



# ♂ Men: On Campus THOUGHT BRIEF

Philadelphia Conference 2004

edited by Paul G. Brown

## Back When..

### Dr. Harry Cannon, Standing Committee for Men

*This year the Standing Committee for Men is celebrating its twentieth year as a part of the American College Personnel Association. To this day, many members of the Association question why the Standing Committee exists, what its foci are, and why it is needed. In an attempt to better understand the Committee and its roots, Harry Cannon, one of the “Founding Fathers” reflects back on the impetus that lead to the creation of the Committee and its foundational precepts. In many ways, the Standing Committee for Men arose through the support of sister colleagues in the feminist movement and specifically from the Standing Committee for Women. To this day, the Standing Committee for Men continues to espouse many of the ideals of feminism and serves as a Committee of allies with other ACPA groups while focusing on the unique experiences of college men.*

---

There is a plaque on my office wall that declares me a “Founding Father” of the Standing Committee for Men. That declaration is somewhat at odds with the historical truth. Instead and in fact, there was a band of brothers (along with some very supportive sisters from the Standing Committee of Women) who played the key roles in establishing the Committee. The founding—as best I can recall—began a quarter of a century ago and took place something like this.

A workshop intended to explore those areas in which men and women might find causes-in-common was held on the Northern Illinois University campus in the late 1970s. Murray Scher and Cynthia Johnson

had been drafted to facilitate discussions in separate morning sessions, Cynthia working with the women and Murray with the men. The original format called for bringing the two groups together in the afternoon to explore the issues developed in the morning sessions. Contrary to our carefully designed plans, the men became so enthralled with this new experience of being able to talk with each other about matters that acutely affected them as males that they flat-out declined to meet with the women after the lunch break. They wanted to use all of the remaining time to continue the heady experience of intimate sharing with other males.

There was no sense of antagonism expressed by either group toward the other, and indeed the women participants turned out to be quite supportive of having the men continue to use every available moment to revel in this rare opportunity. Perhaps having already recognized the need for such spaces as “consciousness raising” sessions within the women’s movement, the women participants were pleased that men could enjoy the same experience. Furthermore, by working separately for a time, perhaps the two could ultimately come together as even stronger combined force.

Although the men involved dispersed after the workshop, some who were present reached out to like-minded cohorts in ACPA and in the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) to find ways to afford similar opportunities for gentle males to gather for these types of encounters.

**Dr. Harry Cannon**

[hcanon@rkymtnhi.com](mailto:hcanon@rkymtnhi.com)

The programming in the two organizations, ACPA and APGA, reflected these new ideas of what it means to be male, how to explore being male, and how that experience impacts women and other groups. Specifically, Greg Eichenfield, Peter Sherrard, Bob Morgan, Steve Schwerner and other members wrote program proposals and recruited other males to serve on program panels. Jim O’Neil and Murray Scher wrote thoughtful and incisive articles for our journals, and Jim Barclay, then editor of the Personnel and Guidance Journal, was receptive to and encouraging of submissions addressing men’s issues

Over the next six or seven years, until the “official founding of the Standing Committee for Men in 1984, there was much activity focusing on men’s issues at a variety of levels and in a variety of arenas. At the time, ACPA was still a part of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, and thus programming that addressed the concerns of men occurred at the APGA Convention. At this same time, members of the ACPA Executive Council, including myself, began negotiations with our sisters who represented the Standing Committee for Women (SCW), to the end of establishing a Standing Committee for Men. Ursula Delworth, Cynthia Johnson, and Jane Fried were just a few of the Council members and active SCW participants who seemed more than happy to help us advance our cause. This, however, is not to suggest that the path was strewn with roses.

Murray Scher recalls one encounter with a formidable female member of the Council who suspected male power play. In the course of a debate about whether the Council should authorize a standing committee for men, she suggested that Murray wished to compete with the women members of the Association. He replied that he “*never*” competes with women (but later admitted to doing so on occasion). Ultimately and after numerous discussions in and out of Council meetings, the formation of a Standing Committee for Men was approved by the ACPA Executive Council—we were in business.

It is important to note here that the males involved in working to establish the Standing Committee for Men in these early years were strongly committed to the feminist movement, and were very much inclined to view androgyny as a positive and useful model for male development. That philosophical position undoubtedly eased the way for the warm support that was actively forthcoming from Standing Committee for Women members. Nonetheless, in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s the emergence of a mythopoetic subculture in the men’s movement engendered conflict and considerable discomfort for some of the early founders of the Committee. We remained strongly committed to a feminist model and to the support of women’s issues. Also about this time, an issue of the Personnel and Guidance Journal was given over to the disciples of Iron John, who took a dim view of us feminist males. That issue of the Journal generated some wounded feelings, particularly for our more articulate and prolific spokespersons like Murray Scher and Jim O’Neil. However, replies were accepted for a subsequent issue of the Journal, and the conflict proved to be short-lived.

Those internal wars seem to have subsided. The Standing Committee for Men has been “built into” the institution that is ACPA. The Committee members not only find strength in each other, but have—over two decades—continued to make a difference in the lives of the men on their home campuses. It has been a joy to have a ring-side seat at this revolution, and to have benefited from the affection and support of these early founders; they helped me grow and reminded me of the man I aspire to become.

**Visit us on the web...**

<http://www.acpa.nche.edu/comms/SCM/>