector of those things he cares about.

Men's contemporary roles seem artificial and contrived. Men largely are not called on to act as protectors and nurturers of their family. They are money- and resource-bringers. Women still have retained much of their roles as the ones who bring life into the world, and through the last three decades, have gained some of the respect and rights due them.

It also seems like women in our culture have a better support system if the relationships between the women I know are any indication. They share their problems, hopes and fears with one another and act to encourage one another. They laugh together and cry together.

Men do a lot of what they call "male bonding," but often it leaves much to be desired. It often is just dulling the pain of life over beer and football, with little or no significant attempt to cope with feelings.

That is how this summer's garden brought out something I'd never recognized before. Working with my friends, devoid of the conventional male crutches, we discovered each other. We worked together toward the common goal of bringing life to a chunk of backyard.

We saw each other for the strengths and weaknesses we possessed, but instead of putting each other down as some men might, we coped by helping each other and teaching each other. Not just about gardening, but about who we are and what we would like out of our lives.

Men need not be trapped by their roles. Women continue to prove that these roles can be cast off if a person is willing to defy the conventional in search of what feels more appropriate to the individual.

In a culture where men are all too often told not to feel, I felt a growing friendship between a group of adult men and recognized how finite the role of manhood is, as portrayed by our culture.

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ANDY FREDERICK

Little problems need attention

There are a lot of things wrong with the world. We all know the big ones: hunger, war, poverty, homelessness, hate, Dan Quayle.

There are other problems that are not so big or important, and their solutions seem more within reach.

Following is a list of problems that I would like to see solved and things I would like to see changed. The solutions to some are more fantastical than others. But it's fun to dream.

Problem 1: Reckless drivers. My biggest gripe is with people who run red lights. I'm not even talking about normal red lights. I'm talking about those red lights where the other street's green is delayed for about five seconds to give people much more time to run the red without killing anyone.

My solution: put those tire-shredding parking lot protectors at every intersection and have them pop up as soon as the light turns red, then watch people quickly learn that the yellow light means "slow down," not "speed up."

Problem 2: Parking. There isn't enough of it. I'm sure that doesn't surprise anyone. But the problem isn't really that there aren't enough parking spaces. The problem is that cars are a waste of space.

The average person doesn't spend all that much time in a car. Maybe an hour a day. And when people are not using their cars, they need to find some place to store them.

The average car can carry from four to six people and also has a good deal of trunk space. But the average car usually carries only one person at a time and the trunk space is rarely used.

Only the future holds the answer to this problem. Cars must someday be replaced with one-person, computer-controlled pods that continuously roam



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the streets waiting for someone to summon them.

Either that or we need a whole mess of taxis.

Problem 3: Sidewalks. No, not paying for them. I'm talking about where they're placed. We all learn in school that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Except when using sidewalks.

The solution to this problem is not difficult at all — nor is it mine. I have been told of a recently constructed university that did not lay sidewalks. With no artificial restrictions on movement, the students always took the most sensible routes. After a year, sidewalks were laid everywhere that the students had worn paths.

That's food for thought that can be applied to other things besides sidewalks. It's better to let people choose paths for themselves than to force them to follow artificial restrictions. And that brings me to the next problem.

Problem 4: Term limits. Recently, an astonishing number of people have decided that everyone is voting badly except for themselves. Rather than curbing their own habit of automatically voting for the incumbent, people would rather limit freedom of choice by forcing politicians out of office after a set number of years. Thus, people would be prevented from re-electing good, honest, experienced politicians. Restricting freedoms is never the answer.

The preferable alternative to term limits is to shift the restrictions from the politicians to the voters. People who want term limits are the problem, so obviously the solution is to prevent them from voting. Then the rest of us democracy-loving Americans can continue to vote for whom-ever we want.

Problem 5: Cats. Somehow people have gotten the idea that cats should be free to go anywhere they want to.

People claim that cats are independent creatures who need to satisfy their urge to prowl and hunt and whatnot. If that's the case, take them to the forest and set them free. But if a cat is to be kept as a pet, it should be kept inside.

A person cannot claim to care about a pet if it is allowed to roam freely. Animals are less intelligent than children. A parent who let a 3-year-old run around outside would be grossly irresponsible.

Driving, parking, sidewalks, term limits and cats. They're hardly issues that would shake the world. But they occasionally rattle mine a little bit, and maybe yours as well. And if finding the solution to one tiny problem makes life a little more enjoyable, it is worth looking for.

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