

A SYMBOLIC ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
OF THE MYTHOPOETIC MEN'S MOVEMENT

by

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This thesis is dedicated to Teenie Olaveson (1915-1997).
I hope I made you proud.

Abstract

The mythopoetic men's movement is a men's spiritual/ healing movement which has been in existence since the mid-1980's. Mythopoetic men gather at conferences, retreats, and in small groups and engage in activities such as drumming, dancing, myth-and storytelling, and ritual enactments. There currently exists a lacuna of scholarly literature on the movement. What has been written originates from political and sociological perspectives, and employs a methodology of textual analysis in its critiques. This thesis uses an alternative methodology, experiential anthropology, to explore the mythopoetic men's movement at a deeper level. Through this approach, alternative conclusions to the ones reached by previous studies are presented, centring around the transformative potential of the mythopoetic men's movement. The use of ritual and archetypes by the movement are identified as being fundamental to it, and are modeled using two models of the symbolic process. The success of the movement at accomplishing its goal—that of healing men—is then assessed, based upon the author's own experience in mythopoetic men's work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Books about masculinity on the best-seller lists. Satirical cartoon strips in the newspapers. Hundreds of men heading off into the woods to thump drums and wave spears. Primitive masculine rituals revived. Talk-show appearances. Strong men weeping about their fathers, their love lives, their lost sense of self...

Something is going on here; something odd, but possibly important...

—Bob Connell, “Men at Bay: The ‘Men’s Movement’ and Its Newest Best-Sellers”

This is my story. I can think of no better words than these to begin this manuscript. I began this thesis as an eager young graduate student, enthused about symbolic anthropology and still a little wet behind the ears. I had decided to research the mythopoetic men’s movement, and to put into practice the symbolic theory and experiential methodology I had studied for so long through my teachers and favourite scholars. I had no idea of the journey I was about to undertake.

For the first year of my research, I completed the course work requirements for my degree, and began archival investigation of the mythopoetic men’s movement and symbolic anthropology. I produced a thesis proposal which was passed with flying colours by my committee, I presented the course of research I intended to follow to classmates, professors, and conference participants, and I discussed symbolic anthropology and the mythopoetic men’s movement with colleagues.

Soon two semesters had passed, and I realized that I needed to begin field research. This was to be my first bona fide fieldwork experience, and as I suspect is typical of first time field researchers, I was nervous and unsure of myself. I found it hard to get out the door when I had an interview scheduled or a group meeting to attend. Writing from this vantage point now, I suspect that some part of me might have known what an intense and often painful experience this research was going to be for me, not only as a scholar, but simply as a human being.

I eventually began to interview people involved with the mythopoetic men's movement, and became a member of two men's groups. As my participation in this phenomenon grew, my research became increasingly experiential. I was attending men's groups every week, interviewing men involved with the movement frequently, and developing close relationships with the men I had met. My research on the mythopoetic men's movement was beginning to affect my personal life. I delved into a painful childhood I thought I had forgotten, only to discover that I hadn't; I re-examined who I was at my very core, and confronted some of the darker aspects of myself; and I dredged up wells of grief and anger that had been buried for years, in the process becoming a sad and angry person. Completing this thesis has truly been one of the toughest experiences of my life. Sometimes I didn't think I could go on. But I did go on, and I am pleased with the result. Because it *was* such an intense experience, I know that what follows is authentic.

The Dene Tha of Northern Alberta say that unless you experience something yourself, firsthand, you do not really know it. I have attempted to take that wisdom into this thesis. In the pages that follow I draw upon the experience and scholarship of

others, as scholars must do. But sometimes I leave that behind and speak purely from my own experience, from the process of personal transformation that was inescapable as I journeyed into the world of mythopoetic men. This thesis is therefore an analysis of the mythopoetic men's movement. But it is also the story of my journey through it.

1.0 OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE

Upon reviewing the scholarly literature on the mythopoetic men's movement¹, two things are apparent: i) very little has been written directly pertaining to the topic, and ii) the majority of existing publications originate from political and sociological perspectives, but none from a purely anthropological or symbolic anthropological perspective. It is my belief that this absence of a symbolic anthropological study of the MMM has facilitated both a poor understanding and reception of it in the academic community, as well as by the greater public. This thesis is intended to correct this absence.

Two primary questions began and have remained the focus of this research:

1. What kinds of activities are going on in the mythopoetic men's movement, and how can we model them?
2. What are its goals, and are they being achieved?

In answering these questions, I will argue that mythopoetic men's groups are groups of

¹ From this point forward, "MMM" will be used to refer to "mythopoetic men's movement." Other terms used will be "mythopoetic men's work"—what mythopoetic men do, including aims, goals, and practical techniques; and "mythopoetic men," "the mythopoetics"—men involved in the MMM, both locally and worldwide.

men which gather across North America and in other pockets of the Western world with one primary goal in mind—healing. To achieve this goal, they employ two fundamental tools: ritual and ritualization, and archetypal complexes. It is these two elements that I focus on in my survey and analysis of the activities of the MMM. I will also, however, briefly touch upon some very current topics in anthropology, such as symbolic and cultural appropriation.

Being a large movement, or more accurately, a brotherhood of small communities with common goals and techniques which spans continents, it would be poor scholarship to claim to be able to encapsulate the activities of the entire MMM in this thesis; it is important to acknowledge that as with many social phenomena, the MMM is a mutable, large-scale social movement which manifests in unique, localized ways. What I do claim to do in this thesis is to document my own experience of a “time slice” of mythopoetic men’s work at a particular time, in a particular location, and with particular people. This being said, however, based upon my own experience, fieldwork data, and written material on the MMM, in the pages that follow I do make some generalizations about it wherever the data warranted such generalizations.

1.0.1 Structure of the Manuscript

This manuscript is organized into five chapters. In chapter 1, I introduce the focus and approach of the thesis and how it is structured, and then give a brief background on the MMM. In chapter 2 I summarize the scholarly literature on the MMM, focusing on the only coherent body of academic work written on it thus far. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in this thesis—experiential anthropology—and why it was chosen. Methods of data collection and analysis are included in this

discussion. Chapter 4 presents the bulk of the data collected in the project, focusing on the use of ritual and archetypal complexes by the MMM. Data from archival research, my own participation in mythopoetic men's groups, and interviews with group members and facilitators is used in the discussion, and excerpts from fieldnotes and interview transcripts are presented. Finally, chapter 5 presents my analysis of the MMM: I begin by modeling the activities and elements common to it using two models of the symbolic process, and then conclude with an assessment of the success of mythopoetic men's work at achieving its goals, based upon my own experience of it. Following chapter 5 are a brief conclusion, appendices, and a bibliography.

1.1 THE MYTHOPOETIC MEN'S MOVEMENT

Although often regarded by the public as a homogeneous social movement, the contemporary men's movement in fact consists of at least four (and according to some scholars, six (see Clatterbaugh 1990)) subgroups (Harding 1992b). The Profeminist/ Gay Affirmative branch of the movement, influential among men's studies curricula at universities, is generally regarded as having resulted from the women's movement and the development of feminism, and concerns itself with issues of sexism and inequality. Conversely, the Men's Rights/ Fathers' Rights branch appears to be a reaction to feminism and the women's movement, which both mimics the latter's model of aggressive political discourse and directly counters its claims about men. The Addiction/ Recovery branch evolved out of twelve step programs, centres around the idea that men need to be healed, and abounds with terms like "toxic masculinity,"

“woundedness,” and “father issues,” and shares many similarities with the fourth branch of the men’s movement—the *mythopoetic* branch.

The mythopoetic branch of the men’s movement is its largest subgroup, has generated the most popular appeal, and is often mistakenly identified by the public as *the* men’s movement. Thus far in its history it appears to be primarily a North American phenomenon, although Kimmel and Kaufman (1995) note that there have been sporadic groups and gatherings reported in Western Europe and Australia, and many of my informants in this project made me aware that mythopoetic men’s organizations and groups are flourishing in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. The MMM thus appears to be spreading from North America to other English speaking countries.

From their study of the MMM in the United States, Kimmel and Kaufman (1995) report that less than 2% of attendees at mythopoetic gatherings were “men of color,” never more than 5% of attendees were homosexual, and the majority were between the ages of 40 and 55 (263). They thus conclude, as have other authors (see e.g. Harding 1992a; Kimmel 1995a; Hagan 1992a; Goldberg 1995; Bonnett 1996:276-277), that the MMM attracts primarily white, middle-aged men of middle to high socio-economic status. My own experience in the MMM confirms this: roughly ninety-five percent of the men involved in the mythopoetic men’s work that I observed were white, were between the ages of 35 and 55, were middle to upper class, and self-identified as being heterosexual. Other authors claim, however, that mythopoetic men’s gatherings are beginning to achieve at least more *ethnic* diversity (Meade 1993; see also Minkowitz 1995).

If one person has been singled out as the leader of the MMM, and can be accurately said to typify its archetypal, ritualistic, and poetic approach to working with men, it is Robert Bly. Since the publication in *New Age* journal of his interview with Keith Thompson titled "What Men Really Want" (Bly and Thompson 1982), Bly has come to be recognized as the "father" of the MMM.

Also an accomplished poet, Bly began teaching seminars for men and women in the 1970's using fairy tales as pedagogical instruments, and also taught at the Center for Healing Arts in Los Angeles and at the C.G. Jung Society in San Francisco. He then began holding seminars for men only, and during this time also organized several men's conferences (Hoff and Bliss 1995). In 1990 he published *Iron John: A Book About Men*, a national best-seller which has come to be regarded by some as the bible of the MMM, and which is by far the most often cited text of the MMM in popular and academic literature. Using a Jungian interpretation of this Grimm's fairy tale, Bly presents the picture of a young boy escaping the feminizing clutches of his mother and rediscovering the "Wild Man," an archetype of the "deep masculine," in *Iron John*.

The pattern of male initiation, community, and rediscovery of the deep masculine which forms the basis of *Iron John* was put into practice by Bly in the late 1980's and early 1990's in the form of "Wild Man retreats." During these retreats, Bly attempted to facilitate the accessing by men of their "Wild Man within." The tools which Bly used to accomplish this were mythology, storytelling, drumming, dancing, poetry, and ritual enactment. Some of the myths and rituals that Bly used were drawn from Western traditions, but the vast majority were appropriated from other, non-Western cultures, especially Native American traditions.

Since Bly's article in *New Age* journal, and especially since the publication of *Iron John*, and "Wild Man retreats," numerous mythopoetic men's books have been published, some 13 mythopoetic journals have appeared (Bonnett 1996:276), and mythopoetic men's retreats attracting hundreds of men are held all over the world by large men's "networks," such as the New Warriors Network, the Men's Council Project, and the Sterling Men. In addition, one can find groups of between 5 to 12 mythopoetic men holding meetings twice per month or more in not only major U.S. cities, but in small towns everywhere, including rural Ontario. Following Bly's example, hundreds of thousands of men have begun to use ritual, storytelling, mythology, drumming, and other "mythopoetic" techniques to effect some kind of change or growth in men.

Judging from the attendance at gatherings, conferences, and mythopoetic groups, the popularity of the MMM appears to have peaked in 1992, and been on the decline ever since, leaving its future a little uncertain. But whether the MMM survives or not, there can be no question that it has captivated the public's attention, and rather than just New Age frolicking, it has become a serious way of life for many men.

Despite these facts, the MMM has not been well understood. The public's awareness of it seems to still be characterized by ignorance or cynicism. And although the academic community appears to be better informed about the MMM, scholarly criticism on it is still overwhelmingly cynical, focusing on its own political agendas and refusing to engage in serious, rigorous examination of mythopoetic men's work on *its* terms. In the pages that follow, I will attempt a deeper explication and modeling of the activities of the MMM than I have encountered in scholarly literature to date, and I will

offer my own assessment of its efficacy in accomplishing its primary goal, that of healing men.

Chapter 2: Scholarly Criticism on the Mythopoetic Men's Movement

Our fear is that the men's movement will do what men have always done, at least since the advent of patriarchy: blame women for their problems and defend their own privileges. –Starhawk, "A Men's Movement I Can Trust"

Almost from the very time of the MMM's inception, the media's reaction to it could be characterized as "a discourse in derision" (Bonnett 1996:277). Countless magazine articles, newspaper stories, and even several television sitcoms lampooned and oversimplified it (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995:15). The media "delight[ed] in deliberately distorting the aims of these movements, and reveling in the photo opportunities afforded by middle class, middle-aged white men in war paint and loin cloths, whooping and hollering like fantasized wildmen" (Kimmel 1995c:4). Mythopoetic men's gatherings were perceived by the public simply as occasions for grown men to appropriate other peoples' cultures and go off into the woods to play; they were not really about anything serious. Based on discussions I have had with Canadians during the past two years, it appears this perception has not substantially changed.

There has been more popular response to this movement than academic response, probably due to the fact that few people, especially the academic community, seem to have taken mythopoetic men's work seriously. However, this has begun to

change since the early 1990's. A small but growing body of scholarly literature has emerged. It is focused and serious, and originates from a singular perspective—political, and a definitive orientation—feminist/ profeminist. This body of criticism is the only systematic and serious academic response to the MMM currently extant.

2.0 THE FEMINIST/ PROFEMINIST RESPONSE TO THE MYTHOPOETIC MEN'S MOVEMENT

Feminist scholars and writers were the first to seriously look at the men's movement in general, and the MMM in particular. Although a handful of scattered articles existed before it, the publication of *Women Respond to the Men's Movement: A Feminist Collection* (Hagan 1992a), really marked the birth of a serious critical response to the activities of the mythopoetics. Shortly after this, a group of profeminist male scholars, headed by Michael Kimmel, Michael Kaufman, and Harry Brod, began publishing critiques along similar political and sociological lines. Then in 1995 Kimmel followed the lead of his feminist counterparts and drew together scattered profeminist writings on the MMM to form the volume *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)*. These two volumes comprise the backbone of the feminist/ profeminist response to the MMM, and are complemented by various other individual publications.

2.0.1 The Feminist/ Profeminist Critique: A Demand for Profeminist Politics

In the words of Michael Kimmel, the profeminist men's encounter with the MMM began in rejection. In it they found

everything from antifeminist backlash and patriarchy redux to racist appropriation, misleading theology, misguided anthropology, and misogynist political ideology. For most of us, the mythopoetic men's

work reinscribed patriarchy as a political system by asserting men's need for *more* power and refusing to move beyond an individual version of empowerment. (Kimmel 1995b:xi-xii)

The basis for the feminist/ profeminist critique of the MMM is immediately apparent in this passage. It is precisely the prioritizing, or more accurately, the lack of it, of the political and ideological which concerns feminist and profeminist scholars about this movement—they cannot accept the political neutrality of the mythopoetic men: “The mythopoetic men’s movement can become either profeminist or antifeminist. But it cannot remain neutral” (Kimmel 1995c:11). And while some feminist scholars recognize that the mythopoetic side of the men’s movement does address wounds within males and constitutes a beneficial process of healing, they stress that it needs to be mixed with political awareness and activity to change imbalances in the world (Hagan 1992a), for after all, “the reins of change” for the most part lie in the hands of men (Gill 1992).

In general terms, feminists are frightened by the MMM (see Hagan 1992a), or rather by its harmful potential. Profeminist men share many of the same concerns, yet are also *envious* of it. Many profeminist scholars openly express envy at the power of figures like Michael Meade, Robert Bly, and James Hillman to draw hundreds and thousands of men together in a serious effort (Kimmel 1995a). Profeminist men, who also hold gatherings, conferences, retreats, and men’s groups, would like to somehow acquire the mysterious ingredient of the mythopoetics which has made them larger and more attractive to men². They consider themselves and the mythopoetics to share

² Interestingly, this dynamic has manifested in the Ottawa area, with local profeminist men beginning to use the ritual techniques of mythopoetic men, such as at a recent (March 1997) gathering organized by profeminist men called simply “Men’s Ritual Gathering.”

common goals—the growth of men and the redefinition of masculinity—yet they feel compelled to correct the sexist, misogynist, patriarchal leanings inherent in the MMM.

And herein lies one of the fundamental bases for the profeminist and the feminist critique of the MMM: they evaluate it in terms of women. The profeminist men “have sought to set this ‘men’s work’ of the mythopoetic men’s movement against the backdrop of the extraordinary efforts of feminist women to claim their voices of anger, passion, and pain over the past thirty years” (Kimmel 1995c:4), and the feminist scholarship similarly centres around the MMM’s potential to harm and continue to disempower women.

Before I begin to summarize the criticisms of these two sets of scholars of the MMM, it must be noted that they both also acknowledge the *beneficial potential* of the mythopoetics’ work. As Steinem notes, women want a men’s movement; they are literally dying for it (1992:v; see also Carlin 1992). And profeminist men recognize that men are searching for a new sense of meaning, for what it is to be a man, and that “men breaking down their isolation and fears of one another is important” (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995:38, 27). But, as mentioned above, and as we shall see below, although these scholars applaud the *efforts* of the mythopoetic men, they have grave reservations about *how they are employing those efforts* in what they see as a quick fix devoid of any serious and responsible political awareness (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995:38).

2.0.2 Patriarchy and the Mythopoetic Men’s Movement

Almost without exception, every piece of scholarship on the MMM with a basis in this perspective contains the assertion that the MMM is simply patriarchy revisited, or patriarchy with a new face (Clatterbaugh 1995; Messner 1993; Goldberg 1995;

Hagan 1992a; Brod 1995): at its worst, the MMM can be a “vehicle for perpetuating structured gender inequality, sexism, and the oppression of women, children, and marginal men” (Sabo 1995:71). Although the mythopoeics deny the existence of patriarchy (Clatterbaugh 1995:56), these scholars claim that what is occurring in the movement is nothing new, for men gathering with men to talk about men has been occurring for many years (Hagan 1992b; Carlin 1992): the MMM is simply a “kinder, gentler patriarchy” (Hagan 1992b:xi).

Within this critique, the MMM is seen as a kind of haven, an attractive retreat from the real world which avoids issues of power or challenges to men as the norm, and asks nothing except for men to articulate their hurts, many of which are blamed on women (Clatterbaugh 1995:59). This escapist notion by white, middle-class males is termed institutional blindness by Schwalbe (1996; see also Clatterbaugh 1995), because although men are wounded from personal relationships and parents, these woundings are embedded within institutions; the men at mythopoetic gatherings do not recognize this and therefore mistake the cause of their wounds. Clatterbaugh (1995) goes so far as to state that “men who misidentify the cause of their wounds are doomed to never heal” (59).

Michael Schwalbe, a sociologist in the profeminist group of writers who has thus far conducted the most in-depth study of the MMM, states that it is not that mythopoetic men are “foot soldiers in a misogynist campaign. Rather [the task] is to examine how mythopoetic ideas and practices bear on the relative status and power of women and men in our society” (Schwalbe 1996: 144). Schwalbe found, however, that

the mythopoetic men, blind to institutional power, conceive strategies to avoid this analysis.

The men he observed claimed they were not doing men's work to analyze society but to get in touch with their feelings; instead of looking at whether men and women had problems of greater or lesser seriousness, the standard response was that men always have an equivalent problem to women's problems. The general attitude of the mythopoetic men he observed was thus a desire for parity between the genders—they wanted both genders' pain to be recognized. Schwalbe critiques this "strategic" approach employed by the mythopoetic men of not engaging in any serious analysis, calling it "anti-intellectualism" (Schwalbe 1996:147-149, 227-229).

Another tactic Brown claims the mythopoetic men use is to portray men as victims, whether of female pressure on the male psyche, or of overbearing mothers (1992; see also Ruether 1992:163; Clatterbaugh 1995:55). Yet men still enjoy enormous advantages over women in North American society; women are victims much more than men are (Brown 1992).

Schwalbe (1996) and others also note the class disparity (and the mythopoetics' blindness to it) inherent in the MMM (see also Carlin 1992; Brown 1992; Nonn 1995). The retreats are really only affordable to upper-middle class males, who also demographically happen to be white and heterosexual (Wolf-Light 1995). "In this [Robert Bly] mirrors the marginalisation that takes place in society as a whole whereby white, affluent heterosexuality is the model for all men" (ibid:219).

Schwalbe notes that it is in a sense natural that the men at mythopoetic gatherings exhibited this institutional and class blindness: they were materially

comfortable, and thus “had little impetus in engaging in serious analysis of the class structure of society” (Schwalbe 1996:151). It was also morally comfortable to maintain these blindnesses. Being aware of institutional power would force them to do serious thinking about their society and their place in it, and being aware of class power would force them to look at their relationship to working-class men and women, which would lead back to institutional structures (patriarchy), thereby putting the blame for social evils “back on the shoulders of men, those who were truly ruling class patriarchs” (ibid:150).

In *Unlocking the Iron Cage* (1996), Schwalbe succinctly summarizes the feminist/ profeminist critique of the mythopoetic men’s movement in a passage worth quoting at length. Again, it is written in the context of his participation in the movement.

In sum, the main problem was, when it came to thinking about gender and power, the men embraced a style of thinking that censored any ideas that might have kept them from feeling better about themselves as men. This was both a therapeutic and a political maneuver. In the short term it served the men’s more pressing interests in mental health than in social analysis. But it also had potential consequences, and less healthy ones, for women, in that this kind of thinking posed no threat to the status quo. *So the real problem was that the mythopoetic style of thinking about gender and power short-circuited attempts to do the hard work of figuring out just how the whole range of gender, class, and race inequalities in our society hurt most people, while benefiting a relatively few.* (150; emphasis mine)

The feminist and profeminist scholarship thus grounds its response to the MMM in political critique, focusing on issues of power, gender, institutional structures, class, race, and sexism.

Political Distress at Anti-feminist or Anti-female Sentiments

Within the assertion that the MMM is patriarchy reinscribed are several smaller criticisms. For instance, many scholars have noted the anti-feminist and misogynist nature of the activities and sentiments of some mythopoetic gatherings and texts (see Caputi and MacKenzie 1992; Clatterbaugh 1990; Kimmel 1995c; Sabo 1995; Hagan 1992a), and some claim outright that the MMM is hostile to women (Bonnett 1996:276). Burant claims that Robert Bly (who is often used to represent the movement due to his foundational role in it) “is reacting against the demands of feminism and provoking a surge of anti-woman sentiment” (1988:7). Bly denies the claims that the movement is a reaction to feminism, stating instead that men have simply become too soft and feminine (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995). Yet considerable evidence contradicting this claim has been marshalled by critics of the movement.

Clatterbaugh (1990) notes, for instance, that Bly and others often blame women for a lack of male vitality (95). Bly also says that women and mothers don’t let boys contact their “shadow selves,” women school teachers teach values that demean the father, and mothers find instinctual masculine traits to be false (ibid:99). And elsewhere Clatterbaugh (1990:94-95) notes that Bly has said that feminism hurts men and holds them back from becoming themselves (see Bly 1987:2-3; Bly 1985), and that feminists have wounded men (see Bly 1985).

Schwalbe claims that the MMM subconsciously (and sometimes consciously) reproduces and reinforces sexism and sexist stereotypes (Schwalbe 1996), and in his observation of mythopoetic groups over a period of two years, he noted that sexist, anti-feminist, and anti-female imagery and comments were seldom challenged (Schwalbe

1996:154). By far the most dramatic and often quoted example of such behaviour is a famous exchange which occurred at one of Bly's retreats between him and a man in the audience: "'Robert, when we tell our women our desires, they tell us we're wrong,' shouts one camper. 'So,' says Bly, 'then you bust them in the mouth because no one has the right to tell another person what their true desires are'" (Chapple and Talbot 1990:196). Bly and the MMM have been lambasted about this incident time and again by feminist and profeminist scholars, who claim that it typifies the MMM's attitude toward women.

Another portrayal of women which troubles some critics more than the overt sexism and misogyny noted above, is the mythic portrayal of women and the appropriation of the feminine by the movement. Sabo (1995) notes that the MMM employs mythic portrayals of women, and not real women, citing the second-best-selling text of the movement, *Fire in the Belly* (1991) by Sam Keen, as an example. Sabo and others feel that Keen's and the movement's mythologizing of "WOMAN" is dangerous because it divorces men from real, individual women by turning them into mythic objects.

In this fashion, not only are men appropriating other cultures' customs, but they are also appropriating women or the idea of the feminine: according to Carlin (1992:122), playing with masculinity may be fun, but it fails to take into account that it is defined by what it is not—the "shadow," the "inferior," the "other," in mythopoetic terms. Carlin claims that this is nothing but recycled imperialism, whereby women function as mirrors of men's centrality (1992:119; see also Caputi and MacKenzie 1992:73). Furthermore, Horowitz states that this process of "Othering" women and the

feminine, and the deeply entrenched mythopoetic notion that men must separate from women to become men, merely increases polarized gender relations by its superficial and mechanical view of equality (1993).

Reproduction of Traditional Gender Norms

Such a mechanical view of equality based upon denial of the feminine, these authors note, is also bound up with traditional norms of masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality. According to Kimmel and Kaufman (1995), due to its demographic makeup and its failure to incorporate any kind of serious sociological analysis, the MMM reproduces the dominant social norms in which it is embedded.

Thus, the spiritual quest for authentic and deep manhood reproduces traditional norms of masculinity and femininity, of heterosexuality, and, in our culture, monogamous marriage; in short, the men's movement retrieval of mythic manhood reproduces the entire political package that Gayle Rubin called the "sex-gender system." In the present, as in the mythical past, the demonstration of manhood becomes associated with a relentless repudiation of the feminine. (24; see also Clatterbaugh 1995; Caputi and MacKenzie 1992)

Gutterman (1995) also notes that Bly's whole argument is based upon this male/female, Self/ Other dichotomy, and warns that perceiving identity within this absolutist binary framework presents a danger. Identity requires difference and its conversion into otherness to secure its own self certainty. This strategy of reproduction thus makes Bly and others suppress destabilizing agents such as sexual ambiguity or homosexuality (167). This theme has been taken up by other authors as well (see also Murray 1995; Randall 1992; Clatterbaugh 1995), as Bly especially has been criticized for his ignoring or downplaying of homosexuality in mythopoetic men's work.

Essentialism

The MMM is deeply and unashamedly essentialist (Clatterbaugh 1995:50; Caputi and MacKenzie 1992), and this presents a problem for many scholars, for essentialism “plays a central role in historical patriarchal ideology” (Clatterbaugh 1995:49), and

leads the men’s movement to adopt a version of manhood that corresponds rather neatly with our society’s dominant conception of masculinity—man as warrior and conqueror—and to suggest that this represents the quintessence of manhood. (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995:25; see also Brown 1992)

Not only does essentialism reproduce traditional conceptions of gender and patriarchal social structures, but it also promotes separatism and distrust—men are wounded by women, only men can “make” other men, and only men can heal men (Clatterbaugh 1995:51). But perhaps even more disturbing, especially to feminist scholars, is the process whereby essentialism blends into moral permissiveness: men can be violent because it’s just their nature (Caputi and MacKenzie 1992:72-74; see also Clatterbaugh 1995:54).

Depth Psychology and the Mythopoetic Men’s Movement

The essentialism that underlies the work of the mythopoetics is based upon depth psychology, especially the work of Carl Jung. Feminist and profeminist scholars have looked at the way that this psychology is used by the movement and found many problems. First of all, there is the claim that the MMM simplifies Freud, Jung, and depth psychologists to suit their needs (Kimmel 1995c). Clatterbaugh echoes this by claiming that the movement simplifies archetypes and makes them very ambiguous, thereby allowing them to explain whatever they want (1995:51). This argument parallels

the criticism that mythopoetic leaders pick and choose whatever stories suit them, and interpret those stories to suit their needs also.

Clatterbaugh also claims that there is actually no evidence that archetypes even exist (*ibid*). Sabo echoes this by stating that human psychology is a cultural phenomenon, a social construction; identity and behaviour are less informed by myths (and archetypes) than by political and economic circumstances (1995:69).

The conservatism and sexism inherent in much depth psychology is also criticized by these authors. Kimmel and Kaufman (1995) claim that the MMM “embraces a traditional and rather conservative, rendering of psychoanalytic theory” (27). It is also stressed that this conservatism exists in depth psychology because it existed in its creators—Clatterbaugh (1990) points out the undeniable sexism in Jung’s writings and the writings of post-Jungians, like Robert Johnson (see Johnson 1988).

Additionally, Kimmel and Kaufman (1995) not only believe that the MMM uses a traditional, conservative, and sexist reading of depth psychology, but also that its psychoanalytical diagnosis of the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the need to break from the mother is incorrect.

2.0.3 Cultural Appropriation and the Mythopoetic Men’s Movement

Profeminist critics of the MMM have not overlooked the existence of enormous cultural appropriation in it, noting its selectivity (Connell 1995:92-93; Kimmel and Kaufman 1995:28-31; Wolf-Light 1995:216; see also Bonnett 1996), its disrespectfulness and racism (Goldberg 1995; Kimmel and Kaufman 1995:31; Brod 1995:95; Connell 1995:84), and its decontextualization (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995; Wolf-Light 1995; Connell 1995:92). As with many aspects of the MMM, their response

to its appropriation of other cultures is not only critical, but also cynical: “Bly and the others wander through anthropological literature like postmodern tourists, as if the world’s cultures were an enormous shopping mall filled with ritual boutiques” (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995:28-29).

Although not feminist in nature, Alistair Bonnett’s recent article (1996) also discusses the cultural appropriation of the MMM. Bonnett claims that “the movement expresses its gender essentialism through reworked colonialist notions of ‘racial’ and landscape identity” (Bonnett 1996:280-281), which allows mythopoetic men to not only feel powerful, but to act out and naturalize their contradictory experiences of power (284).

The issues of cultural and symbolic appropriation raised by feminist and profeminist critics of the MMM are extremely current in the social sciences at this moment. During my research on the MMM, I witnessed cultural and symbolic appropriation constantly. I will discuss them briefly in the conclusion.

2.1 SUMMARY

The only coherent body of scholarly literature on the MMM has been written by feminist and profeminist scholars. The reception of the movement in this literature is unequivocally negative: although some authors do see promise in the existence of the MMM, all of them express concerns over the politics or lack of them in it, and the damage that may result from this fact. Specifically criticized within the movement are its implicit patriarchy, its traditional gender norms, its blindness to institutional power

and class structures, its anti-female and anti-feminist overtones, its essentialism and misdiagnosed psychoanalytical basis, and its racism and cultural appropriation.

Although the recent volume by Kimmel (1995a) invites mythopoetic leaders to dialogue with profeminist scholars, there is no real dialogue in the text, but merely two polarities of thought which seem no closer to reconciliation than they ever were. My fieldwork with mythopoetic men also reinforced this apparent situation, as many of them expressed the profeminist men's movement as feeling very foreign to them. One informant even said that he did not consider it a part of what he was doing, but a part of the women's movement.

One of my hopes is that this thesis will raise awareness of what mythopoetic men's work is about, and perhaps in doing so facilitate better understanding and cooperation between these two groups, which are indeed quite far apart, and yet have important causes, passion in their hearts, and the potential to do great good.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Of all the human sciences and studies anthropology is most deeply rooted in the social and subjective experience of the inquirer. –Victor Turner. “Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience”

In the previous chapter I summarized the only extant body of academic literature on the MMM, written by feminist and profeminist scholars and based in political critique. Although a discussion of these critiques in their own right would certainly prove a worthwhile exercise, my focus here is instead upon the research methodology that was used in their construction. While this body of criticism has raised some important questions about the mythopoetics’ work, its nonanthropological perspective and political focus necessarily precludes collection of a certain body of data and arrival at a certain range of conclusions. Specifically, the methodology of the feminist/profeminist critique of the MMM lacks a phenomenologically and experientially based fieldwork approach, and an accompanying theoretical framework capable of interpreting such data as this approach would elicit. The door has thus been left wide open for a deeper study of the MMM, based in phenomenology and full experiential participation. After a brief discussion of the methodology of feminist and profeminist critiques of the movement, I will outline the experiential methodology that I used in just such a study.

3.0 METHODOLOGY OF THE FEMINIST/ PROFEMINIST CRITIQUE OF THE MYTHOPOETIC MEN'S MOVEMENT

A pertinent question to ask about the feminist/ profeminist literature is how did the authors arrive at these conclusions? In other words, what research methodologies did they employ in their analyses of the MMM? For the majority of the articles published, we have no way of knowing, because methodology is seldom, and if ever, ambiguously, discussed.

Of all of the publications on the MMM from a feminist or profeminist perspective, in fact of all publications I have thus far encountered on the movement, only a few mention any kind of participation in or actual observation of mythopoetic activities, and only one publication, Schwalbe's *Unlocking the Iron Cage* (1996), lists sustained fieldwork as a research strategy used³. It appears that the data used by these scholars consists primarily of the texts written by the leaders of the movement, and occasionally of the accounts of a handful of participants, usually journalists, at mythopoetic gatherings.

In more than half of the articles written by feminist and profeminist scholars, the primary source of data on the movement cited is Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1992). Another favourite source is the series of five books by Moore and Gillette (1990) on the four archetypes of the mature masculine. The research methodology followed by feminist and profeminist critics of the movement thus appears to be generalization from the most popular texts of the movement, such as these, to the activities of the entire

³ Interestingly, although a profeminist sociologist, Schwalbe's conclusions depart the most from other profeminist writers and are the only ones to approach the conclusions which I will later present.

MMM.

The feminist/ profeminist critique of the MMM is therefore, and self-admittedly in many cases, based primarily upon a *textual interpretation* of the movement. As noted above, there is seldom any mention of fieldwork or participation in the activities of the movement as a research strategy. And with the exception of Schwalbe's study, there is no reporting of phenomenology or the experience of the researcher; there is no question that experiential data has been left out of the research.

Like the feminist and profeminist critics of the MMM, I also began my investigation of it by surveying the books, articles, and internet postings of its major figures and resource centres. By reading Meade's *Men and the Water of Life* and Bly's *Iron John*, interviews with them and other mythopoetic leaders, articles written by mythopoetic men, and even advertisements for weekend retreats, I tried to get a sense of what the movement was all about. I *was* able to discern some elements common to it, such as drumming, story- and myth-telling, and ritual performances, as well as the general focus and intentions behind these activities. Yet as time passed, I began to realize that I could not say with any certainty what actually went on in a mythopoetic gathering. It soon became apparent that the only way I would be able to speak with authority about mythopoetic men's work would be to experience it myself. I thus decided to use a dual approach to my study on the MMM, one utilizing not only texts as data, but also actual fieldwork amongst mythopoetic men. In particular, I decided to use an *experiential approach* to studying the MMM.

3.1 EXPERIENTIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

What is coming to be known as *experiential anthropology*, or *experiential ethnography*, originated in part as a reaction to the textual focus of post-structuralism and post-modernism, which, like the research done by the feminist and profeminist scholars mentioned above, “is rarely informed from direct ethnographic fieldwork, or for that matter from the actual practice of any phenomenology” (Laughlin and McManus 1995:39). Poewe (1996), Hastrup (1987), Laughlin and McManus (1995) and others have delineated how such a text-based approach, in anthropology or any other field of inquiry which involves living subjects, can only be considered, in the final analysis, as poor science. Obversely, the thrust of experiential anthropology is to focus on the *lived experience* (Hastrup 1995) of the other, and for the anthropologist to try to approximate that experience to as great a degree as possible. Poewe, paraphrasing Bohannon (1995), further emphasizes the experiential shift away from the text, claiming that “...Experiential ethnographies are distinct from experimental ones and should be removed from the textualist lock-in” (Poewe 1996:181). And Hastrup goes so far as to say that “The *reality* of anthropology is not text-bound but life-bound” (Hastrup 1987:294).

Experiential anthropology can actually be traced back to the early psychology of William James, who reminded us that science begins in experience, and prescribed a radically empirical method of scientific inquiry. Jackson (1989) follows up on James’ prescription, and notes that the current quantum mechanical model of the inseparability of researcher and phenomenon under study vindicates James’ approach (3). And

paraphrasing James, Laughlin and McManus further state that “science should be grounded in experience, and should be open to any and all experiences had by human beings, regardless of cultural or personal history” (Laughlin and McManus 1995:36).

Although we know that the total sharing of experience with our informants is impossible (Lindquist 1995:7), we can try, in doing experiential ethnography, to enter the “world” of the other as much as possible (Hastrup 1987). “The role model of a fieldworker is no longer a cool and detached observer. ‘professional stranger’, ‘the fly on the wall’, bearing the minimum necessary burden of participation in the name of dispassionate ‘observation’” (Lindquist 1995:6). Instead, we now recognize that the ethnographer is *actively engaged* in the construction of the ethnographic reality, that truth is an *intersubjective creation* (Hastrup 1995:16) involving researcher and those studied as mutually participating subjects.

This experiential approach to anthropological inquiry that I followed in my study of the MMM entails a number of commitments and research strategies by the anthropologist. First among these is the commitment by the anthropologist to “surrender himself to the culture” (Poewe 1996), to be willing to truly “go native,” with the recognition that he must eventually come back⁴ (Lindquist 1995); only by experiencing another culture in full, empathetic participation can the anthropologist speak with any authority about the experience of its members. Poewe goes so far as to say that “...if the ethnographic other experiences something, so can, indeed should, the anthropologist” (Poewe 1996:190).

⁴ Lindquist (1995) claims that during full experiential participation, the anthropologist does in fact go native, in that her “cognitive maps” begin to resemble those of her subjects as she approaches their level of competence in day to day activities and experiences.

Another strategy of the experiential approach begins with the recognition that not only are the notepad and the tape recorder tools of the anthropologist in the field, but *the entire person of the anthropologist is a research tool* (Olaveson 1995; Lindquist 1995). Based upon Lindquist's idea of cognitive mapping in the field (Lindquist 1995), and a biogenetic structural understanding of experience, it may be said that *the entire spectrum of experience is encoded upon the cognitive apparatus as well as the body of the anthropologist during fieldwork*. Seen from this perspective, the anthropologist, when doing experiential fieldwork, is herself *embodied knowledge*. Such a recognition entails a rigorous attention to phenomenology, and awareness of not only mental experience in the field, but also data which is collected *through the body* of the anthropologist. It also entails awareness of the preconditioned, intentional, and constructed basis of perception, and of how this necessarily impacts the experience of the anthropologist in the field, and the data gathered (see Laughlin 1988; Lindquist 1995; Prattis 1997:Chap. 11).

Viewed in this way, the question begs to be asked, what better informant can the anthropologist find than himself? Hence Hastrup's (1987) and Jackson's (1989) suggestion of *becoming one's own informant*.

A radically empirical method *includes* the experience of the observer and defines the experimental field as one of interactions and intersubjectivity. Accordingly, we make ourselves experimental subjects and treat our experiences as primary data. (Jackson 1989:3)

Thus, in the experiential approach, any and all of the experience of the anthropologist in the field becomes data, and this is what makes crucial the experiential notion of truly

“entering the world” of the other (Hastrup 1987), and of attempting to meet the other as “one experiencing subject to another” (Lindquist 1995).

3.1.1 Experiential Anthropology and Nascent Spiritual Forms

After this brief discussion of the experiential approach, it is apparent that what is central to it is *full, direct, empathetic participation in the world of the other, with a special focus on personal phenomenology and mind/body awareness*. It is also apparent from surveying the extant literature on the MMM that such an approach has not been used by a single study yet. I believe, however, that such an approach is crucial not only to studies on the MMM, but in studies of other nascent spiritual forms also.

Lindquist sets the stage for such a conclusion in her discussion of her study of urban North American sweat lodge ceremonies (1995). She says that it is clear that, in studying traditional sweat lodge ceremonies, to understand their meaning to Native Americans it is feasible to use as data texts or informants’ accounts. However, for the anthropologist studying the meaning of modern, urban sweat lodge ceremonies, “the prerequisite is to share the little that can be shared—that preobjective bodily experience” (Lindquist 1995:22). This is necessary, she states, because the practice under study is not an established tradition, handed down orally through hundreds of years. Instead, it is *nascent*, or *syncretic ritual* (see Grimes 1995; Myerhoff 1982), and typifies the widespread experimentation going on in the evolving spiritual culture of the Western Hemisphere, including in the MMM.

This has direct implications for the study of the MMM. By most accounts it is barely ten years old. There is certainly no age-old tradition in the movement, nor are there authoritative texts capturing generations of experience and tradition. And

complicating matters even more, as feminist and profeminist critics note, the mythological and ritual borrowing of the movement is extremely arbitrary: individual groups and organizations survey the world's cultures and appropriate what suits their needs. Thus what one group does might vary significantly from the next. What the researcher is left with, then, as authoritative data, is his own, subjective experience of the activities of the movement. *I thus assert that any study of a nascent spiritual form, such as the mythopoetic men's movement, must begin in experience, in direct and full participation in the phenomenon under study.*

The feminist and profeminist critiques discussed above did not employ such an experiential approach in their research on the MMM. It is important to recognize a point I was reminded of by a colleague, however, that full experiential participation in the movement was never an option for feminist scholars, as most of the movement's activities are open to men only (Cohen 1997). Profeminist scholars, however, had a rich field of experiential data to mine in their studies, but did not do so, and I believe their conclusions about the movement reflect this. Although I do agree with their critiques of the movement's sometimes implicit racism and sexism, and of its potential for continuing patriarchy, it is my assertion that they have not achieved a comprehensive understanding of the movement, but instead offer surface criticisms of it based on the interpretation of texts and other people's accounts, and not their own mature phenomenology and full participation. More specifically, the profeminist critique has missed out on the *transformative* potential of the MMM.

Michael Schwalbe (1996), the only author to report engaging in sustained participant observation in the movement, does discuss experiences of transformation,

and recognizes the centrality of ritual to the MMM, yet downplays these in favour of political critique. His case exemplifies my point that engagement in participant observation in the MMM, even when it is performed in a state of disbelief and hesitation, as in Schwalbe's case, leads to alternative experiences and conclusions from the ones that were reached by previous studies. Schwalbe's and other feminist and profeminist authors' preconceived notions about the MMM, as well as the analytical framework and assumptions that they began their critiques with, prevented them from accessing a certain range of data and arriving at particular conclusions. Similarly, in my study I have chosen to focus on transformation, healing, and symbolic process, rather than political critique; my methods of data collection, my preconceived notions, and my theoretical maps therefore precluded my focusing on such political and sociological data, and my reaching such conclusions.

The difference between these two methodologies, however, lies in the fact that while I had similar reservations and limited actual knowledge about the MMM initially, I sought to deepen my knowledge through experiential participation. When I began my study of the MMM, I too was skeptical of what appeared to me to be a lot of New Age goofing around, and in fact have retained some reservations about many of the sillier activities I participated in. Unlike the profeminist scholars of the movement, however, I did not stop there, but engaged myself in experiential participation in the movement. This engagement allowed me to collect data which radically changed my conclusions about it, and I suspect that had profeminist scholars followed a similar research methodology, they too would have experienced and witnessed transformation, and arrived at some alternative conclusions.

My experience with mythopoetic men's work *was* transformative, and I personally witnessed transformation in the men with which I formed a community. By subjecting myself fully to it, by truly participating in the mythopoetics' world, I accomplished some of the personal goals which I set out for myself, and often witnessed other men reach similar objectives. It is precisely this type of data which profeminist scholars have missed, and which Schwalbe, despite his inability to suspend disbelief, began to observe when he participated in mythopoetic men's work.

3.2 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.2.1 Initial Research

In September 1995 I began my study of the MMM. After having decided upon the topic, I began archival research. Using some of the main texts of the movement, background books written on it (such as Harding 1992a; Clatterbaugh 1990; Taylor 1995), as well as articles found on-line and in the popular media, I began to develop a picture of what the movement entailed. I had chosen the movement because I suspected that it contained ritual and symbolic elements, my area of interest. My initial research confirmed this. I then began surveying theoretical models to come up with a synthesis with which to analyze my findings. This background and theoretical archival research was carried out intensively from September 1995 to April 1996.

After the first two months of background research on the movement, however, I began to feel that archival data was not giving me a true picture of the MMM. At this point I decided to implement a dual approach of archival and field-based research. My strategy was to begin with accounts of mythopoetic activities found in some of the

seminal texts of the movement and in background sources, and then let my personal experience in the field enrich what was written in these texts. As time progressed, however, I began to place more emphasis on the fieldwork component of the research. The conclusions I draw in later chapters are thus based primarily upon my field experiences. I use the mythopoetic texts to establish similarities or differences between my own experience and what is portrayed as occurring in the rest of the MMM.

3.2.2 Establishment of Field Contacts

In the fall of 1995 I began to establish field contacts in the Ottawa area. All of my research was done in the Ottawa area, for three reasons. The first is that Ottawa is in fact a hotbed of mythopoetic activity in Canada, and comparatively so with the United States also—there turned out to be ample opportunity for research on mythopoetic men's work in the area. The second is that I determined that because of financial and geographical considerations, traveling to other locations of mythopoetic activity (predominantly southern U.S. states) was unfeasible. The third reason for basing all of my field research in the Ottawa area is that I decided upon a strategy of long-term participation in mythopoetic groups, which enabled me to assess change and transformation in myself and other group members. It also enabled me to develop a better rapport with informants, and to collect data of more depth and detail than if I had simply attended groups or gatherings in distant cities once.

The way in which I established contacts was more through word of mouth and happenstance than by any systematic means. I was told of men I should contact about mythopoetic men's work, and also found them myself, as many are listed in local magazines, and even advertise their services there.

Initially, I established contact with only mythopoetic group “leaders”: men who were deeply involved in local men’s groups and activities⁵. Beginning in the fall of 1996, I then began attending two men’s groups on a regular basis. I located the groups through the early contacts I made with prominent men’s movement figures in the area.

3.2.3 Fieldwork

I conducted fieldwork from April 1996 to July 1997. The general approach I followed during all of my fieldwork was an experiential one. My constant aim was to immerse myself deeply in the MMM, a process which proved to be mentally and emotionally exhausting. I knew from the outset that studying a subject which had a healing focus, especially from an experiential perspective, would affect me deeply. Even as I began to read mythopoetic texts and theoretical works on ritual and healing, “things” began to surface for me, and as I got deeper and deeper into my fieldwork with mythopoetic men, my work began to have a personal impact on me. Doors were opened for me through my investigation of the MMM and group healing, especially into my past. Although such deep and personal involvement in the mythopoetics’ world has given me superior insights on it and has been an excellent research methodology, it also made for an extremely difficult and often painful year.

My experience in the field was intense and focused on deep experiential participation in the world of the MMM⁶. I attempted *to take my informants seriously, to suspend disbelief and act as if everything my informants said was true*, as Young and Goulet (1994) note is the imperative first step in respectful and serious ethnographic

⁵ I will discuss informants in more detail in chapter 4.

⁶ Although, as I will discuss later, I did encounter problems of identity revolving around my role as both participant and observer.

inquiry. I attempted to enter the world of the men that I participated with, sharing their goals, feelings, and problems. As I “moved” (Hastrup 1987) in the world of mythopoetic men, I soon began to view my fieldwork not only as professional obligation but as personal gratification. I came to enjoy and crave the contact with other men, the support, love, and sense of community and common struggle that I shared with them. In fact, in the beginning of my fieldwork, before interviews and group meetings I was nervous, reticent, and had constant thoughts of canceling the appointment. In the second half of my fieldwork, however, I looked forward to every group meeting, anticipating the warmth and support that it would give me.

Interviews

My fieldwork began with interviews. I primarily consulted two texts in preparation for them, *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (1988), and *Person to Person: Fieldwork, Dialogue, and the Hermeneutic Method* (1996). The latter was particularly elucidating and is a perfect translation of the experiential research methodology I wanted to follow into practical research methods and field situations. Michrina and Richards stress the personal, intersubjective nature of the relationship between researcher and informant, and how it is important to meet one’s informants as equal, mutually experiencing subjects. I was also guided in this respect by Blair and Prattis (1994). Throughout my interviews and participant observation I tried to put this experiential and humanistic emphasis into practice.

After I made contact with some local prominent figures in the movement, I asked them if they would mind talking to me about their experience in it. I was not turned down by one person I asked, yet this was a constant fear of mine, one which

caused me to word my requests carefully. I seldom used the word “interview,” because I was certain that its formality would frighten off prospective informants. Instead I found other euphemisms like “chat,” “talk,” “get your experience on,” and so on. In hindsight, I now realize that simply asking my informants if I could interview them about their experience would probably have produced the same responses.

I conducted a total of 16 formal interviews. All but 2 of these were tape recorded and transcribed onto hard copy. Thirteen were conducted with mythopoetic leaders. In these interviews, four different leaders were interviewed, and will be referred to from now on as “A”, “B”, “C”, and “D”⁷. “B”, “C”, and “D” were white males who have participated in and run mythopoetic groups, weekends, and events and have been to various mythopoetic trainings and conferences. The fourth informant, “A”, was a Native Canadian who facilitates healing work with men that shares many structural similarities with the work of the other men I interviewed. I conducted interviews with him on four separate occasions.

“A” was actually the first contact I made in the field. I am still unsure whether or not what “A” does with men can be classified as mythopoetic men’s work. “A” himself considers what he does to be traditional healing, as opposed to “stealing traditions,” as he and some other Native men accuse the mythopoetics of doing. I nevertheless continued interviewing him for a number of reasons. First, the times I spent with him were simply very powerful experiences. In all of my interviews and observation, I tried to get an intuitive, bodily sense of my informants—of who they were, of what they were saying, of their abilities and competence in this work. On every separate occasion with

⁷ For profiles of informants, see Appendix 3

“A”, I felt an overwhelming feeling of compassion and genuineness in him. I came to be sure that if there were men out there who could facilitate healing in other men, “A” was certainly one of them. Through my interviews with him I became convinced of his power and genuineness as a healer.

The second reason for my working with “A” was that the techniques he told me that he used during his healing work (although he was reticent to share them with me), were similar to the ones that I was discovering were used by mythopoetic men. I thus grouped “A”’s work with the mythopoetics’ work due to the fact that they used similar techniques to heal men, albeit in slightly different cultural contexts. A final reason for working extensively with “A” was that I wanted to get his perspective on the cultural appropriation of Native healing practices.

In addition to mythopoetic leaders, members of one of the two mythopoetic groups that I attended regularly were interviewed also. A total of 3 interviews were conducted with 3 different group members. This tactic of interviewing members of one group just once could be considered a methodological weakness of this study; making claims about the effect that mythopoetic group work has had on people whom I only interviewed once, as well as about their feelings toward it, is problematic. Multiple interviews would have been the best way to make judgements of this nature. However, a number of reasons contributed to this methodological strategy.

I was advised by my supervisor to conduct no more than about 15 to 20 interviews for my M.A. thesis. With this limitation in mind, I chose a specific strategy to get “inside the mythopoetic men’s movement.” My strategy was to collect data on what actually occurred in mythopoetic group work, on the experience of being a *member*

of such a group, by deep participation in it, by becoming my own informant. By simply being a male, I automatically had access to this data, as this is the only real prerequisite to joining a men's group.

On the other hand, I could not experience *leading* men's groups and being heavily involved in the MMM for a number of years. I therefore knew that to gain access to this realm of experience, I would have to rely upon interviewing mythopoetic leaders. This was thus the technique that I primarily used to access data about the techniques used, the rationale behind them, how success is evaluated, etc.—data about *facilitating* mythopoetic men's work⁸.

It was therefore for these reasons that I chose to focus most of my interview time on mythopoetic leaders, rather than group members. I knew that my best informant would be myself, that I would be gathering a wealth of data on the experience of being a member of a mythopoetic men's group from participant observation. In addition, I was also able to record apparent signs of the gradual transformation and participation of other group members by my participation with them, despite my lack of asking them specific questions in the one-on-one interview setting. Despite all of this, conducting several interviews with all of the men I attended groups with would have been the optimal strategy for data collection, could I have followed it.

The interviews usually occurred in coffee shops or restaurants, although a few were done in informants' houses and in my house, and one took place in a local park. Although public locations were usually noisy and often made transcription difficult

⁸ To my surprise, however, interviewing was not the only avenue open to me, as I was able to have an experience of facilitating a major mythopoetic event, which I will discuss later.

later, they were usually picked because I could not think of a more quiet place to meet that was convenient for both of us, and because a coffee shop was usually the suggestion of the informant, and I was always so relieved to be granted an interview that I accepted whatever location they offered. Again, in hindsight, I now realize that people are more willing and eager to share their knowledge with an interested researcher than I had previously thought, and negotiating the best possible place and time for an interview will not necessarily scare them off. Knowing this before would have saved me a lot of transcribing time.

The interviews ranged in duration from 40 minutes to two and a half hours. Before each interview with a new informant, I gave them a consent form, which they and I both signed (see Appendix 1). The form briefly explains my project, and I also usually explained it to them on the phone or in person when I arranged the interview. I instructed them that they did not have to answer anything they did not want to, and that they could terminate the interview at any time.

Having read a lot of the literature on reflexivity, and on the experiential approach to fieldwork, I was conscious of trying to reduce my bias on the research process, yet also of how I was an inevitable participant in its construction. Among the ways I sought to translate these concerns into actual research techniques (and they proved difficult to translate), was my keeping an "interview journal." Since the tape recorder looked after collecting auditory data during interviews, I attempted to record unspoken responses and factors. I primarily recorded in my interview journal instances when I thought I had biased the subject with a perhaps unnecessary comment or prompt,

and when they appeared, through their body language, to be uncomfortable. I took these into consideration when analyzing the data.

My interview questions were open-ended. I always brought a list of questions to interviews, although I did not always follow them exactly (for a list of sample questions used during interviews, see Appendix 2). My technique was to go into the interviews with 5-8 general areas to discuss, which I would introduce with a very broad question such as, "How do you use ritual in a men's group?" This would inevitably lead to more precise areas of discussion. Usually I just allowed the informant to take the conversation where he would.

My method of coming up with questions was relatively simple: I knew specific areas that I wanted to investigate, such as ritual, mythology and archetypal psychology, healing, past experience in men's groups, how they got involved in men's groups, and so on. I then composed two initial lists of questions, one for mythopoetic leaders and one for group members, centring around these areas. The answers I received during interviews then helped me to gradually narrow my focus. Although my questions did become more precise and focused, my research on the MMM has shown me that it is an extremely experience-based phenomenon, and often eludes linguistic classification. I was thus often frustrated by informants' vague or ambiguous answers. For example, when I wanted a concrete account of how one knows when transformation is occurring in the ritual setting, all they could say were things like,

That's a good question. I don't know how I know. UMMM, in ways that I could put it into words, it feels right. I feel like I'm on top of it, and, I'm not lost, I'm not, confused, I'm just, there. UMMM... even then that's not really correct, because sometimes I am confused and I'm okay with my confusion. And that's, okay too...

It thus became apparent to me how central my own experience would be to my truly understanding mythopoetic men's work.

Participant Observation

There is no question about who my best informant was during my study of the MMM. Although from "A" I got the best intuitive sense of what this type of healing is fundamentally about, no one taught me as much about mythopoetic men's work and the process of healing, ritual, and community as myself. Through extensive participation in men's groups, I became my own informant; I tried to enter the world of mythopoetic men as fully as I could, in the process "surrendering myself" to the world I was studying.

As guides in putting my experiential and phenomenological research philosophy into practice during participant observation, I used the methodology texts mentioned above in "Interviews." In addition, I consulted Emerson, Fretz and Shaw's *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (1995), which discusses not only note-taking, but everything from conducting observation to writing an ethnography. One particular issue I was reminded of by it was not to editorialize in writing up notes, but to report details in a more neutral fashion, something I am not prone to do.

From March 1996 to July 1997 I attended more than 25 men's group meetings. One of these meetings was during the summer of 1996. I had reached by telephone a contact person for Sterling Men's Teams, which are outreach men's groups formed by men who have gone on "the Sterling weekend" (an initiatory weekend retreat). I expressed interest in learning more about Sterling men's work, both academically and

personally, and the person I spoke with encouraged me to come out to a team meeting. It was held in a park in the Ottawa area and attended by 7 men, including myself. After the meeting I took about 6 pages of notes.

All other participant observation in men's groups occurred within two groups which I attended regularly from the fall of 1996 to the summer of 1997. The first group that I attended I call Group 2 (Gr2), because although I attended a meeting of it in March of 1996, I did not return to it until November, after I had already joined another group, Group 1 (Gr1).

My first attendance at Gr2 was my first attendance ever of a men's group. I got the time and location of the group from a contact person in a local publication, and called the person who hosts it. He invited me to join them at the next meeting.

I went to the meeting with a set of wild expectations about what I would find, such as half-naked men drumming, dancing around, and telling other people's myths. What I instead found was a group of 3 ordinary guys sitting around talking about ourselves for an hour and a half. I left that meeting in a state of depression and disillusionment. My first instance of participant observation of a mythopoetic men's group turned out to be nothing like I thought it would be, and I wondered if there even was any mythopoetic men's work going on in Ottawa.

Because of my disappointing first fieldwork experience, I did not return to a mythopoetic men's group for more than six months. I instead dove back into background material on the movement and symbolic anthropological theory.

When I finally began sustained observation in a group, it was not with the group I attended in March but with a group that was just being put together by "E", a man who

had just moved here from another province, and had been involved in mythopoetic men's work for over 4 years. I was given his name and number by "C", a mythopoetic leader I had been interviewing. I called "E" and was told the time and date of the first meeting. From that day forward I was a member of Gr1.

A few weeks after joining Gr1, I decided that I wanted to do observation in another group also, to broaden my sample. I initially wanted to join three to four groups, but soon realized that this would accumulate far too much data for me to deal with. I instead chose the strategy of long-term, intense participation in a smaller number of groups, since this would allow me to make detailed observations and notes of the activities of each group, and of its effects both on me and on other members, over a period of time. I deemed this an essential approach, since I had been told by those I had interviewed and had encountered in the literature that men's work does not just happen instantly—it is a gradual process. I thus decided to limit my group participation to two groups, but to get as deeply involved in these as I could. In the end, I still accumulated a very large amount of data.

As my second locus of participant observation, I chose to return to Gr2, the one I had attended in March. My reasons for this were: i) I already knew about its existence and had an "in"; ii) I did not want to spend much more time looking for another group to participate in, and I had not really found any other groups that had even a tinge of "mythopoeticness" to them; and iii) after attendance at a couple of Gr1 meetings, it seemed to me that whereas Gr1 definitely had mythopoetic elements in it, and "E", the group's de facto leader, had a mythopoetic background, Gr2 had the same healing focus

as Gr1, but very few mythopoetic elements⁹. I thus thought that Gr2 would provide an interesting contrast to Gr1, and that since I could not survey many groups in this limited project, I could at least vary my sample a little.

Both Groups 1 and 2 met every two weeks, at a member's house. The meetings were in the evenings and usually lasted from two to two and a half hours. The groups I attended had four and three members respectively including myself (although two more men later joined Gr1), thus making them uncharacteristically small; indeed, getting more members was often a topic of discussion at meetings. I attended each group regularly from November 1996 to July 1997, missing only three meetings in Gr1, and four in Gr2.

I resolved that I would take notes on my computer when I arrived home at night after each meeting, so the night's events would still be fresh in my mind; this was rarely the case, however. Sometimes I would write up my notes the next morning, sometimes a couple of days later, and sometimes a week later. This was a constant source of guilt for me, as I knew that writing them up immediately was the best way to take accurate notes.

My notes on group meetings averaged about 8 pages in length, when I was taking extensive notes. However, after about the fifteenth instance of participant observation, I began scaling back my notes. Initially, I recorded physical setting, procedure of the meeting, actions and words of the members, and my own actions, words, and phenomenology. My scaled back notes were considerably less detailed, however (averaging about 4 pages in length), and focused mainly on my phenomenology and any noteworthy body language or verbal utterances by the other

⁹ Descriptions of each group follow in chapter 4.

members, as well as any unusual ritual procedures or changes in the setting. I adopted this strategy because I was simply accumulating too much data to manage, and because I had begun to notice that certain elements of the meetings, such as setting, props, and ritual procedures, followed a predictable pattern every meeting. I thus decided to record only aberrations in these patterns, and to focus more on my own process of healing, and any significant occurrences in the other men.

To conclude my discussion of participant observation, below I present a passage taken from my notes on a night's meeting, which highlight the process of discovery and maturation that I underwent during my fieldwork.

Since I've "decided that my fieldwork is over," I notice that I am much more comfortable, and relaxed at meetings. Tonight was no exception. Tonight was an amazing meeting for me. I feel that I made leaps and bounds at it. When I go to meetings now, it is more because I want to than because I have to. It is more of a personal motivation. I realize that I am also going because I need to do participant observation, but I am not worried about observing every detail anymore. I'm more interested in the experience that I have. I feel more free, and I'm also participating much more in the meetings. Before I was working under the assumption that if I did anything to "alter" the meeting, I was tainting, ruining, or biasing the data. Now I realize, especially with the subject matter that I am working with, that I am an integral part of what happens at meetings, I am a co-creator of it. I now think that despite the fact that theoretically I do not acknowledge that the researcher can remove himself from the milieu and process of research, practically I was trying, at least a little, not to disturb the "pristine research setting." (Gr1, Mar. 25)

This excerpt illustrates the process of how initially, although I was conscious of trying to be reflexive and experientially grounded, I was still abstracting myself from participation. During group meetings I was careful to "stand back" and not disrupt the group process and influence the other members. When I decided to scale back my notes, however, roughly one month after my last interview was conducted, my anxiety in the

field dissipated. I had in a sense decided that my fieldwork was over, that there was no longer any pressure to mentally record every little detail and write it up later. This was a liberating experience for me in the field. I no longer felt the pressure and anxiety before going to a meeting, and actually began to enjoy meetings not just occasionally, but every time. My participant observation became less like work, and more like an important part of my life. In fact, my men's groups became very important parts of my life.

3.2.4 Other Research Activities

In addition to interviewing and participant observation, I engaged in two other projects of significance during my study of the MMM.

As a contribution to the men's community from which I was gaining so much knowledge and experience, I agreed to write a regular column for Canada's only national men's journal, *Everyman*, published bimonthly in Ottawa. From September 1996 until August 1997 I published 6 columns. The title of my column was the rather pedestrian "Academic Arguments"; I was to infuse the journal with an academic tinge. Although I am not very satisfied with most of what I wrote for the journal, it was an interesting experience, and I am glad that I could give something back to those who gave so much to me.

A final event of significance in my research was my cooperation with local mythopoetic leaders in putting on a men's retreat in May 1997. When the other organizers approached me in March and asked if I would be a co-organizer, I was literally flabbergasted. The idea that they thought I was any kind of authority on men's work astonished me. I told them this, but they insisted that I be a part of the weekend. I agreed, and worked closely with them over the next two months. The experience was

invaluable to my understanding of the mythopoetic men's movement, and gave me an inside perspective on it which I could not have received any other way.

3.2.5 Data Analysis

I began coding interview transcripts and fieldnotes in April of 1997. With well over one hundred pages of data to analyze, this was a very involved process.

From the beginning of this project, I had in mind specific areas which I wanted to focus on in the MMM, and a particular set of theories with which to analyze them. There is no question that I went into the field with a preconceived model within which to plug my data. As the project progressed, however, I attempted to incorporate some of the principles of grounded theory to my data collection and analysis: I attempted to keep my areas of inquiry fairly broad, to allow my informants to steer conversations where they would, and to allow for concepts to emerge from interactions in the field rather than the theoretical models I was using. Toward this end my interviews were kept fairly open-ended.

In addition to allowing concepts and definitions to emerge during interviews, I also followed this process during the coding of data. I began by looking very broadly at three main concepts in the data: ritual, archetypes, and healing. From these classifications I allowed other categories to emerge from the data, such as "Wholing, Wholeness, and Spirituality," "Sacred and Safe Space," and "Symbolism of the Four Quadrants." There is no question that I was looking for certain concepts and ways of operationalizing concepts in the data, but I attempted to allow the informants' words to speak for themselves as much as possible in formulating categories of analysis.

As I will mention later, this proved to be not too difficult, since my informants discussed and used elements such as ritual in quite rational and explicit ways, necessitating little operationalizing and translating of informants' terms into esoteric categories of analysis; often their conceptualizations of terms and actions were very similar to the ones used in my theoretical framework.

Once my data had been coded, I began to integrate it with the theoretical models I had chosen for analysis, and began writing chapters 4 and 5, where the bulk of the data is presented. Although I had initially intended to try to check my interpretations of data and points of analysis with informants, time constraints made this possible in informal ways only. During several conversations with informants, I recounted some of their thoughts and how I intended to model them, but without the presence of interview and fieldnote transcripts.

Having presented the findings of previous studies and their methodological weaknesses, and the methodology used in this study to attempt to overcome them, I now turn, in chapter 4, to a discussion of what I perceive as being the "heart" of the MMM—ritual and archetypes.

Chapter 4: Ritual and Archetypes Within the Mythopoetic Men's Movement

*Most premodern peoples accepted myths as being literally true, with little or no reflection upon their deeper significance. Modernity has denied myth and ritual any significance at all, while at the same time living according to unexamined myths of a scientific and rational nature. A postmodern reappropriation of mythic imagination and ritual process acknowledges both their emotional and cognitive significance. We re-create the myths and participate in the rituals, understanding that they are a useful psychological means of getting to otherwise blocked Libido. Myth provides a mindset within which we can call up the archetypes. Ritual is the process of invitation and dialogue. – Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, *The King Within**

As I stated in chapter 1, when I decided to do graduate research, I was initially motivated not by a particular social phenomenon, but by a particular body of anthropological theory. For a number of years I have been especially drawn to symbolic anthropological theory. I thus picked the mythopoetic men's movement as a subject of study, because it appeared to contain symbols and symbolic complexes, and ritual enactment, key elements in the symbolic process. After a gradual process of experiential immersion in mythopoetic men's work, it became apparent to me that the MMM *is* an inherently symbolic phenomenon, and that symbolic complexes and ritual enactment play fundamental parts in it.

In this chapter I will summarize and present examples of the data that I collected on the MMM. I will begin with a discussion of the general aims and orientation of the movement, which centre around healing. After providing this contextualization, I will

then discuss what I have determined to be the two fundamental building blocks of mythopoetic men's work from a symbolic anthropological perspective: ritual and ritualization, and archetypal symbolic complexes.

The field data that I base the following discussion on consists of personal interviews and notes taken on my own participation in mythopoetic men's work over a period of approximately one year. The personal interviews were conducted with "leaders," those who had facilitated groups, workshops, conferences, and been involved in the movement for some time, and "participants," men like myself who had recently joined a group, or have been involved in mythopoetic work for some time, but not to the extent that the leaders have. In addition to interview data, more than 90 pages of notes on my participation in two men's groups supports my discussion, as well as my own unwritten experience of mythopoetic men's work, including participation in facilitating a mythopoetic men's weekend in May of 1997.

4.0 AIMS AND ORIENTATION OF THE MOVEMENT

It was initially difficult to determine what the aims of the mythopoetic men's movement were. The books written by such major figures of the movement as Robert Bly and Michael Meade are, characteristically, poetic and narrative in style, offering few hard and fast rules as to how to "do" mythopoetic men's work, and as to what purpose it is supposed to achieve. Some mythopoetic texts are more definitive, however (see e.g. Taylor 1995).

My interviews with mythopoetic leaders and group participants produced similar ambiguity initially; informants were reluctant to be specific. As I continued to probe the

nature of mythopoetic men's work, however, and as my own engagement in it deepened, a central aim of the movement began to appear: *mythopoetic men's work seems to be fundamentally about healing, or what mythopoetic men variously call "growth," "personal growth," "positive change," or "transformation."*

Upon realizing the therapeutic and "self-help" orientation of the movement, my inclination was immediately to classify it with Alcoholics Anonymous and other recovery and 12-step groups. Although it shares some similarities with these groups, and mythopoetic men often have histories in these programs, however, there is more to mythopoetic men's work than this. It has many faces. sometimes looking like group psychotherapy; like one big boys' club; like New Age spirituality; and like a group of human beings just sharing their stories. The MMM is all of these, and resists being classified for this reason. It is an enigma, drawing upon diverse approaches, techniques, and ideas. The one binding characteristic of the MMM is its focus on healing and personal growth.

My interviews with mythopoetic men supported this conclusion. In the following interview excerpt, "B", who does mythopoetic men's work, yet doesn't like to call himself mythopoetic, discusses this.

Maybe the best question is what do we want? What is the vision? What is it that men want? I think there's a bunch of men who want to heal. And they don't know exactly what that means, but they know something about the process. The mythopoetics fall into that pretty well. The mythopoetics typically want to heal; they've got in touch with a whole bunch of pain in their lives, and that's what's normally meant by "the men's movement," and they want to fix their lives up¹⁰. (B1:2)

¹⁰ When citing interview transcripts, a capital letter will indicate the informant, the following number will indicate the interview number, and the number following the colon will indicate the page number of the transcript. Fieldnote citations will indicate which group the note is from, the date of the meeting, and the page number of the transcript.

4.0.1 “Wholing” and Spirituality

Once it became apparent that healing was the primary focus of the MMM, I attempted to clarify its definition of healing. Operationalizing this definition in any kind of precise way proved to be difficult. Some of the mythopoetic men that I spoke to were reluctant to even call what they did “healing,” despite the fact that, as I began to work closely with them, their words and actions made this focus clear. They found it even more difficult, however, to describe what this healing entailed, apart from using one concept repeatedly—that of *wholeness*.

It is actually to be expected that the concept of wholeness would play a central role in the MMM, since it is central in Jungian psychology and archetypal psychology, two of the biggest influences on the movement’s ideology. Most of the literature that can be classified as belonging to the MMM involves the concept of wholeness, especially as a goal that humans are inherently striving for. The goal of mythopoetic men’s work appears to be to help men to achieve wholeness, by integrating the repressed and unwelcome parts of themselves. Joseph Jastrab, for example, in *Sacred Manhood, Sacred Earth*, repeatedly mentions wholeness as the ultimate goal for humans to achieve, and the “Vision Quests” he facilitates which the book is based upon are structured to help men to achieve it: “Our life task is to realize wholeness, to live it fully in all of its beautiful and terrifying complexity, in a place where wholeness seems not possible” (Jastrab 1994:97).

In the men that I worked with, and in mythopoetic texts, this conception of healing as regaining wholeness was also intricately bound up with the notion of “the

spiritual”; not only did several of my informants define the healing work they did in the MMM as a drive toward wholeness, but they likened healing and seeking wholeness with spirituality, and said that they saw mythopoetic work as spiritual in nature.

And so that is healing, that is wholing, heal comes from the root whole, and it is healing to have your whole self, whatever that may be, welcomed into the, into the group. You set it up so that that part of you is welcome there too. So spiritual work is simply allowing for the whole person, whether it's the economic or the physical... and particularly welcoming, because it's so often not welcomed, the values, the hesitations the needs that are so easily ignored or devalued around us. So making those really welcome, transformation happens when those can be welcomed. (C2:5)

Tim: So would you say then that this sort of men's work is definitely about healing in that sense?

Yes, about becoming whole.

Tim: And would you say that that's the same as spiritual work?

Yes, I have [it] that the object of spiritual work is about becoming whole also. Yeah, most of the great spiritual leaders have made that clear, if you read their writings, but were misinterpreted by their followers into dualistic good and bad. It's not about being good or bad, its about being whole. (B1:12)

The mythopoetics I spoke and worked with, and many mythopoetic authors thus see their work as a quest to become more whole. Furthermore, they see this work as spiritual and powerful: “Our work and play this morning has been a sacrament as holy as I have ever experienced in any church. Is this not true religion, this humble offering of ourselves to the soil? And the wholeness remembered, is that not the purpose of all liturgy?” (Jastrab 1994:92).

4.0.2 The Walking Wounded, and Living from Hurt

“Wounding” is a word that surfaces in mythopoetic men’s work frequently. Mythopoetic men, drawing once again on psychological theory, claim that all human beings are wounded in some way, that they carry around inside them wounds from earlier experiences, especially those from childhood (see e.g. Moore and Gillette 1992:32). Additionally, men have distinctive wounds which form around experiences and issues particular to men. These wounds are the focus of the healing that goes on in the MMM.

Mythopoetic men claim that men today, in the words of “A”, are “living their lives from the experience of hurt.” Through the mechanism of repetition compulsion, many men repeat the same childhood traumas they suffered, often at the hands of their parents (Moore and Gillette 1992:202). Men thus *react* to their environment, including their wives, children, jobs, or the drive home after work, from their earlier experiences of hurt, rather than *acting* from a more balanced sense of self. Again, this is basic psychotherapeutic theory, and is true of not just men but all human beings, but it is the basic model of pain and healing that the MMM uses, and accounts for the use of psychotherapeutic techniques and the similarities with psychotherapy that I encountered in my own group work, in interviews with informants, and in the texts of the movement.

One of the particular goals of mythopoetic men’s work, then, is to help men to recognize how they live their lives from “the experience of hurt,” and to help them to get past that experience. My informants spoke about this approach, and their own experience of it:

Maybe I'm feeling rejected, you know, I'm scared I'm losing somebody or they're rejecting me. So that kind of process is normally facilitated by a couple of other men. So they would help me trace that thing back. You know, maybe it's all about rejection as a child. My father wasn't home, whatever. It's about going back there and dealing with some of that stuff. If you don't go back there and deal with it, at least you're aware, okay, yeah, that's where that thing comes from, that every time somebody does that to me... But the next step is to okay, go back in there and try and rework it... And usually there'll be some kind of a process you can do to go back in there and you know really truly understand, you deserve to be loved and have attention if you didn't get it, you can be angry about that, you can try to get what you really need, you know, to love yourself... (E1:5-6)

As I began my research into the MMM and started to immerse myself in the world of the mythopoeists, I knew that the experience would have a strong personal effect on me. Even so, I underestimated how great the effect would be. I too began to delve into earlier experiences, and have come to realize how much *my* personality and how *I* react to the world are conditioned by my past experiences of hurt. During an interview with "A", we discussed these. The experience was a very emotional one for me, and one which I will never forget. I always felt an indescribable genuineness and humanness in "A", and came to respect him enormously. The following excerpt illustrates the type of approach he and other group facilitators use, and the power and compassion he possesses.

...and you're going to want to be a rescuer, you want to help her, you want to do the same thing you were doing for your brother the whole time you's were growing up, rescuing him and taking care of him. Who was taking care of you? Did your brother take care of you? Who was taking care of you? Did your father take care of you? Did your mother take care of you? What about you? It hits home when you look at scenes like that. It's a sadness in your life. You know, even with that you need to cry about those things; that's how you feel. You need to work through that sadness in your life about being alone, feeling that helpless, hopeless, you know, somebody needs to listen to you, and believe you, that it was sad for you, and it was hard sometimes. You know, what the

hell's a little boy, 9 years old know about being an adult, or trying to take care of someone else? You're doing it because half of you, you love your brother, but half of you is afraid, trying to protect you from the horror that you were watching. Make sense? When you start working on those core issues right there, move on from that part, its what you call, sometimes they say the child within. And you carry little Tim around that's been hurt when he was young. You gotta learn to take care of him. 'Cause when you do, none of that's gonna matter, 'cause you'll be happy with you. (A3:9)

4.0.3 Bettering the World by Bettering Ourselves

Feminist and profeminist scholars have criticized the MMM for being self-centred. They express outrage at the thought of white, affluent, middle-class men asking for their support as they whine about their inner children. The mythopoetic men, however, feel that they have been misunderstood by these critics. I was told by informants that mythopoetic men's work is not just about healing men, but about *healing society* also.

The mythopoetic men that I worked with spoke about "shame and blame" as large factors in men's lives today. They feel that men are made to feel ashamed of who they are, of being men, and are blamed for what is wrong and unjust in society. They see these also as wounds, in that men are constantly walking around with a deep-rooted sense of shame about who they are. These wounds in turn cause men once again to react rather than act from a healthy sense of self.

The mythopoetic men realize that men *are* responsible for most of the negative elements in our society, but they believe that constantly reminding them of this and making them feel worthless and ashamed of who they are will not solve the problem. *They feel the answer is to go inside.* As "A" told me, we can't ignore the problems that

men create anymore, nor can we ignore how men are perceived by the public. We must do something to change it, “and the way to get there is to take care of you” (A1:8).

Many mythopoetic men thus believe that the way to effect the positive changes in the world that their profeminist counterparts are concerned with is to start within and deal with the pain and negative experience that causes men to behave negatively in the outside world. Put simply, the best way to better the world is to first better oneself.

Tim: [Y]ou were saying that you want to get involved in things like Big Brothers, and homeless shelters, and other things. Has that come from your group work? Like, would that have happened if you hadn't been involved in group work, has the group work enabled you to do stuff like that?

Umm, I think it definitely comes out of the group work, and I believe that a man can only go out and really offer something of himself when he has already done some work on himself. And he can continue that work by doing that other outside work and mission work, and it feeds into my own personal sense of doing my mission, or. I think some men, or women, get involved in these outside community projects, they think it's, on the surface they think it's a good thing to do, but it's almost like a diversion or a keep busy, and they're not doing their own personal work. (E1:9)

It arises out of the mythopoetic literature, and out of discussions with mythopoetic men like the one above, that their belief is that the only way men will become less violent, less sexist, less abusive of power, is through first doing serious personal work on themselves, through first healing themselves. Unless men clean up the garbage inside of them, the abuse, neglect, and hatred that they once experienced and have not let go of, they will be abusive, neglectful, and hateful to the rest of the world. That dynamic, mythopoetic men believe, is what we are witnessing this very moment.

4.0.4 Healing as Continuous Process

Contrary to the initial assumptions that I brought into the field, the type of healing that occurs in the MMM is not an instantaneous, “one-time shot.” When I began attending mythopoetic group meetings, I expected to see transformation neatly laid out and segmented in front of me for the purposes of analysis. I was rudely awakened.

As I worked with mythopoetic men, they brought me to realize that the work they do on themselves in groups and on mythopoetic weekends and events are moments in a lifelong process of healing. There are small moments of transformation, what one of my informants called “the a-ha effect,” but the transformation that goes on in mythopoetic men’s work is never complete; we all need healing, and it is a continuous process: “It’s a lifelong thing, and health and sanity is all relative, you know? Everybody around you is hurting in some way” (E1:8). “A” echoed this point and also emphasized that a healer must be healed also, and expressed concern over how Western culture, or rather the healing professionals of Western culture, seem not to recognize this:

...[Psychologists and social workers are] memorizing the words of someone else, as opposed to speaking from your own heart. There’s a difference. That’s what makes the difference with us. We heal all the time. I have elders I see all the time. I don’t do this [by] myself. I always talk to everybody. I feel everybody deserves the business. I may be a carrier of the words, but the one that receives them, it’s up to them to make decisions of what they want to do with it. But it’s worth it, cause I would want to receive those words too. For my own healing. You heal everyday. There’s no end to it. (A1:7)

Once I had abandoned my initial conception of mythopoetic men’s work as an instantaneous healing exercise, I began to get a much clearer picture of what the MMM is about. I also got a much clearer picture of the path of my own life thus far, where I

was going, and what I could do to alter some of the things that made me unhappy yet seemed impossible to overcome. I began to see mythopoetic men's work more as the men I was working with saw it, not as a quick solution to one's problems (there are none), but more as an ongoing way of dealing with issues and becoming the person one wants to be through community and the support of other men.

In practical terms, there are specific forms which this takes, and within these forms particular tools to facilitate it. I have chosen to focus on what I assess to be the two principal tools of the mythopoetic men's movement—ritual and symbolic complexes. In the following pages I will discuss how they are used within the movement, drawing once again on written materials and field data, including my own participation in mythopoetic men's work.

4.1 RITUAL WITHIN THE MYTHOPOETIC MEN'S MOVEMENT

Ritual plays a vital role in the MMM. The places where ritual and ritualization take place within the movement are primarily at weekend retreats, initiatory weekends, and during group meetings. According to my informants, men who attend initiatory weekends are usually encouraged to bring the ritual forms and techniques that are introduced there back to their "follow-up" groups and use them there, and ritual guidelines are often actually sent to "graduates" of the weekend along with updates on the activity of the network. This follow-up use of ritual procedures learned during a weekend is precisely the aim of what are often called "integration groups," which are meant to continue and integrate the experience of the weekend in a man's life, "to keep the experience of the weekend alive," as one of my informants said. I cannot discuss this

process with any authority, however, since I did not attend a weekend initiation and then join a follow-up group, but rather joined two groups in which not all members had been to the same initiatory weekend.

Examining the use of ritual by the MMM is an enigmatic exercise for a number of reasons. First, the mythopoetics use ritual in a very conscious way. I was shocked, for example, when during only my third interview, "C", a man involved in mythopoetic men's work for over 5 years, began telling me how he had a great interest in ritual, and how it was his primary technique for setting up sacred space. I had not even gotten down my interview question sheet to the topic of "ritual," yet he spent the next 15 minutes talking about it in very explicit detail. This anecdote typifies the familiarity and ease with which mythopoetic men discuss and use ritual in what they do. My supposition is that their conceptualization and use of the term is very different from that of the majority of cultures that anthropologists study, where ritual is probably not discussed in such rational and sometimes academic terms. In a sense this situation made my job easier, for I did not have to translate all of the actions and words of my informants into the categories of analysis that I wanted to use, for they often used the very same categories themselves in discussing and working with ritual.

The reason for this is the second element which makes studying ritual in the MMM so enigmatic. Being on the whole very literate and usually well-educated men, the mythopoetics *conduct research* on ritual and symbolic techniques. As opposed to a culture with a more intact and older tradition, where ritual and healing techniques are usually passed down orally through many generations, albeit metamorphosing along the way, in the MMM there is no real tradition from which to draw ritual techniques.

What this has facilitated is mythopoetic men *researching ritual techniques and the use of symbolic complexes*: Jastrab (1994) talks about how he learned the teachings of different Native American medicine people, Taylor (1995) gives “how to” instructions on using ritual in men’s groups, Meade (1993) uses tribal stories and ritual practices from all over the world (although we don’t know how he got them), Moore and Gillette (1992) do the same, and in the groups I attended, as well as in my other work with mythopoetic leaders, ritual forms and symbolic complexes from other cultures were used extensively.

But not only do mythopoetic men research other cultures’ rituals, they also research ritual and symbolic theory. For example, one of my informants, “D”, has a library of over 150 books on not only the MMM, but on ritual, archetypal psychology, symbolic theory, psychoanalysis, and group therapy. And in the mythopoetic literature, one finds numerous references to such figures as Victor Turner, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, Arnold van Gennep, and Carl Jung¹¹. In fact, in a recent bibliography on the men’s movement (August 1994), Eliade’s *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* is listed as essential reading in the section on the MMM, right alongside books by Bly, Moore and Gillette, Meade, Jastrab, etc.

4.1.1 Conceptualizations of Ritual

Usually when the word “ritual” was used by my informants, it was used to refer to specific practices that we did during group meetings, or to other exercises which are frequently used during group meetings, but which we had not yet used. Thus, since my

¹¹ Gilbert also notes that the MMM draws upon many of the great scholars of myth and ritual (see Gilbert 1992:43).

informants were telling me *and showing me* what they considered ritual performance, I did not do a great deal of explicit questioning as to how they defined ritual. I think it is useful, however, to include some of the men's words about ritual and its place in mythopoetic men's work, to give an idea of their conceptualization of it.

Tim: ...You were saying that having more rituals and sticking to them, and explaining what was behind them more, was something you wanted, what's important to you about that?

They just, they just seem so earthy to me, that they're very vague in turn, and that there's something important inside... They just speak of that, they speak strongly. That there's other important forces, at work. There's something important that's going on around me... And quite related to that, it seems to bring a sense of history, along with it, you know, the spirit of our forefathers, powers like that. It feels more grounded, I feel more grounded, that I'm part of something. Just that that's something important, that I don't often reflect on. (F1:5)

Tim: What would you see the group being like if it was more spiritual?

Umm, I guess a bit more ritual aspects, we've done that a bit in our group, with the sweetgrass, and, sort of the way that we start the group sometimes, but, I know there are other groups that have sort of regular rituals that change according to the time of year, I guess it's sort of an acknowledgement of, for lack of a better word. higher power, or some, maybe more discussion about what that means to people as opposed to, we tend to sort of in our group, focus on what's been going on in people's lives... (G1:3)

So ritual is about symbolizing, and speaking the language of the psyche... (B2:3)

In all of the discussion that follows, I have considered anything identified by the men themselves as ritual to be such. In relation to performances which did not possess formal qualities, were not regularly performed with little variation, and were not identified by the men as ritual yet possessed ritualistic elements, I use the term *ritualization*, following Grimes' definition (see Grimes 1995:41-49).

Big Rituals and Small Rituals

As I begin to discuss the part that ritual plays in mythopoetic men's work below, I will be talking about ritual in two senses. The first sense refers simply to the mythopoetic group meeting as ritual space. As will be evident from my informants' accounts, and as was evident from my own experience of group work, the entire group meeting can be conceptualized as a ritual. Within this protracted ritual space, smaller, more particularly focused ritual techniques are used to accomplish particular goals. Below I will describe a typical group meeting, and detail some of the smaller rituals which occur within this ritual space.

4.1.2 The Mythopoetic Group Meeting as Ritual Space

Based upon mythopoetic texts and my informants' accounts, Gr1 was fairly typical of most mythopoetic men's groups. Gr2, however, although its focus was definitely on community, support, and personal growth, shared few of the ritual and symbolic elements characteristic of the MMM. In discussing typical mythopoetic activities, therefore, most of my observations come from my experience in Gr1.

Setting and Props

Both groups met at the house of one of the group members. In Gr1, after arrival at the house, we usually walked directly to the living room and sat down, forming a rough circle of four, and as of May 1997, six members. In Gr2, we usually did not begin the meeting proper immediately, as the other 2 regular attendees usually had not eaten supper yet, and ate while I watched them. After supper, we would all walk into the living room and take our places on the furniture, again forming a rough circle. Both groups had an unusually small number of members, since according to mythopoetic

texts and my informants, 6-10 members is the optimal amount for a mythopoetic men's group.

The setting and ritual implements of Gr2 were very simple. We all sat around a small coffee table, upon which was usually placed a pot of tea and perhaps some cookies, which we consumed during the meeting. The lighting was usually moderate, and the living room was sectioned off from the rest of the house by a doorway with bamboo curtains. "H", who hosted the meetings, had a female roommate who always seemed to be at home during them and caused what Grimes (1995) calls "ritual misfires," performances which fail to effect their desired result, which in this case and in other meetings was the creation of a safe space (which I will discuss below). On more than one occasion "H"'s roommate walked by the living room and could hear what we were saying. When this occurred, the other men often stopped talking until she was gone, as did I. At these times, I felt (and from conversations with them, I believe the other men did too) a breach in the safe space that we had created, which was partially dependent upon the circle consisting of men only. Informants told me that the presence of women made it difficult for them to share their emotions, because they instinctively felt defensive and obligated to engage in "social games" in their presence. Ritual misfires of this and other types occurred frequently during the meetings I attended.

The setting of Gr1 was more elaborate. We sat on furniture (as opposed to the floor, as some groups do) which was centred around a small coffee table. On the coffee table were usually the same items: some form of refreshment, a candle, a glass pie plate with burnt sage from the previous meeting, a small bag of sage, a partially burnt braid of sweetgrass, an eagle feather, some matches, a copy of *Everyman*, and a silver serving

tray in which we placed ritual objects which held special meaning to us. Two other items which were sometimes on the table or “altar,” were a copy of the Bible, from which passages were read on two occasions, and a talking stick, a ritual object deriving from Native American traditions. We never used the talking stick during a meeting, however.

4.1.3 Elements of a Typical Group Meeting

A typical meeting in Gr1 had four parts:

- Smudge
- Check-in
- Working on a Topic
- Closing

Gr2 was less structured, and usually consisted of the three, and sometimes four of us, making our way into the living room and taking turns having the floor to discuss what we wanted. After each man had had his turn, we usually said good-bye, embraced each other for a moment, and then left. Since Gr1 contained more formal ritual practices, most of my descriptions will come from notes on it, but I will draw similarities and contrasts with Gr2 occasionally. Again, Gr2 seemed to share the same goals and intentions as Gr1, but did not employ the mythopoetic techniques that other groups often due. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5, when I discuss efficacy.

Smudge

In Gr1, after we had all arrived and taken our seats around the coffee table, someone usually asked if we should begin, after which we all stood up beside the coffee table, in a tighter circle. One man, usually “E”, would take a small portion of sage and put it into the glass pie plate, then light it with a match until it began to smolder and

emit its distinctive aroma. "E" would then hold the pie plate up to another man and fan the smoke onto him with the eagle feather, "smudging" his entire body. During this, the man being smudged usually closed his eyes and stood with his arms at his sides, in what I called in my fieldnotes a "gesture of surrender," since the posture seemed to embody humility and surrender to something else, perhaps the group, or the "higher power" or "the grandfathers" that we often invoked.

After the first man had been smudged, he took the sage and the feather and smudged another man, and so on, until everyone had been done. Someone then usually took up the braid of sweetgrass and lit it until it began emitting its sweet-smelling smoke. The braid was then held in the middle of the circle, and each man grasped it in his fist, so that we were all standing in silence with our hands on top of one another, holding the sweetgrass, and taking deep, conscious breaths. After a minute or so of this, the sweetgrass was placed into the pie plate and allowed to burn itself out.

At this point in the first three meetings, we sat down and took a series of deep breaths, for a period of about one to two minutes. The purpose of this, according to "E", was to relax us, and to further help us make the transition from mundane to sacred space. At the fourth meeting, "E" and "G", who had been through a New Warrior Network weekend initiation, brought along a set of instructions on "Calling the Grandfathers," which is a ritual that was introduced to them during their weekend and is meant to be used in New Warrior Integration Groups. From this meeting on, as the final part of our smudge, we called the grandfathers using this guide (I will discuss this technique in the next section of this chapter on the symbolic and archetypal complexes

used by the movement). Once we had called the grandfathers, we then sat down and began the second part of the meeting.

In Gr2, we did not have a formal ritual to begin the meeting. The only symbolic act that marked the beginning of the meeting was our transition from the kitchen to the living room, where we seated ourselves on the furniture and formed a rough circle. Attending Gr2 often felt like less of a serious exercise for me, perhaps because it was not marked off from the rest of the world in such a formal and serious way, as Gr1 was.

The purpose of the smudge was explained to me by the men I attended groups with, and by the mythopoetic leaders I worked with, as *a ritual transition into sacred or safe space*. In my notes on my first meeting in Gr1, I describe the explanation of the smudge given to us by “E”, who began the group.

After we had sat down, “E” began to tell us about what ideas he had for the group. He said that he had been involved in men’s groups back where he was from, and he had thought we could do some of the same things that he had done in previous groups. This included an introduction, or opening, which could involve a “ritual smudge.” He said he used sage for this. It was a good way to purify the men in the group, to ‘get rid of’ or ‘leave’ “all the shit.”¹² He said it was a “kind of a native spirituality thing,” that he had used and been involved with before, and ‘that the men’s movement “stole” I guess.’ He said that he had been involved with natives out on the West coast and that they ‘didn’t seem to have a problem with it’ (with the “stealing” of the ritual). He said, “we did it together.” (presumably the natives and white men did the ritual together) ‘Anyway,’ he said, ‘it was, he thought, a good way to purify the circle.’ (Gr1, Nov.22:2)

The smudge was thus used by us, and according to my informants and texts on the movement, by many other mythopoetic groups, as a technique for ritually marking off the group meeting from the ordinary, mundane world. With the smudge it was

¹² Written material within double quotation marks is verbatim, and within single quotation marks, paraphrased.

understood that we were entering a sacred space, and divesting ourselves of all of the impurities, all of the “crap” of everyday life, in order that we could feel safe enough to take some risks, and do some inner work on ourselves.

I do enjoy a sort of a sense of ritual, that, you come, you know that there’s going to be a certain sort of opening, an opportunity in the middle for you to do whatever you want to do, and, sort of you develop your own tradition. It might be fairly similar to other groups, but, at least there’s something you know that, it’s, you’re comfortable with, it sort of builds trust... So, it’s about how the group is a safe place, a place to go where I can tell a story or, put out an issue, try to work through it... (E1:7)

This notion of creating a safe or sacred space was also often called “creating a safe container”:

Tim: So you think the smudge, what would the purpose of the smudge be, at the beginning of the group...

In my view it does a couple of things. In native traditions it’s a cleansing ceremony. And you can look at it as that. But one of the things that is also going on when you’re working with safe containers or sacred containers is that you’re looking for a change of mood and a change of space from regular, ordinary everyday things, and I have to say that over the time that I’ve been doing this, the smell of smudge does that to me almost right away. Sweetgrass or sage. Boom. Oh yeah, we’re here. Kind of like the hypnotist swinging the watch, you know, boop, there we go. (D2:5)

My own phenomenology during the smudgings of Grl provides a good example of how this ritual did not always effect the desired transition. I will discuss the efficacy of the rituals used in mythopoetic men’s groups in the next chapter, but the following passages from fieldnotes give a sense of when the smudge “worked” for me, and when it didn’t.

Despite the smudge and the other techniques for creating a safe ritual space, during it I felt little. I did not feel a deep transformation, perhaps not any transformation, into a different space. And I also felt

unsure about and unacquainted with the ritual gestures we were using. They seemed foreign to me. (Gr1, Jan.6:7)

As soon as I saw “E” getting the smudge ready, I began to get into a different space. I began to really get into the moment, the place that we were... As the smudge went on, I increasingly felt more present and something else, although I cannot accurately describe it. I felt reverence for what we were doing. I felt myself beginning to honour the transition into sacred space. More than at any other meeting, I gave myself to this transition. My mind was not focused on anything else at this time. I really felt a transition deep within myself. I gave myself over to what was going on totally. (Gr1, Jan.29:3)

Checking In

During Gr1 meetings, after the smudge we did an exercise called a check-in. Check-ins, along with smudging, appear to be another staple ritual exercise of the MMM; in my work with other mythopoetic men outside of Gr1 and Gr2, “checking in” was something that we did almost automatically, and without a lot of pre-planning. Also, the routine we followed in Gr2 was actually one prolonged check-in, although it was never called that while I attended the group.

The check-in, as it was first explained to me, and as I learned through doing many of them, is an opportunity for a man, once a safe space or container has been established, to simply, “check in” with the rest of the group about how he feels right now, how he’s been feeling since the last meeting, what’s going on in his life, what he’s anxious about, and what he would like to work on that night, or perhaps whether he would like some help from the group. The check-in is a time for men to express their inner thoughts and emotions, especially the ones which they cannot normally express due to the demands of the tough, unfeeling, resilient persona which mythopoetic men say that men today are forced to assume. In the safe, sacred space of a circle of men,

however, men gradually allow their feelings to surface and be placed out into the group. This occurs often during the check-in.

Each man has a turn to say what is on his mind, without being interrupted. In Gr1, we could go on as long as we needed to. At the end of his check-in, a man usually finished by saying, "I'm in." I later learned that this phrase is particular to New Warrior men, of whom there were two in Gr1. I never specifically questioned the men about what "I'm in" meant, but from the countless check-ins that I have done, my interpretation is that it means the man is now fully present and committed to the circle, he has brought himself into it completely and with full attention, and is ready to do some work. Usually the men in the rest of the group responded with nodding their heads, or by saying "Ho!"

In Gr2, after we had sat down in the living room, someone volunteered to "go first." The "going" was very similar to the check-ins of Gr1. Whoever went first usually had about 15 to 20 minutes (we often used a stopwatch) to say whatever was on his mind. As in Gr1, this usually took the form of speaking about how one had been feeling since the last meeting, what was going on in his life currently, what was worrying him, how personal relationships were going, etc. "H", who hosted Gr2 at his house, liked to call what we did in it "spewing," and was always anxious to start spewing.

An important point to bring up about the type of open, honest, deep sharing that occurred during check-ins (and also in the next part of Gr1 meetings, and which I will discuss later also), was the stress that the group, and especially the leaders or hosts of the group, placed upon two notions: i) that the group was not the place to analyze another man and play amateur therapist, proposing to have all the answers, and ii) that

men *healed themselves* in group work; no one else could do it for them or show them the answers, but they could ask questions to help the process. During both Gr1 and Gr2, we were cautioned by the man who organized the group that it was no one's place to tell someone else what was wrong with them or what they needed. This atmosphere of equality, of no one being in a specialist or hierarchical position, was a constant presence during group work, and one which my informants said made group work so superior to individual therapy. Following are some thoughts of the men on this issue.

It's not what I want. It's what they decide that they need. I think I'm just a stimulator, a fertilizer, or just a, support them. be their friend, be somebody they can trust, someone to talk to. (A2:1)

Another thing too, is like, I think, like I've gone to professional counselors, and it's different from being in a group, like peer group. It's a different experience, like you don't have the feeling that you know, one person is the authority and you're sort of the poor soul that's going to this authority asking for advice, it's like, it feels differently. It's sort of like peer counseling, it's, it's like nobody's the expert in all areas, everybody's got their own experience. (G1:6)

"D", probably the most experienced mythopoetic leader I interviewed, stressed to me the related point, which was also borne out in my group experience, that mythopoetic group work is truly leaderless. Each man is responsible for his own growth. There might be a facilitator, but as "A" said above, a good facilitator simply stimulates that which a man is already aware of inside himself.

Working on a Topic, and Processing

The "meat" of a typical mythopoetic men's meeting occurs after ritual cleansing and transition from mundane to sacred worlds, and some form of check-in by those present. This was the case in Gr1, but not Gr2, where the check-in was the main part of the meeting.

Although we did not try a wide variety of techniques in Gr1, from my interviews and work with mythopoetic men, and from mythopoetic texts, I became aware of the existence of countless rituals and exercises that mythopoetic groups use to effect healing (for some examples, see Taylor 1995).

Although I will get into modeling and assessing mythopoetic men's work techniques in chapter 5, my informants introduced me to their own model for what mythopoetic men's work does, which I will present here. The concept is called *processing*, and was first introduced to me by "E".

Processing is a term used by the New Warrior Network, one of a number of large groups of mythopoetic men in North America who put on initiatory weekends, but the underlying approach behind the term is similar to that of all of the mythopoetic men's work that I have encountered, both in my own experience and in textual material. *Processing involves using specific techniques, especially rituals or simple group exercises, to work through, or release a blockage (usually a repressed, painful experience or "wound"), which is preventing a man from becoming more healthy, or more whole, or often in his own terms, from "being the man he wants to be."* In my brief encounter with the Sterling men (a group similar to the New Warriors), in my experience with the groups I attended, in my discussions with men with vast experience in New Warriors Network, The Men's Council Project, and other mythopoetic backgrounds, and from my survey of mythopoetic textual material, processing appears to be the fundamental approach used in ritual group work in the MMM. Here is a description of processing by "E":

Tim: So that's the idea of processing I guess. Whatever he needs, if he's got something he wants to process, or to work through, whatever he needs, the group is there to help him do it.

Yep. That's right. There's ahh, if you really want to simplify processing, you ask the man "Okay, what do you want?" So, whatever it is you want, you put that out in front of you. And then you say what's getting in your way of what you want? So that's between you and this. So you can set that up physically. And you can say, okay, how bad do you want that? Or what do you have to get up, to get it? You know? And you can set up all these things physically, and sometimes you need to get vocal, or physical, or just intense, particular ways of getting the things you want. And being aware of what you're going to lose, you know, so it's about action and, intensity, it's sort of like re-imprinting, or re-framing... you know, cause I've been through a lot of these things, it's not about control, it's not about me controlling how I feel about something, but when I work through it, go back and actually deal with by action and energy and intensity, deal with some of these issues, when I find myself in the same situation again, I don't have that same sense of a block, it's like a different perspective now, it's not something that I'm controlling anymore, it's something that I've dealt with to a certain extent. You may have to go back to the same issue a few more times to really get it out of the way, but there is a more or less step by step kind of process that, you can do, but it means going back. (E1:5)

Before a man can get help from the group in processing something, however, he must become aware of its existence. Reaching this awareness was sometimes called "opening a door" to issues, or "pushing boundaries," by my informants. This stage is basically about becoming aware of unconscious wounds, especially those from childhood.

During group work, especially in Gr1, I witnessed other men opening doors to unconscious wounds. In the mythopoetic literature, Bly (1992) and others place much emphasis on father wounds and mother wounds. I was initially skeptical as to the importance that these authors seemed to place in long-forgotten childhood experiences. When I began group work however, I soon saw how I had underestimated the power of

old wounds, as I began to get to know the men in my groups better, and saw forty and fifty year-old men trapped in the pain of events that had happened 30 years earlier, and displacing that pain onto the people in their lives in the form of anger and emotional numbness. This witnessing, however, was nothing compared to my own realization of how I had not dealt with my childhood pain of a broken home and was carrying it around with me every day, letting it shape who I am. As I did mythopoetic group work, I got deeper and deeper into that pain, and made many startling realizations about myself. I opened many doors to deep wounds.

Uncovering deep issues and wounds was described to me not as an instantaneous occurrence, but as a gradual, layered phenomenon. A couple of informants used “the onion analogy” to describe it.

...But I know now like there's a lot of stuff under there. And it keeps bubbling up to the surface, like I deal with one issue and then I realize, oh, there's another one there, like, something else. Interconnected and you know, very complex, and, dealing with this whole thing is like an onion, somebody describes it like an onion, you get rid of the top layer, which is like a protective layer, and all of a sudden these... keeps coming to the surface, you know, you deal with one layer and you keep getting deeper and deeper, and you know, more stuff keeps coming up, and at one point I thought that I could just deal with an issue and just clear it away, and at some point down the road I'd be a perfectly healthy guy, but now I'm realizing it's more like a life process, it's, the first step of awareness is just the first step. There's going to be a whole bunch of new opportunities for awareness, and it's sort of never-ending, so, health is sort of relative. (E1:8)

In Gr2, our practice was to give everyone a chance to be heard, to put any issues he wanted out into the group, to allow himself to speak them and perhaps get in touch with them to greater extent by being witnessed by the other men. In Gr1 this occurred also, but at this point we began to use other tools to allow men to *process* the issues they

had become aware of. I stress *began* here, because although I am aware of the existence of numerous ritual techniques used in the MMM for processing, in Gr1 we had just begun to do processing in earnest as I was finishing this manuscript and getting ready to leave the country, and hence the group.

During check-ins similar issues would sometimes be identified. Often we would spend the rest of the meeting working on them, or on one man's issues. For example, I recall one meeting where I was feeling extremely depressed, so much so that I could barely utter a word. Right after my check-in, when we were all "in," "E" turned to me right away and "acknowledged my sadness" (a simple but effective technique for establishing trust and safety), and asked me if I would like some help. He said he was prepared to devote the entire meeting to helping me work through what was causing me such pain. and the other men agreed to also. We spent the whole night on me, and I felt much better when I left, and experienced a real transformation during the meeting; I realized things and made mental links which helped me to come a little farther in my healing journey. It was an amazing, transformational experience, and one that I will never forget.

There were two things which my informants seemed to stress in processing issues: the power of community and support, and getting out of the head, and into the body. As one informant discussed above, healing done in a community of men was special because there were no hierarchies, just equals offering shared experience and support. In addition, when talking with informants, and during group meetings and the men's weekend in May, it was stressed that one of the barriers to men sharing more of themselves and getting in touch with their emotional lives, was their tendency to remain

“in the head,” or at “the conceptual level.” The mythopoetic literature stressed this also (see Bly 1992; Jastrab 1994; Meade 1993; Daly 1993). My informants and mythopoetic authors said that men tend to deal with situations, even those involving emotional content, in very rational ways. This accounts for their suppression of emotions, and the built up grief, disappointment, and anger that mythopoetic activities try to get at. The way to do this, it was explained to me, was to get away from concepts, to get out of the head and into the body:

And I use experiential things from experiential psychotherapy exercises and techniques, body things sometimes, because a lot of things you can get at through the body because men tend to conceptualize most things. So if you stay in the concepts they're pretty comfortable, they don't get challenged very much, but if you get into the body, the things that are not conceptual are stored there. So you get more into the feelings and the emotional space, with men if you work through the body. And even simple things like touching hands, and pushing or get into competition in a way that is not conceptual. So just talking about competition, that's not competition. And even when we're competing in conversation, as men often do, we're not in touch with the competitive aspects of it, because we're in our habit space. But when you do it through the body, you get in touch with it more, it brings up much more anxiety, more emotion. So I use those kinds of things. (B1:7)

It was explained to me that ritual and ritualization within the MMM are used to put this stress on the body, the sensual, the tactile, the physical.

Besides the rituals which I described above, I participated in or witnessed many others during my research, and heard or read about even more. At a Sterling Men's Team meeting (an integration group from the Sterling Weekend), I witnessed 3 or 4 rituals and occurrences of ritualizing behaviour, including one called a “roach,” where men flopped around in the dirt like roaches as punishment for transgressions against the group. Rituals like these, and others which I actually participated in placed stress upon

what Schechner (1985; Schechner and Appel 1990) and others call the subjunctive mood—acting “as if”—and also upon getting into the body.

Another exercise which exemplifies this approach, and which I had the opportunity to experience to a fuller degree, was role-playing. A few of my informants mentioned it as a valuable technique in helping men to process issues, and in Shadow Work, a type of amateur group psychotherapy which sprang out of the MMM, and which I will discuss below, role-playing is fundamental.

On one occasion in Gr1, during my check-in and as we began focusing on a topic the group helped me to identify an issue that I wanted to process. I told them that I had been feeling angry all of the time, especially at certain people. “E” suggested the possibility of the anger “coming from deeper issues” (Gr1, Apr.24:2), and I agreed that I thought it did. I said that I thought it came from a particular relationship that I had with someone as a child. “E” then asked me to remember an incident involving the person during which I was hurt or angry. I did this and then described it to the group. “E” then asked me if I “wanted to do something with it” (ibid). I nodded my head yes. The following excerpt describes how we role-played the incident, and what effects it had (some words are changed to retain anonymity).

“E” had all of us stand up. He asked “F” to be _____. Right away, without any prompting from “E”, “F” looked at me and said, ‘Well, I’ve gotta go now, I’m taking off. You didn’t have the kitchen clean, you’re not ready to go, so I’m leaving without you,’ or something to that effect, and walked out the door of the house. I had my head down, because I knew I was going to get emotional, and was too embarrassed to look at anybody. “F” did a really good job at this.

“E” then started saying things like ‘How do you feel about that, about ____ just leaving you like that?’ ‘What do you want to say to _____?’ At this point the tears came down. I felt the old hurt again. It didn’t take long to come up, which made me realize that I’m carrying it

around with me all of the time, and close to the surface. I stood there with my hands on my hips, looking at the floor. "G" to my right, "E" to my left, and "F" out by the door, tears streaming down my face. I felt embarrassed, and also amazed that this little exercise worked, that it brought out a reaction in me so effectively. (Gr1. Apr.24:2)

We continued this for another ten minutes or so, with "E" directing "F" to say certain things, and to move certain ways. One thing that was stressed was the physical embodiment of the abandonment that I had told the group I had felt during the incident: "E" instructed "F" to turn his back to me while he was saying things, and to walk away from me.

After we had finished the exercise, we discussed what had happened. "E" explained that he was trying to elicit the anger from me that I had described to him earlier. His directions to "F", and the questions that he asked me, were attempts to allow me to release that anger. As we talked about the exercise, however, I told the group that although I had periodically felt anger welling up inside of me during it, I was not quite ready to express it. "E" also asked how the other men felt during the exercise. "F" said that he felt like me, that he could not feel anger about it, only sadness and abandonment. "G", on the other hand, "said immediately that he was angry. He said, 'I was pissed off, that someone could do that to a boy.' "E" then said that he was feeling angry too" (Gr1, Apr.24:3).

I was truly amazed at the reactions that this incident precipitated in me, as well as in the other men. Although I had not anticipated there being much value in role-playing up to this point, the experience that night was a very intense one for me. I saw how powerful such a simple ritual enactment could be, not only for myself, but for the other men also.

Closing

In Gr1, at the end of every meeting we had a closing ritual. Just as the smudge, and to some extent the check-in, ritually demarcated that we were now in sacred space, the closing ritual marked that we were leaving that space. The “closing” was fairly simple. We all stood up and formed a tight circle, placing our arms around each other’s shoulders. At this point sometimes each man took a turn to speak briefly. Usually we said how we were feeling, what we had gotten out of the meeting, and anything else that was on our minds. Each man did not talk for much more than 30 seconds to one minute. When the last person had gone, we all moved in closer and gave each other a good squeeze. The closing was often my favourite part of Gr1 meetings, since there was a lot of physical contact in it, and it brought a connectedness with the other men. Upon interviewing the other men, I found out that they felt this way also.

There was no formal closing in Gr2. When the last man had taken his turn speaking, we sometimes made small talk for a few minutes and then got up to leave. As we stood by the doorway, we usually gave each other a hug. Again, the physical contact in Gr2 was one of the moments when I felt the most connected with the other men.

It is my guess that such a closing as the one we did in Gr1 is typical of many mythopoetic men’s groups. “E”, who has been involved in more than 4 groups, has been to and staffed many initiatory and retreat weekends, and has been involved in other mythopoetic activities, introduced the closing as something he had done in other groups, and in New Warriors. In addition, at the Sterling Men’s Team meeting that I attended, the men performed a similar ritual, called a “shockwave,” in which they formed a circle,

put their arms around each other's shoulders, then threw them up into the air and yelled out. They then fell to the ground, and waved to each other, saying "Shock!"

4.1.4 Summary

Not only does the literature of the MMM use the term *ritual* frequently, but so did the mythopoetic men whom I met and worked with. This is so because they consciously and purposively use it as a tool to effect healing and growth. It is used as a tool for creating a safe, sacred space in which men can take some risks and do some healing, and is used to facilitate that healing by helping men to process issues and wounds which are preventing them from accomplishing their goals. Within the ritual and ritualization which takes place in the MMM, stress is placed upon the power of community, and in getting out of the head and into the body. Through the simple rituals of the MMM, men attempt to access and express parts of themselves not normally welcome in the rest of their lives, and to work through whatever blockages are holding them back.

4.2 THE USE OF SYMBOLIC COMPLEXES IN THE MYTHOPOETIC MEN'S MOVEMENT

4.2.1 The Jungian and Post-Jungian Approach

The very term "mythopoetic," although sometimes defined and used more precisely by scholars, alludes to the stress on the poetic, the imaginative, and the symbolic, in the context of the MMM. As I wrote earlier, the mythopoetic men I worked with, and the authors of many mythopoetic texts, emphasize the necessity of getting out of the head, out of a conceptual, rational mode of experiencing, and into the body, into a

metaphorical, imaginative way of experiencing. In doing this, the MMM has seized upon a particular body of theory in conceptualizing how the human mind operates—depth psychology. And although some authors who have written texts popular in the MMM, like Sam Keen (1992), use the work of Freud and other psychologists also, *Jungian and post-Jungian psychology has had the greatest influence on the shape of the MMM.*

New Jungian scholars, such as Carol Pearson, Jean Shinoda Bolen, James Hillman, and Robert Moore have redefined Jungian psychology and the conceptualization of archetypes (see Pearson 1986, 1991; Bolen 1984, 1989; Hillman 1975, 1985; Moore and Gillette 1990), and the latter are two of the biggest figures in the MMM. Post-Jungian psychology views mythological heroes and archetypes not as static forces, but as gods and energies dwelling in the psyches and souls of all humans. Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, who produced the five book series on masculine archetypes beginning with *King Warrior Magician Lover* (1990), call the archetypes “programs,” and stress their genetic basis: “Encoded within our genetic inheritance, we believe, are what we call King and Queen ‘programs’” (Moore and Gillette 1992:8). The series by Moore and Gillette is by far the most scientific treatment of archetypal psychology in the mythopoetic literature, citing numerous works establishing the existence of archetypes.

Other mythopoetic works, although less scientific, also definitively place themselves within an archetypal perspective. Bly’s (1992) entire approach is based upon archetypal psychology and the Wild Man archetype, and Pinkola Estes, in the foreword to Jastrab’s (1994) book, stresses archetypes as healing forces: “In even the most

devastated human beings there remains a pristine archetypal pattern for the regrowth of spiritual life. and this impulse toward renewal of spirit, when harassed, forbidden or tortured, will, instead of dying, dive directly underground in order to preserve itself” (Pinkola Estes 1994:xi-xii). During fieldwork, mythopoetic leaders I interviewed also talked about using archetypes in the work they did.

...Here’s a metaphor for archetypes. I think that all of the people who have gone before us, and maybe the people who are going to come after us, I don’t know, but certainly the people who have gone before us, have, with their own psychic energies and intentions. have created paths through the jungles, okay, so the fact that people have for 1000’s of years been cutting firewood, means there’s energy in that path. (B2:3)

It is clear from what is written on archetypes within the MMM, and from the way that archetypal psychology is used in it, that mythopoetic men, following Pearson, Bolen, and the others mentioned above, believe there is tremendous healing potential in the use of archetypes. Once again, the context within which this healing is framed is that of regaining wholeness, another Jungian concept:

Jungians are a bit more hopeful [than other psychologists] because the archetypes provide us with genetically wired resources for wholeness. The circuits we need for personal well-being are there for us in the unconscious. *For men the masculine archetypes are potentially enormous structured sources of Libido regardless of how much damage we have sustained in early life.* (Moore and Gillette 1992:206)

Mythopoetic men such as Moore and Gillette thus believe the key to men truly healing lies within them accessing the archetypes of the mature masculine.

If we can learn to access them adequately, they will enable men and women to cooperate in building a viable postmodern planetary civilization—a historical realization of mythic images of the cosmos. The King we await is within, a psychological potential every man carries with him...

If we can learn to access them successfully, they become resources of energy both for our personal lives and for healing our planet—we become more radiant in every area of our lives. (1992:8,36)

The Shadow

The Jungian concept of the shadow archetype plays a central role in the mythopoetic men's work that I experienced. As my involvement grew, I began to see a pattern developing in how the mythopoetic men conceptualize the type of healing that goes on in the movement. The shadow is conceptualized by them as the sum of repressed parts of the personality, and is where the wounds reside which hold men back from becoming who they want to be, from becoming more whole. Mythopoetic men's work is very much about working with one's shadow, and many of the rituals and exercises mythopoetic men do are aimed at "letting the shadow out to play," as "D" often phrased it to me. Another informant, "E", illustrated this point while discussing processing.

I guess it's, the whole thing is based on the concept of shadow, Jungian psychology, a lot of psychological concepts in New Warriors, but it's based on shadow, and how that affects us and blocks us, and offers ways that we can help each other look at our own shadows, the processing tends to be very active.

Tim: What do you mean?

Rather than just sitting there and just reflecting on it, it's about active, okay, get your shadow out in the open, you might use different psychological ways to help these things become clear, and work through them, like if you want to yell at somebody, that's fine, if you want to kill a person [role-playing], that's fine, you know, we can make that happen, or, it's sort of an anything goes, whatever you need to do... (E1:3-4)

A specific and actually patented technique for working with the shadow within groups was introduced to me as I began working with mythopoetic leaders to facilitate a

men's weekend. The technique is called Shadow Work, and can be learned through a set of video tapes and instruction manuals, which I had the opportunity to view. Shadow Work was actually formed out of the work of Moore and Gillette, and so it shares many affinities with the type of activities that go on in mythopoetic men's groups, and is used in these groups also. Shadow Work is much too enormous to discuss in detail here, but it basically involves setting up a safe container or psychological space, and then helping an individual to invite parts of his shadow out, where they can then be processed through various tools, such as role-playing.

Shadow Work is also based upon the quadrated structure developed by Moore and Gillette and fundamental to the MMM. I will discuss the four quadrants shortly, but first here is a passage by "D" describing Shadow Work and how the shadow is worked with in mythopoetic groups.

And another thing that happens to us as we go on, that old Jungian notion that, for whatever reason, we have all of these things that we put in the bag [in our shadow]. Well, I've come to realize that older societies, and other societies before us used ritual for something else that was really valuable and we ought to be doing more of it. There's a piece of this that I really love, and it's called the Shadow Dance, and that's where you can go and invite your shadow out to play. So now you've got a safe container, and you've got rules about who can do what to whom, and there are ways of telling people that you don't want to be bothered, and there's always a safety valve, a safety word to get out of things, and stuff like that, but basically a Shadow Dance is a place where, with costume, and all sorts of props, you can bring the wild, crazy, dangerous things in the back of your mind out to play! And it's my contention that if you have a place, a safe place like that where you can bring those things out to play, they are not going to turn up in your relationship or on the street.

Tim: So that's another important part of ritual that you see that we need?

Yeah, absolutely.

Tim: To work with the shadow, bring it up?

Umm-hmm. And have a safe place where we can ritually, allow the things we've suppressed, and the things that would perhaps be viewed as evil, come out and play. (D2:6-7)

4.2.2 Symbolism of the Four Quadrants

As my experience in mythopoetic men's work grew, it became apparent that there was one underlying symbolic complex which was ubiquitous to the activities of many mythopoetic groups and organizations. The complex involves relationships between sets of four elements. Although it cannot be said definitively how mythopoetic groups began using this symbolic complex, they have self-admittedly borrowed its symbolism freely from Native American traditions, and Jung's work on the quaternio is well-known. These are the two most likely origins.

In my own participation in group work and other mythopoetic activities, the symbolism of the quaternity was almost as widespread as basic rituals such as the smudge, the check-in, and the closing. Also, in mythopoetic texts numerous references are made to quadrated symbolic structures.

One example of this symbolic complex is the calling of the four directions, which we performed in Gr1 as a part of every smudge. We used a guide sheet called "Calling the Grandfathers," which "E" and "G" had gotten from their New Warrior Weekends. Calling the directions involved standing and facing each of the directions of the compass while one man read from the sheet. We asked that the "Grandfathers of the East" come and bless our circle, calling out all of the things that this direction symbolized. We then turned to the south and did the same, then the west, the north, upwards toward the universe, downwards toward the Earth, and finally inside ourselves, to the direction

within. After the man reading had finished calling a direction, the rest of the group responded “Ho!” In *Sacred Manhood, Sacred Earth*, Jastrab also describes the ritual of calling the directions that is performed on his Vision Quests (1994:48-49), which is virtually identical to the one we performed during the smudge in Gr1.

Each one of the four directions is associated with an archetype, gifts, a gateway emotion (the emotion used to access that archetype), a colour, and a certain animal (see figure below). This basic, quadrated structure is foundational in the MMM; it is the template for many mythopoetic rituals and other activities. Shadow Work, for example, is structured entirely around the four archetypes of the King, Warrior, Magician, and Lover. The idea in Shadow Work is to determine which quadrant(s) are “in shadow” for a person, and to bring them “out of the bag.”

“Calling the Grandfathers”

Direction	East	South	West	North
Archetype	Lover	Warrior	Magician	King
Gifts	Sensitivity, Empathy	Discipline, Focus on Purpose	Intuition, Wisdom, Humour	Purpose, Identity
Gateway Emotion	Grief	Anger	Fear	Joy in Oneself
Colour	Yellow	Red	Black	White
Animal	Red Hawk or Eagle	Buffalo or Mouse	Coyote	Timber Wolf

4.2.3 Accessing the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine— Ritual, Mythology, and Storytelling

Mythopoetic men commonly state, drawing upon Joseph Campbell's work, that our own myths (Western civilization's) no longer work for us. This is the reason for the widespread borrowing and remythologizing that Moore and Gillette (1992:214-215) and other mythopoetic men claim we must do to bring the archetypes alive again in the minds of contemporary men. Mythopoetic groups and facilitators have indeed followed up on this, as is evident in the appropriation of Native American rituals and symbols which are used in groups everywhere, and which were used in one of the groups that I belonged to.

In discussing how to access the archetypes of the mature masculine in *The King Within*, Moore and Gillette focus much of their discussion on the construction of personal, private rituals (1992:215, 231). Mythopoetic groups, however, use group-oriented rituals, such as Shadow Work and the Shadow Dance, and the calling of the directions, to access the archetypes.

Although my informants were vague on the issue of archetypes, and on how accessing archetypal complexes facilitated healing, mythopoetic textual material was slightly more informative. The idea behind accessing archetypes in the MMM appears to again relate to the idea of men regaining wholeness. In Shadow Work, and in the work of Bly, Moore and Gillette, Meade, Keen, and other mythopoetic authors, a healthy man is seen as one who maintains a balance between the different archetypal energies, especially those of the four primary masculine archetypes, the Warrior, Magician, King, and Lover.

Furthermore, certain archetypes are believed to constellate around particular energies. For example, Bly discusses the Wild Man archetype, a variation of the Warrior,

which he claims the ineffectual men of today need to access (1992). Similarly, Moore and Gillette discuss the strong work ethic inherent in Warrior energy, saying that “Male Warrior energy is an *excellent* incitement to getting things done...” (1992:244). Keen (1992) also focuses on our need for developing a new type of man for our times, and sees the greatest threat to our existence right now as being our destruction of the Earth; hence his call for men to become “EcoWarriors.” Jastrab (1994) also emphasizes redefining the Warrior psyche in relation to service to the Earth.

Moore and Gillette’s (1992) book is devoted solely to the archetype of the King. In it, and in other mythopoetic material dealing with the quaternity of masculine archetypes, such as the calling of the four directions, the leadership qualities inherent in “King energy” are discussed, as is the necessity of men accessing it. In an excellent passage which sums up the entire book, they describe the need for and the potential of contemporary men accessing their inner Kings:

We began this book by calling attention to the ancient and widespread longing of our species for the return of the liberating and life-enhancing King—a longing that is echoed throughout the mythology of many cultures. We have argued in this book that this longing is not just an infantile fantasy in response to our feelings of hopelessness and helplessness in a chaotic world. Rather, we are convinced that this ancient imago within us is an image of the biologically encoded potentials for generativity and inclusive nurture which are a part of the evolutionary potential within everyman. *Masculinity is not in its essence abusive. We have within us the innate potential to use our masculine power for blessing, stewardship, and servant leadership. Our ancient longings may yet be fulfilled—not through one messianic person, but through an inner revolution in the maturation of masculine consciousness in which millions of men may participate.* You can be a part in this revolution in masculine consciousness—in the return of the True King. He is within you waiting for you to welcome him into your life and to bring his vision to your family, your community, and planet Earth. (1992:254)

Besides more overt rituals involving the direct invoking and embodiment of specific archetypes, other, more passive forms of accessing archetypal and other unconscious complexes are used in the MMM, such as storytelling. Perhaps the most recognized storyteller and expert on mythology in the movement, Michael Meade, describes how he uses storytelling at men's gatherings in *Men and the Water of Life* (1992).

As a story is told, the storyteller inside each listener sends up images to meet the words. A story is taken in by matching the words with scenes instantaneously produced in the imagination of the listener...

Each man in the chorus must describe the image and the feeling associated for him with the scene of Vasilisa in the tent. Each must get out his story of what is going on between women and men, between him and his lover, between the masculine and feminine elements in his own soul. The value of mythic scenes is not that they distract us from "reality" but that they move current issues, feelings, and attitudes toward the wisdom in these stories. There is a deep, magnetic logic to these old tales that pull our current feelings up to consciousness, drawing our attention to ancient issues. (57, 268)

Storytelling and the use of mythology and archetypal complexes are thus additional tools to accompany other ritual forms within the MMM, all for the purpose of aiding men in becoming aware of and processing repressed wounds and pain, and in the process becoming more whole.

4.3 ADDENDUM: THE MAY MEN'S WEEKEND

Most of this chapter had been written before I attended the mythopoetic men's weekend in May of 1997 which I and four other men organized. I will briefly discuss some highlights of the weekend here.

From May 30 to June 1 of 1997 I helped four other men organize and facilitate “Men’s Spirit Camp 1997: Men as Individuals, Men in Community”, a men’s weekend held at a retreat centre near Ottawa, Ontario. I was quite shocked when the men asked me to help them organize the weekend, as I myself was just learning about mythopoetic men’s work, and hardly felt qualified to put on a weekend of it for other men. I am extremely happy that I agreed to do it, however, as it both enriched the data that I had already collected, and proved to be quite a transformative experience for me. Space does not permit me to go into great detail about the weekend, but I will present some highlights.

Most of the weekend’s activities revolved around an altar which we constructed in the centre of the main room that we met in. The altar consisted of a large altar cloth, about 2 x 1 metres in measurement. In each of the four corners of the cloth was placed one candle, which represented a direction and an archetype: East-Lover, South-Warrior, West-Magician, and North-King. There was also a central candle in the middle of the altar. During the first night, after all of the men had arrived, we held a ceremony during which each man placed a sacred object, something with special meaning for him, on the altar, where it remained for the entire weekend. We then lit the candles and had a check-in. Much of the weekend’s activities revolved around the altar and the four directions and archetypes; we invoked them, discussed them, and tried to embody their qualities during various rituals and other exercises.

Saturday and Sunday began at 7:30 am, when we ate breakfast. The morning’s activities began at 8:30 and lasted until 12:00, when we broke for lunch. The afternoon lasted from 1:30 until 5:30, supper was from 5:30 until 7:30, and the evening’s activities

went from 7:30 until whenever we decided to quit, or until people got tired and went to bed.

To sum up the entire weekend in a few pages is impossible. It was about many things, including building community (which I am proud to say was my idea), and allowing men an opportunity to do some processing. Toward these ends we did many things. There were many types of rituals and group exercises that we used for various purposes, such as a knuckle-rapping exercise in which men were supposed to physically experience competition and isolation. We (the facilitators) also told a story throughout the weekend, a technique often used at other men's gatherings, and popularized by Michael Meade. The five of us picked a story which we felt spoke about community, called "The Rabbi's Gift." Each one of us took a portion of the story and told it at various points throughout the weekend. Our intention was to let the story work on the unconscious minds of the men, imparting its wisdom about isolation and community in a metaphorical, imaginative way. To facilitate this, we strategically located the times of narration so as to allow the men time to reflect on the story, and also to coincide with rituals and exercises we used to try to build community.

Shadow Work, which we called Carpet Work, due to trademark issues, was also done on the weekend, to allow men to process issues (I will discuss the Carpet Work from the weekend in more detail in chapter 5). Witnessing this was a great opportunity for me to see some ritually facilitated processing, which was very dramatic and powerful, and had quite an effect on me.

Friday night and most of Saturday were not pleasant experiences for me on the weekend. During these times, I could feel that I was not allowing myself to emotionally

open up to the other men; I was keeping my walls up. I felt like I wanted to go home, and I also felt guilty for feeling this way, since I was a facilitator, and was supposed to be a role model for the other men. The other facilitators dispelled my fears, however, as they assured me that whatever I felt was okay; part of the weekend was about being honest with oneself, and with the group.

On Saturday night, we held a Shadow Dance, during which four altars were set up around the room representing the directions and the masculine archetypes. Props and costumes were supplied, and the men were encouraged to dance, jump around, dress up, and "let their shadow come out to play." This they did, and so did I. At some point before the Shadow Dance I felt something let go inside of me. It was as if I told myself, "Okay, just relax and be yourself. Let your guard down and get silly. Have some fun." I did get silly during the Shadow Dance, as I painted myself up with face paints and danced around the room banging on a drum (I actually did a lot of drumming during the weekend; I seemed to really take to it). It felt very liberating to just let go and do whatever came into my mind. I just engaged in free ritualization, jumping around, bumping into other men, and making awful music with my drum and pots and pans that I got from the kitchen. I also went and sat in the Warrior quarter, and contemplated the Warrior archetype. In somewhat mysterious fashion, after a while I began to feel more powerful...

Sunday morning and afternoon I also felt free and unblocked, and talked to the other men more easily. We did a processing ritual with one man involving the four archetypes and directions of the altar, and then had lunch. Sunday afternoon we did

another piece of Carpet Work for a man, which I also discuss in chapter 5. To close the weekend, we did what has come to be called “the blessing piece.”

“D” had told us (the other facilitators) that he had a ritual in mind to close the weekend which involved blessing. We began to perform it, but most of the men in the circle decided that it didn’t feel right, and so we altered the ritual. What came out of our ritual tinkering was an extremely powerful experience for me and many of the other men also.

We formed a circle of men (about 12 of us), sitting on chairs in the middle of the room. Each man took a turn getting up and standing in the middle of the circle, putting on a crown and a cape (to symbolize the King archetype), and then walking around to each of the other men and blessing him. When one of the men got up in the middle of the circle, the other men spoke about him, telling him the qualities they saw in him, such as courage, leadership, love, and so on. The blessings that some men then gave had to do with the qualities that were spoken about them; others walked around and blessed each man in the circle with their own words.

“D” told the circle at one point that he wanted a blessing from me. He had tears in his eyes when he said this. I then stood up and put on the crown and cape. I can’t explain why, but standing there in that costume, looking around at the other men, I actually did feel kingly. “D” then said that looking at me, and my young age, he saw hope for men. He was still weeping as he said this. Other men from the circle then began naming qualities that they saw in me. As I turned around and faced each man while he was speaking about me, it took great effort to hold back my tears. I had not felt very good about myself for many months, and to stand there and be honoured by older

men was both uncomfortable and hard to accept, and yet was also such a transformative, powerful experience. I then began blessing each man by standing in front of him, putting my hands on his head, and giving him the blessing of “hope and honesty,” two of the qualities the men had identified in me. After I had finished and sat down, I did begin weeping.

This final ritual made me forget every unpleasant aspect of the May weekend, including the preparation I had to do for it. It was truly a beautiful, powerful experience, one that I cannot accurately capture in words. I wept during it, as did a few of the other men, whom it also visibly touched, and for days afterward I was carried on the wave of love and empowerment that the ritual gave me. I will never forget it, or that weekend.

Chapter 5: Modeling and Assessing the Mythopoetic Men's Movement

The best measure of a ritual's success is that it effects a positive transformation in a person's life. –Frank Lawliss, Transpersonal Medicine

As I stated in chapter 4, creating and working within ritual space, and using “small rituals” and archetypes within this space, is crucial to mythopoetic men's work. I reached this conclusion partially through the literature on the movement, yet the overwhelming evidence for this has been my own involvement with mythopoetic groups and mythopoetic leaders, including facilitating the May men's weekend; ritual enactment and archetypal complexes were *fundamental* parts of what we did during mythopoetic gatherings.

Existing academic critiques of the MMM, which I discussed in chapter 2, have failed to recognize the importance of ritual to it, and have not examined its symbolic activities in any systematic and sustained way. One possible exception to this is Schwalbe's recent book *Unlocking the Iron Cage* (1996). Schwalbe uses the work of Victor Turner to model the use of ritual by the MMM, describing it as a “search for communitas.” Although he states that healing is the central goal of the MMM, and that ritual enactment and not political debate is its method of accomplishing this, Schwalbe

nevertheless focuses the majority of the book on the political shortcomings of the MMM.

Despite the existence of patriarchal and anti-feminist overtones in it, however, there is more to the MMM than patriarchy reinscribed. Below I will use models derived from symbolic anthropology to provide a deeper and more accurate picture of the processes underlying mythopoetic men's work. Following this, I will briefly assess its efficacy at accomplishing its central goal—that of healing men.

4.0 MODELING THE MYTHOPOETIC MEN'S MOVEMENT: PROCESSUAL MODELS OF RITUAL ENACTMENT AND EMBODIMENT

4.0.1 Theories of Symbolic Process

In order to understand and model the phenomena occurring within the MMM from a symbolic anthropological perspective, we must first define some of the concepts which will enter into this process, and their relationships to each other. In particular, I will be drawing on the conceptualizations of myth, ritual, and consciousness of the biogenetic structuralists and Ian Prattis.

The biogenetic structuralists essentially see the myth-ritual complex as an evolutionary form of human adaptation (d'Aquili 1983; Laughlin et al. 1990). Humans, as they developed conscious awareness, also developed the ability or rather the capacity to experience alternate phases of consciousness, a development which has an adaptive function. Human beings are thus able to enter alternate neurophysiological entrainments, and in fact facilitate these entrainments, which produces experiences of qualitative distinction from normal waking consciousness. This purposive re-entrainment of neural

networks is achieved through ritual. As is well-documented now, during ritual activity *drivers*—repetitive visual, tactile, or auditory stimuli—are often used to achieve this re-entrainment which often involves retuning of the autonomic system (Laughlin et al. 1990; d'Aquili 1983; Lex 1979). Ritual activities thus facilitate the activation of other and often dormant neural networks, and Laughlin et al. (1990) have suggested that areas of the evolutionary pre-human brain, or paleoneurognostic structures, including the upper spinal cord, portions of the mesencephalon, diencephalon, and the basal ganglia, are often activated during ritual activities. Recently scholars have begun to make the link between Carl Jung's theory of archetypes and these neurognostic structures (see e.g. Newberg and d'Aquili 1994; Stevens 1983; Laughlin 1996), thus edging ever closer to a more comprehensive theory of consciousness.

Prattis (1984; 1997:Chap. 2) uses Jung's work on archetypes as his starting point for examining the relationship between myth and ritual. Establishing that archetypes are expressed as primordial motifs within mythology, he then goes on to restate Jung's assertion that it is the dialogue between the ego and the archetypes of the collective unconscious which facilitates individuation. According to Prattis, there are two types of individuation. Natural individuation occurs throughout a person's lifetime as the archetypes are spontaneously presented to the ego. Artificial individuation occurs when the archetypes are purposively activated or prodded, facilitating their physical experience within the body. One form of this purposive activation of archetypal material is ritual.

The work of Prattis and the biogenetic structuralists on the symbolic process may be summarized within a few key points: i) mythology and ritual are symbolic

systems which have adaptive value for human beings; ii) the nature of their relationship is that ritual is the enactment, or the *embodiment*, of unconscious and often archetypal structures, which comprise the building blocks of mythology; and iii) it is through this *physical experience* of unconscious material that personal and spiritual growth, or individuation, occurs.

Based upon their understanding of human consciousness and its penchant for symbol-making and manipulation, Prattis and the biogenetic structuralists have developed two excellent models for understanding, explicating, and analyzing the use of ritual and archetypes which occurs within the MMM.

4.0.2 Metaphor-Vibration-Form

Prattis (1997:205-235) has recently developed a model of the interaction of culture and symbol termed Metaphor-Vibration-Form. Viewing the myth-ritual complex from this perspective, he sees it basically as a behaviour transformation system.

Metaphor

Prattis conceptualizes *metaphor* as “the qualities, meanings and properties assigned to symbols” (Prattis 1997:212). Metaphor

enables a symbolic concept to register with the mind and senses...[It is] a means for human awareness to connect to symbol, so that the spiritual guidance inherent in all that symbolizes the transcendental, for instance, can initially be grasped. The metaphor... is an external mental form which corresponds to a latent internal symbolic structure that is not yet known as personal experience. (Prattis 1996:6)

Metaphor is thus the initial step in the symbolic process, in which one mentally dialogues with symbolic complexes. Prattis goes on to equate symbolic and archetypal

complexes, such as the Sky Woman myth of the Ojibwa and Iroquois nations, and the story of the Last Supper from Christian traditions, with metaphor.

Vibration and Embodiment

Vibration refers to the physical experience, or *embodiment*, of the metaphor within one's body. Ritual dramas and meditative practices provide the stage for the experience of metaphor as energy circulations and vibrations within the body. As Prattis notes, "The progression from metaphor in the mind to vibration in the body is essential because without it the individual is left with mental constructs and intellectual curiosity, but no physical experience" (1997:212). The experience of metaphor in the body is best achieved in an altered state of consciousness, what Prattis also characterizes as "void energy." Heightened awareness of the symbol occurs within an altered state. Vibration is thus very much about the *embodiment*, the *physical experience*, of metaphors and archetypal energies in the body.

The stress on embodiment as being crucial to ritual enactment is one which has found its way into much recent literature on ritual (see Grimes 1995; 1990:145-157; Bell 1992; Prattis 1997; Jennings 1982; Jennings 1995; Laughlin and McManus 1995). Anthropologists and other scholars of ritual are coming to realize what Turner proclaimed years ago (Turner 1969) about the fundamental role that physical, embodied experience plays in ritual enactment and the study of ritual, that "Ritual knowledge is gained by and through the body" (Jennings 1982:115). Ronald Grimes, perhaps the most recognized scholar on ritual currently, also stresses the centrality of embodiment to it:

Apart from embodiment no ritual enactment transpires (see Dixon 1976a, 419). Even rites such as meditative ones calculated to deny or overcome the tangible use the body in order to effect this denial. And

even when the body is decorated or mutilated with tattoos, circumcisions, and subincisions, or is so heavily draped and costumed that it becomes a thing, it remains the central, concrete fact of ritual. (Grimes 1995:66; emphasis mine)

Embodiment occurs when the interior and exterior, the inside and outside, are considered to be so much in harmony that they are almost indistinguishable (Grimes 1995:85). It is the taking of something known only as a mental construct, as Prattis states above, and giving it physical form: the enactment of consciousness with one's body.

Form and Transformation

In Prattis' model, once metaphor has been cognitively experienced (metaphor), and physically experienced through ritual enactment (vibration), cognitive and perceptual shifts occur, which then are expected to manifest in changes in speech, thought, and action. This is the third stage of the symbolic process—*form*.

When the physical experience in the body deepens and is interpreted and understood through continued ritual focus the initiate becomes aware of differences in attitudes and behaviours, as the "numinous" qualities associated with the symbolic metaphor are eventually expressed behaviourally in terms of new and different modes of acting. The new behaviour forms are supported socially and through repeated ritual enactments that entrench the qualities of the symbolic metaphor in the mind, behaviours and attitudes of the initiate. It is at this instance that one can say the metaphor has come into form, through a model of behaviour transformation... (Prattis 1997:212-213)

The level of form in Prattis' model translates into real changes and transformations in personality and behaviour patterns. Changes in "form" can thus be seen as the goal of any symbolic, ritual process, such as rites of passage or seasonal rites, where changes in status from boyhood to manhood or from barren to fertile crop yields are the desired result.

Most rituals, and all liturgical rituals, are fundamentally about this transformation, as many authors have recognized (see Driver 1991; Turner 1969, 1979; Laughlin and McManus 1995; Laughlin et al. 1990; Jennings 1995; Turnbull 1990; Myerhoff 1990). “The business of religions and their rituals, then, is to effect transformations, not only of persons’ individual subjectivities but also transformations of society and the natural world” (Driver 1991:172). As Pratis outlines, the ritual enactment of symbolic complexes is precisely designed to effect a change or transformation in behaviour, to bring the participant from one way of being in the world to a new one. Transformation rituals, such as the healing rituals of the MMM, are thus about effecting *change* from one state to another. Laughlin and McManus (1995) summarize this, and how Victor Turner recognized it also.

Moreover, Turner had an insight into the actual psychological processes operating in *rituals of transformation* that allowed him to see that *much of what human ritual is about is change* (Turner 1969; Lavie, Narayan and Rosaldo 1993). In our own terms, Turner taught that certain types of ritual produce states of consciousness that effectively unstructure the “natural attitude” of participants and then restructure a new attitude, one that is considered more appropriate, functional, adaptive or mature by the society... The key to the operation of any such ritual is the involvement of *embodied* consciousness in activities that produce transformations in consciousness (literally, the reorganization of the structures mediating consciousness). (38; emphasis mine)

4.0.3 The Cycle of Meaning

The biogenetic structuralists’ work on the Cycle of Meaning (see Laughlin et al. 1990; Laughlin 1995) has provided an important tool to anthropologists of religion. It presents a general model, from a consciousness perspective, with explicational value for all human symbolic phenomena. The Cycle of Meaning is

[t]he process of integrating knowledge, memory and experience, especially within a polyphasic society... According to this cycle, a society's cosmology is expressed in its mythopoeic symbolism (myth, ritual performance, drama, art, stories, etc.) in such a way that it evokes direct experiences in alternative phases of consciousness. The experiences and memories that arise as a consequence of participation in the mythopoeic procedures are in turn interpreted in terms of the cosmology in such a way that they verify and vivify the cosmology. (Laughlin 1995:20)

Similar to Prattis' model of human symbolic activity, the Cycle of Meaning involves metaphor (expressed in mythopoeic expression), vibration (the evocation of direct experience, often in ASC's, through ritual enactment), and form (the modification or enforcement of worldview and/or behaviour). Interjection by a shaman or some type of spiritual guide is often crucial to a successful Cycle of Meaning. Prattis makes the same point, noting that experiences which are not interpreted in a beneficial way by competent spiritual guides can in fact be highly detrimental to an individual (personal communication, 1996).

When the Cycle of Meaning is complete, numinous experiences are evoked in members of a society, through the facilitation of mythopoeic expression by a spiritual guide, and these experiences are then interpreted by the guide in such a way that individuals can make sense of their conception of and place in reality.

The processual models of transformation through ritual enactment that I have just summarized underlay the experiences I had in the MMM, and the picture of the movement illustrated by mythopoetic authors: *personal transformation and healing, through the embodied ritual enactment of symbolic and unconscious complexes, is at the heart of mythopoetic men's work*. In my experiences, there were two distinct forms which this embodiment took: i) the embodiment of wounds, and ii) the embodiment of

archetypes. It was through these two forms of ritual enactment that men attempted to heal themselves and effect personal transformation.

4.0.4 The Embodiment of Wounds: Surfacing and Clearing

As I described in chapter 4, some of the mythopoetic men that I met and worked with have their own conceptual model for the work that they do, called processing. My experience facilitating the May men's weekend strongly confirmed this model as being exemplary of what most mythopoetic men do. Men who I had never met before, and who have not been on the same weekend initiations as other mythopoetic men I know, also used this model extensively. Throughout the May weekend, the terms "processing," "in process," "an issue to process," and similar ones were used. The central aim of mythopoetic men's work is healing, and mythopoetic men conceptualize it as processing personal issues and blockages.

The first step in processing is the recognition of one's blockages. As I described in chapter 4, the vast majority of the blockages and issues that I witnessed men trying to work through, as well as my own blockages, stemmed from emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual wounds suffered during childhood. The men that I worked with described how they were beginning to recognize how these wounds were still causing them pain and conditioning how they interacted with their environments now.

Once a man had reached this step of awareness, the next step was to attempt to remove the blockage. Within the mythopoetic men's work that I witnessed and participated in, this was accomplished through ritual enactment and the physical embodiment of the unconscious structure or wound which was causing the blockage; I mentioned various techniques that are sometimes used to accomplish this in chapter 4.

During the May weekend, it became apparent to me that role-playing, which was actually psychodrama, seems to be a favourite technique of many mythopoetic men.

During my own group work and the May weekend, psychodrama was used as a ritual technique for physically embodying unconscious wounds. I have already described an experience of this technique from my own group work, but I will briefly discuss the psychodrama that I witnessed and was involved in on the May weekend also.

Many of the men who came to the May men's weekend expressed an active interest in wanting to do some processing. As a facilitation group, the other leaders and I offered them a chance to do this through a variation of the Shadow Work that I described in chapter 4, called Carpet Work. Carpet Work is actually not too dissimilar from Shadow Work, but Shadow Work is a copyrighted name, so we could not say that we were using it.

Although I am not very familiar with psychodrama on a theoretical level, Carpet Work is apparently simply psychodrama which incorporates the four archetype model which Moore and Gillette derived and which, as I have written, is fundamental to mythopoetic men's work. During the May weekend, I witnessed three "pieces" of Carpet Work, or three men processing issues. Space does not permit me to elaborate in great detail on these, but I will speak briefly about them.

Each piece was facilitated by someone with experience in Carpet Work, and the rest of the men present assisted also. The person doing the piece (the man processing an issue) was asked to identify the issue, and provide details about it. It was explained to me that this technique is supposed to be "driven" by the person doing the processing.

This means that he only goes as far as he wants to, and only goes where he wants to with the issue.

Carpet Work basically involves the person identifying an issue he wants to process, and then working back in memory to the occurrence of a wound associated with the issue. Perhaps the initial wound which precipitated the issue. As is to be expected, much of Carpet Work involves mother and father issues, since wounds incurred during our formative stages of development are so instrumental in shaping who we are. Once a scene of wounding has been captured from memory, it is re-enacted physically. This is done through identifying "lines" and postures which are repeated throughout the piece. The lines are usually things that were said by the person who did the wounding, and things said by the person who was wounded. Postures are identified which try to recapture the scene of the wounding, such as a father turning his back on a son, or towering over a son menacingly, and waving his finger. Other men in the group are chosen by the person doing the processing to portray different people from the scene of the wounding; the idea here is that the person will choose a man who most reminds him of the figure from his past.

Once the cast has been chosen, and the lines and postures are known, additional props, such as specific colours of clothing, pillows, crowns, hoods, dolls, and other objects are used to further help reconstruct the scene. When the scene "feels right" for the person, it is then enacted. The lines are rehearsed, and the postures and actions performed.

The goal of Carpet Work and Shadow Work, as it was explained to me, and as I perceived and experienced it, is to effect a cathartic release of the emotions and pain

associated with a specific traumatic incident in a person's life. During the May weekend, and in every instance of this type of psychodramatic exercise that I witnessed, this was achieved to at least some degree. At the May weekend I witnessed three pieces set up, during which men ritually enacted painful childhood experiences. As the piece was performed, each man let out a torrent of emotions. The physical enactment of the scene seemed to instantly take the person back to that time, and his reactions were often instantaneous and dramatic. I will never forget watching two of the men focusing deadly stares full of incredible anger and resentment, and yelling obscenities at the top of their lungs, at two other men who they had just met the day before, yet at that moment were physically embodying fathers who had done a great deal of damage to their children forty years earlier. Just witnessing this had a great impact on me, bringing up many of my own feelings from childhood experiences. I also felt an intense sadness and compassion for the men as they worked through their pain. I knew what it was like to be hurt too.

After the person had tapped into the painful experience and the emotions associated with it, the piece was usually structured so as to allow him to achieve some kind of resolution. In two cases this involved the son forgiving the father for what he had done, and the father accepting the forgiveness, and offering some kind of reassurance to the son. Another technique I saw used in one piece involved the son (person doing the piece) symbolically killing the "bad father" by gently pushing him over (upon which he was caught by two other men). A good father, standing behind the bad one and played by another man, then appeared, offering whatever qualities the son had needed from the bad father, but never received.

As with other parts of men's work, there was a good deal of physical contact during these pieces, such as embracing at the end of them. After this was done, the actors who had helped the person do the processing "de-rolled," which meant that they looked directly at the person and said "I'm not your father (or whatever the role was), I'm (person's name), and I'm your brother."

Surfacing and Clearing

The intention of ritual enactments within the MMM such as the psychodrama I described above is the embodiment of unconscious contents of participants. In this case the unconscious complexes were not apersonal and ahistorical, archetypal ones, but were personal experiences of traumatic events. I believe a simple model of *surfacing and clearing*, developed by Prattis (1997) and based on the work of Thich Nhat Hahn, best describes what happens during the processing that occurs within the ritual enactment of wounds in mythopoetic men's work. This model also corresponds accurately with the data that my informants offered in fieldwork, during which they also used the terms "surfacing" and "clearing," and described a similar process as the one below.

Surfacing and clearing, according to Prattis, is the process at the core of most healing and meditative systems (1997:174). "The basic idea is that when we dialogue with painful material that has been repressed, we reduce the potency of that material. In other words we rob it of the energy that can render us dysfunctional—physically and mentally—which is basically what illness is all about" (ibid). Prattis draws on the work of Thich Nhat Hahn (1993), who describes the blockages from traumas from our upbringing, genetic memories, and karma as *samyojana*, or *knots of suffering*. These

knots of suffering are stored deep in our unconscious. “Afflictive emotions such as fear, anger, insecurity, sadness, jealousy and attachment keep the knots of suffering in place, and this produces the disjunctions in mind/body/soul unity that causes illness” (ibid). Surfacing and clearing involves becoming aware of these knots of suffering within one’s unconscious, and then releasing them.

The importance of surfacing and clearing, both physically and mentally, is so one can be free of the knots of suffering and experience a deeper level of personal integration. However, the emotion and pain of old wounds and deep hurts must first of all be identified, surfaced and then released. (Prattis 1997:175)

As I discussed above, the great power of ritual to effect transformation is in its ability to bring about a deeper experience of knowledge previously known only cognitively, through the process of embodiment—ritual knowledge is bodily knowledge. In the embodiment of wounds through ritual enactment that I witnessed in the MMM, what were previously only known as painful, repressed memories became bodily experiences of that pain. In this way, the energy bound up in unconscious wounds was transformed through ritual enactment into more¹³ physical energy, which was released in cathartic performance. Painful wounds stored as energy in the unconscious were thus surfaced and cleared during these types of rituals.

4.0.5 The Embodiment of Archetypes

Ritual enactments within the mythopoetic men’s work that I participated in, and also in the activities documented in mythopoetic texts, focused on embodying a personal symbolic complexes also. We are speaking here of the ritual enactment of archetypal

¹³ I say “more” here because I do not posit a Cartesian mind/body dualism. The energy of unconscious wounds was simply transformed or transferred to other parts of the body.

and mythological complexes, the “stuff” of most religious experience. This more religious form of ritual enactment was also prevalent in the mythopoetic men’s work that I participated in, and was often integrated with the embodiment of wounds. I will use another example to illustrate this occurrence.

The May men’s weekend, as in the example of Carpet Work I gave above, also entailed an intense amount of ritual enactment of archetypal complexes. The weekend was an excellent opportunity to enrich my data, as the types of activities which I had participated in during group work every second week were being performed continuously over a period of three days. One example of the ritual embodiment of an archetypal complex came after one piece of Carpet Work done by a man. When we had finished the piece, and the actors had de-rolled, “D”, one of my informants who had facilitated the piece, instructed one of the men in the group to go get the crown and a cape. These were then put on the man who had done the piece. “D” then told him that he thought he had “called on his king,” or that his “king was here” (I don’t remember the exact words). What “D” was trying to do was to get the man to access his inner King, to call forth the qualities of the King archetype. “D” asked him how he felt at that moment. The man said “present.” “D” then named him “King _____ the Present,” and told someone to go turn on the compact disc player we had in the room to a certain song, one which was supposed to embody king-like qualities.

When the music had started, “D” invited the man to walk around “his kingdom,” and to “bless his subjects.” At this point the man began to get very involved in the ritual. He went into a corner of the room and grabbed a large staff. With the crown on his head,

the robe on his back, and staff in hand, he began walking majestically around the room, laying his hand on each man's shoulder and saying "I bless you." There truly was a kingly look on his face.

Moments of ritually enacting an archetype such as these pervaded the May weekend. The four quadrant, four archetype model of masculinity was involved in virtually everything we did during the weekend. For example, during the Shadow Dance on Saturday night, which was basically an opportunity for the men to engage in free, unbounded ritualization, props, costumes, and makeup were put out, as were "altars" in the four quadrants, each representing a masculine archetype. Throughout the dance, men dressed up, danced, engaged in play, and ritualized. They were encouraged before the dance began to take turns sitting in the King quarter, the Lover quarter, the Warrior quarter, and the Magician quarter, and to "see what came up" for them. This exercise was meant to help the men to access the energies of each archetype, through ritually enacting them.

Mythopoetic men believe that each of the four archetypes of the mature masculine embodies certain qualities which a man needs to function in a healthy, balanced way. By accessing these, a man becomes more whole, which means, in mythopoetic terms, more healthy, more complete. As "D" explained to the men at the weekend as we first gathered around the altar with the four quadrants laid out in each corner of it, "the idea is not to get rid of one quarter's energy; you can never have too much of one. The idea is to bring the other ones up to the same level."

Embodying the Archetypes, and Epic Metaphors

As in Prattis' and Laughlin's models above, this type of ritual enactment within the MMM is about physically embodying a metaphor, and producing numinous experience within the participant, which has the power to transform him. The qualities of the metaphor, which before ritual enactment are known only as mental constructs, are attempted to be embodied, so as to produce a deeper and more profound experience of the archetype.

Sue Jennings (1995), in her work on the Senoi Temiars, also outlines this process. Jennings uses the term *epic metaphors*, to refer to the dominant symbols of Temiar society. Through different ritual enactments, the Temiars attempt to access and embody the qualities inherent in epic metaphors.

Seance performances encapsulate and transform the epic metaphor of tiger and thunder which enable these themes to resonate at deep levels, both for individuals and the Temiar as a society. Thus the seances provide, through enacted and embodied ritual dramas, socialisation and cultural learning of dominant symbols. The seances alert the Temiars to the qualities they most fear on the one hand and those they seek to emulate on the other, as well as providing the means of innovation and change. (Jennings 1995:180)

The Temiars' epic metaphors, like the archetypes of the MMM, are external symbols which correspond to internal, latent symbolic structures. Through ritual enactment, these symbolic complexes are physically embodied, in order that the qualities inherent in them, such as "tigerness," may be accessed and then emulated by the ritual participant.

A similar process occurred in the mythopoetic men's work in which I participated. The dominant metaphors of the symbolic processes we engaged in were the four archetypes of the mature masculine—the King, the Warrior, the Magician, and the

Lover. Through dialogue and textual material, we attempted to learn the qualities associated with each archetype, such as the wisdom and leadership of the King. During ritual enactments, such as the piece of Carpet Work and the blessing ritual that were performed during the May men's weekend, we then attempted to achieve a deep experience of them, by physically embodying these archetypes, with the hope that we might bring the qualities that they symbolized into the other, mundane parts of our lives, and live them on a regular basis.

The ritual enactment of archetypes within the MMM is thus very much an attempt at behaviour transformation. Through physically embodying the deep masculine archetypes during ritual enactment, mythopoetic men attempt to emulate all that they symbolize in the rest of their lives.

4.0.6 Summary: Ritual Enactment as Healing Tool

Ritual is being recognized and used as a fundamental tool in the healing process in popular healing movements like the MMM, and on the burgeoning New Age scene and what Grimes (1990:110) calls "the workshop circuit" (see e.g. Northrup 1995; McGuire 1988). But it is also being used increasingly in professional health care settings by highly accredited doctors and therapists (see Lawliss 1996; Acterberg 1992; Achterberg et al. 1994; Moore 1983; Pearson 1986; 1991). Numerous popular magazines, including *Time*, *Macleans*, and *Psychology Today*, as well as other newsprint and televised media, have recently documented the growing movement toward alternative medicine, including ritual healing. The type of healing techniques that I observed and participated in in the MMM are thus not particular to it, but are being used in similar healing movements in North America and the rest of the world

right now, and are beginning to be recognized and used by mainstream Western biomedicine.

4.1 ASSESSING THE EFFICACY OF THE MYTHOPOETIC MEN'S MOVEMENT

When I began this research on the mythopoetic men's movement, I had two questions in mind: How can we model what is going on in it? and Does it actually work? Having answered the first question, I now turn to the second.

The MMM's primary focus is on healing or promoting growth in men. "Healing" and "growth" are very abstract concepts, however, which makes quantifying them an extremely difficult process. I have felt from the beginning of this project, though, that the question of efficacy is an important one, and that I would have something to say about it. In the data and discussion that I will present below, "healing" will be quantified in various and more precise ways. The *general* indicator that I used in measuring the efficacy of mythopoetic men's work in men's lives, however, was derived from their own descriptions of it to me. The men that I worked with generally defined healing as: "becoming more of a whole person"; "my life getting better"; "becoming the man I want to be." At a *general* level then, I will be assessing the efficacy of mythopoetic men's work from these conceptualizations.

4.1.1 Assessing the Healing of Other Men

It must be stated from the outset that in the emotional, psychological type of healing that occurs in the MMM, the only person who can speak with real authority about whether a man has experienced healing is that man himself; it is impossible to

fully share another human being's experience, and therefore to make judgements about the state of their health. This being said, however, I did make an attempt from the beginning of my research to measure the effects that mythopoetic men's work had on a number of my informants, with the intention of speaking about its efficacy.

Direct Questioning

The first and most obvious method I used for determining if men had done any healing through mythopoetic men's work was to ask them. During interviews, I asked men if men's work had had any effects on their lives, and if it had instigated personal growth for them. The responses I got were mixed.

"D", for example, who had been to many mythopoetic weekends, groups, conferences, and facilitator trainings, repeatedly expressed how certain weekends had "blown him away," had been major moments of transformation for him. "K", a man in a Sterling Men's Team that invited me to the Team meeting that I attended, expressed similar excitement over what Sterling men's work had done for him. During a telephone interview, he told me how Sterling men's work (whose credo is (paraphrased) "to help a man discover and engage his power through releasing the blockages, in order that he may become the man he always wanted to be") had transformed his life, and had indeed made him the man he always wanted to be. Moreover, he said, it had renewed his relationship with his wife: "I've become what she wanted to marry in the first place... I've found myself" (K1:1). Another man whom I met at the Sterling Men's Team meeting also described how "the Sterling Men's Weekend totally changed his life. He came back a 'real man.' He walked through the front door [after the weekend] and everyone in his family knew he was different. He was taught or discovered the man he

always wanted to be (this is a key phrase in Sterling Groups) and unlocked it at the weekend” (Fieldnotes from Sterling Team Meeting, Jul. 10, 1996, pg. 2).

Other men were less enthusiastic about the effects mythopoetic men’s work had on their lives, but still indicated that it had bettered their lives in some way.

...A few days after the group, my outlook tends to be good, positive, upbeat... it has an effect on me. I can’t say as yet that it’s had any major impact... (G1:6)

The effects were also sometimes more specifically observable by the men. “E”, for example, had recognized years ago through men’s work that he had a lot of repressed anger towards his father. Through the awareness and processing that he had done in men’s groups and weekends, however, he had, in his own words, “*cleared*” a lot of it, and no longer had the same negative feelings for his father (E1:5). On a few occasions in Gr2, the members of the group also expressed that coming to meetings had helped them to deal with the problems in their lives. “J” especially, who only came to a couple of meetings since I joined Gr2, was very vocal about the good it had done for him.

One man with whom I attended Gr1, however, told me during an interview that being in the group had not had much impact on his life.

Tim: Since the group started, has it had any impact on you or changed you?

Not for the most part at all.

Tim: Do you feel it’s a valuable thing in your life?

I don’t sense that right now. No, I don’t value it dearly. (F1:3)

Later on in the interview, however, he did express somewhat contradictory sentiments:

Tim: What do you think of the experience of being in this group?

It's certainly been okay. It's been good to see different things, I think it's given me a little more permission to open up emotionally... (F1:4)

Additionally, on other occasions, and during most meetings, "F" stated that he was glad he had the group in his life. It is difficult to interpret the seeming ambiguity of "F"'s attitude toward the group, but I believe it stems from his difficulty in opening himself emotionally. When he was unable to do this, he did not value the experience in the group very much; when he was successful at it, or when other men were, the group meant more to him. These are only my interpretations. however, and it was also clear that "F" did not get as much out of group work as other men did.

Observation of the Men Over Time

The second method I used in attempting to gauge the effects that being involved in mythopoetic men's work had on the men I participated with was observation. This observation occurred primarily in group meetings, as well as during the May weekend and in my other work with the mythopoetic leaders who facilitated the weekend with me. When I began attending Gr1 and Gr2, I attempted to catalogue in my fieldnotes the "states that the men were in." In particular, I focused on: i) issues that they identified they wanted to overcome, and ii) smaller signifiers of their relative state of being, such as ability to open up emotionally, levels of anger, sadness, depression, and stress. Over the several months that I attended group meetings with the men, I made an effort to monitor their progress in these areas.

Not one man that I attended group meetings with totally resolved an issue which he had identified as a problem in his life. This seems natural in light of the fact that

healing is a gradual process. I did witness men make progress with their issues, however.

In Gr2, "H" identified that he sometimes tended to disconnect himself from people socially, retreating from the world and spending much time alone. He discussed this on numerous occasions in group meetings. As time passed, however, he reported to us the efforts he was making to reach out to people. He expressed a feeling of contentment with the success he was having at this. "I", also a member of Gr2, was beginning a new career when I joined Gr2, and expressed a good deal of anxiety about it. At each meeting he seemed to feel more confident about his job. By the end of April he did not mention job anxiety at meetings very often.

I also witnessed considerable progress on self-identified "blockages" in the three original members of Gr1. "E"'s major issue was job stress and indecisiveness at work. From the time that the group began until my departure from it in July, I witnessed "E" gain more confidence in his job situation. He still told us during meetings that he was under stress at work, yet he made some important breakthroughs (according to him), and became more accepting of his situation. "E" had also identified a link between his father issues and his job issues. He did not do any real processing of his father issues in the group, but did discuss them a lot and raised his own awareness of them.

Another man in Gr1, "G", identified problems in his marriage as being the biggest issue in his life. Again, as with "E", "G" identified wounds from his childhood as contributing to the strained relations with his wife, but did not do any real processing of those issues in the group. "G" did make progress with his marriage, by his accounts,

and both the things he described and his body language seemed to verify this; he appeared less forlorn and hopeless when talking about it than during initial meetings.

The final member of Gr1 was "F". Each member of the groups I attended had a special place in my heart. "F"'s was special because in our conversations before meetings, and during meetings themselves, I saw so much of myself in him. "F" also appeared to be the most wounded and the most emotionally closed off of all the men that I met during my research. I thus always felt a special sadness and compassion for him, and I always hoped that he would get to the place of health and happiness that he wanted to, although he seemed, by his own account also, so very far away from it.

"F" had a lot of issues that he was working on and struggling with. The two major ones were anger and emotional intimacy. During the first few meetings of Gr1, I was taken aback by the intense anger which "F" shared with us. He was angry at many things, the primary one being women. He identified his current divorce as a major cause of this. "F" also had difficulty with emotional intimacy in *all* of the relationships in his life. He "lived in his head," as mythopoetic men are fond of describing men, and did not allow himself to feel very much, and was afraid of feeling. As time passed, however, I witnessed "F" make progress in these areas. "F"'s anger, after the first few group meetings, seemed not to return any more. It is difficult to determine whether he still carried a lot of anger around, and was just not expressing it to the group, or whether he truly was not feeling it anymore, but during check-ins "F" did not express feeling anger very often. I interpreted this to mean that he had resolved his anger to some degree, although this is unverifiable in any scientific way.

The issue that “F” constantly identified as still being a blockage in his life was his inability to be intimate. At just about every meeting that I attended, “F” brought this up as a problem in his life, and one that he wanted to overcome. Occasionally he would report small breakthroughs to us, such as times with his children when he felt more open emotionally. He also said during meetings, and in the interview excerpt I included above, that going to meetings allowed him to be more open emotionally. Although I witnessed “F” make some progress in this area, it was clear from his own words and from his body language during meetings that he was still very closed off emotionally. This made me sad, since I could see how much he wanted intimacy, yet had never known what it felt like and did not know how to achieve it.

These summaries of the progress that I witnessed men make during the time I spent with them are by no means exhaustive and detailed; one paragraph summaries cannot come close to doing justice to many months of interpersonal interaction and observation. It is also very important to realize that *a direct cause and effect relationship between personal growth and the men's experience in men's groups is impossible to make*. I have offered the above summaries in an attempt to document the growth that I witnessed, but in no way do I assume that this growth was directly caused by the men's group experience. In a few cases this *was* true, as, for example, when “G” told me during an interview that he used some suggestions that were made during a meeting, and they had a positive impact in his life. As “B” told me in another interview, however, one cannot assume that a person's growth and healing is the direct result of group work; it could be just a function of the natural process of growth that we all experience as we get older, or a host of other, unrelated things (B2:7). I do not claim,

therefore, that any effects of healing or growth that I witnessed in the other men resulted solely from their participation in the group.

However, the men that I participated with said at the end of every single meeting that they were glad they had come to it. They also said that they felt better, that they had got a lot off their chests, that they felt more connected, and a host of other indicators that the group meeting had been a positive, therapeutic experience. And as “E” told me during an interview, in all of the years that he had been involved in men’s work, he had never left a meeting feeling worse than when he had gotten there (E1:5).

A final indicator that the men I participated with derived some therapeutic benefits from group meetings was their level of stress before, and during and after meetings. When I arrived at group meetings, not only was I often feeling extremely “stressed out” over things in my life (including this thesis), but on many occasions, in fact on most occasions, the stress was visibly present on the other men’s faces. Also, during check-ins the men frequently described feeling stressed out about numerous things. As we began the smudge and did our check-ins in Gr1, and as we began the sharing in Gr2, however, I witnessed the men begin to relax, as I myself did. We took deep breaths, and observed moments of silence, to help release the “crap” of the mundane world, including stress. The reduction of stress during group meetings seemed to me to be their most noticeable and immediate benefit. As Lawliss (1996) and others have written about ritual (see also Achterberg 1992; Achterberg et al. 1994), it is an excellent tool for managing and reducing stress and stimulating the vegetative and tissue repairing systems of the body (see Laughlin et al. 1990:156), and it certainly appeared to work during the mythopoetic men’s meetings that I attended.

4.1.2 My Process of Healing and Transformation

As I stated above, it is impossible, and would be unscientific, for me to make any absolute claims as to the healing and growth effected in other men as a result of mythopoetic men's work. I can, however, make such claims about myself. This project has from the start had an experiential focus. I based my research heavily in my own experience, and became my own informant. I have considered all of the experience that I had during my examination of the MMM as data, and it is this experience that informs my writing. The most accurate and scientific method that I can thus think of in attempting to assess the efficacy of the MMM at effecting healing in men is to describe my own experience of healing in it.

Connectedness, Communitas, and My Experience

Mythopoetic men's work, as it was explained to me, is about breaking down walls between men, getting out of the head and into the body, feeling and expressing emotions, and connecting with other men. This was certainly my experience of it. I never thought I had a problem with doing any of these things before, but for some reason during the period that I worked on this project I had entered a phase where I withdrew from open, emotional contact with other people, including men. Group meetings were a chance for me to come out of this withdrawal. I began to crave the open, emotional sharing, the support, the community, and the physical contact that were a part of group meetings. At first reluctant to go "into the field," after a while I began seeing my groups not just as fieldwork locales but as important parts of my life. During the first couple of months of fieldwork, I felt guilty if I missed an interview or a group

meeting. As time went on, the feelings of guilt turned to genuine sadness at the thoughts of missing a night with the men I had come to know and love.

During group meetings, I often felt intense emotions, ranging from anger to grief to love. This was the case at my very first meeting with Gr1.

As I listened to the men talk, and as I myself talked, I felt very emotional. A couple of times I was on the verge of tears. The feeling inside of me was one of intense emotion, of intense—I don't know how to describe it. It was cathartic being with these men. I just felt like I wanted to spill everything, spill my insides out for them, what was bothering me, what was on my mind, what I wanted, what I needed as a human being. (Gr1, Nov.22:9)

I can still recall that night. I was feeling very depressed, and had a lot of things on my mind. Connecting with those men, and sharing emotions, even some physical contact, stirred up intense emotions in me. That meeting, and many other ones, were healing experiences for me simply for their cathartic effect. At my group meetings it was easier to get into my feelings, because they were welcome there, and other men were sharing theirs also. All of the pent up sadness, anger, and stress from the rest of my life got poured out during meetings, and was received by the other men. Group meetings were always very cathartic experiences, and left me feeling more relaxed and emotionally balanced.

Another intense feeling that arose for me during group meetings was an intense sense of connectedness with the other men. I often tried to capture the sense of this in my fieldnotes, but could never find words quite accurate enough to describe it. The best way I know of to describe it is with Turner's term *communitas* (see Turner 1969; 1974). Turner has always been my favourite anthropologist, I think because of the quality of humanness that pervades his work. To me *communitas* embodies that quality, of a deep

human bond, of equality, of compassion. Feeling that intense connectedness, that deep human bond with the other men, was a very powerful and therapeutic experience for me. When it occurred, I felt an ineffable sense of relief inside of myself, as if all of the blockages, all of the stresses in my life temporarily disappeared, and I felt the tension in my body physically release, especially in my jaw and forehead, the 2 areas that I have noticed tense up when I experience stress or anxiety. I also felt great hope in the power of human beings. I no longer felt isolated and alone. The following excerpts describe moments when I experienced that feeling.

The night felt very powerful and intense for me, especially at the beginning. I did feel the guards coming down, both mine and theirs. I honestly did feel like we were naked human beings in that circle. I was with a group of grown men, all of them older, and some of them much older than me, and we were pouring our hearts, our deepest fears, our deepest pain, out to each other. It felt so powerful, so moving, so fulfilling. I felt like, "this is the way it is supposed to be." I wished that it could be this way always. Even after, when I was leaving, I felt that the guards were still a little down, although now we were back in the "real world," where we couldn't just bare ourselves like that all of the time. Thinking about it now, I think this is why I am so sensitive and emotional most of the time, and have been for all of my life. I don't like to let the guards come back up. (I crave and need that feeling, which truly is Turner's *communitas*—I can now pronounce on the reality of that concept, and of Buber's I-Thou. I have experienced it.) Perhaps I want to stay in that space because I have a lot of healing to do, and inside, my body knows that that is where it has to be done, and it feels good when it is in that space. (Gr1, Nov.22:10)

As "E" was talking, and I could see the sadness in his face, and he related how down and frustrated he'd been feeling lately. I just wanted to tell him that I was there for him, and give him a hug. I wanted to make him feel better. I wanted to make him feel like he wasn't alone, and that I cared about him, and that I cared that he wasn't feeling good, and it made me sad too. (Gr1, Jan.29:5)

At this meeting I felt like I was part of a family almost, something that had a sense of strength and belonging, a sense of security and safety. (Gr2 Feb.20:3)

I have used Turner's term *communitas* to describe the feeling of connectedness (which the other men described feeling also), and love and compassion that I felt when I was in ritual space with the other men. But, and I am sure Turner would agree, no linguistic term can fully capture the experience that I had. I am not sure how to quantify the healing effect that being in that energy had; frankly I doubt it is possible. All I can say with certainty is that when I was in it, all of the stresses and negative elements usually plaguing my consciousness disappeared, my body relaxed, and I had intense feelings of happiness and being at peace with myself. Based on what Lawliss (1996) and others have written about the healing effects of ritual, my experience was not an uncommon one.

Transformation

Writing this thesis, and becoming involved in the MMM, began a new stage in my life. Before I came to it I had not been aware of the degree to which I, to which we all, are "walking wounded." During the journey of healing that I began through my involvement in the MMM, I became aware of how much hurt so many people carry around inside of them and to how great a degree it shapes who they are. I now know that I am one of those people.

Through my involvement in mythopoetic men's work, I have begun to get in touch with the pain that I carry around inside, and I have begun the process of surfacing and clearing it. This research project has been the most difficult one I have ever undertaken, not only for its size and scope, but also for its highly personal nature. Researching men's healing has essentially meant researching my own healing, and

getting in touch with all that needs to be healed in me. During this project I often felt like I was in the dark night of my soul, as I struggled with so many deep personal wounds and issues, all the while going through some major external changes to my personal life. I know that the personal journey that I began when I began this project can only lead to a better place though, and is one that I must take. And already I have seen small promises of the brightness that lies ahead, small moments of personal transformation.

During my work in the MMM, I came to many realizations about myself, and began to re-experience and release many of the knots of suffering that I have carried around with me for years. The following excerpt describes an experience of this.

I remember feeling so good at this meeting, feeling so strong, and empowered. I can't explain it. I just felt like I was making progress, like I was overcoming things, like I was taking control. I guess that's what it was, really... And I have to admit that I have been feeling better lately, I have been feeling less under their [unconscious wounds] control, and more like I am in control of my happiness, my life. My moods are a lot more even, and I'm making progress on the opening up/ being able to feel vulnerable front. I still feel like I have a ways to go, but I feel like I am definitely making forward progress.

In my mind, all of the things I am doing right now to try to feel better *are* having a healing effect on me. I can sense when I have made progress, like at tonight's meeting. I'm just so hungry and impatient for it. I want to reach the end right now. (Gr1, Mar.25:2-3)

I did not experience many moments during mythopoetic group work like the one I described above, but the ones I did experience were truly healing. I could sense when I was making a breakthrough on the process of uncovering repressed traumas, such as at this March 25th meeting. I made sure to pay special attention to these little epiphanies, and to the self-knowledge that they contained, for merely being aware of them helped to free me from the patterns of repetition compulsion that I was enacting in my life.

The true magic of mythopoetic men's work, however, the place of real transformation, seems to be in the *processing* that occurs in it; it was apparent at the May weekend, and through talking to various mythopoetic men, that processing was where men did a lot of healing. Unfortunately, although I did witness very powerful episodes of other men processing issues, my own experiences with processing were very limited. The episode of role-playing from the April 24th meeting of Gr1, which I described in chapter 4, was the only real instance of ritually enacted, *embodied* processing that was facilitated for me during my experience in mythopoetic men's work. Although we did not take it as far as it could have gone, it was still a very powerful and emotional experience for me. I could sense myself holding back, but I could also feel enormous bursts of emotion welling up in me. That episode made me realize the huge potential that the ritual techniques of embodiment within the MMM possess. The type of ritual enactment that occurs within the mythopoetic men's work that I witnessed, and which by my informants' accounts and mythopoetic texts, is very representative of the MMM as a whole, can and does have vast healing effects. Not only was the embodiment of childhood traumas through the psychodrama that I did a healing experience for me, but letting my guards down and earnestly engaging in the ritual enactment of archetypes during the May weekend was an empowering experience as well. When I sat in the "Warrior quarter," and allowed my imagination to engage with the energy of the symbols, I *did* begin to feel some of the empowered, purposeful, dedicated energy that is associated with that archetype. And in fact I noticed that I carried that energy with me into the next few days, feeling renewed and empowered in the rest of my life.

4.1.3 The Potential for More

Although I witnessed mythopoetic men's work appearing to have positive effects on other men, and although it certainly did for me, there were shortcomings with it. Although there were numerous, smaller shortcomings in the work that I witnessed, such as the "ritual misfires" that I mentioned in chapter 4, due to space constraints I will discuss only what I perceived to be its major one: its frequent failure to live up to its potential.

One set of facts which struck me as peculiar when I began this research was the presence of elements in the movement that have been recognized as being *drivers*, or having the potential to radically alter the entrainment of neural networks and produce altered states of consciousness, through the retuning of the autonomic system (see Laughlin et al. 1990; d'Aquili 1983; Lex 1979). Some of these elements of the MMM, many of which I participated in, are prolonged drumming, chanting, vigorous dancing, fasting, and physical exhaustion. The MMM, through borrowing ritual techniques from other cultures, has appeared to have borrowed their driving mechanisms also. The peculiarity of this situation arises in that none of the mythopoetic men that I spoke with, and none of the texts that I encountered, appear to recognize the purpose and potential of the drivers they use in effecting ASC's.

This leads to a second potential of the MMM that appears to have not been actualized (although it may occur in other groups around the world whose activities I was not privy to), which is the use of ASC's in the healing process. As Laughlin and Prattis state, the use of ASC's by many cultures around the world is crucial not only to making a cosmology come alive in the mind of a ritual participant, but also to effecting

healing. Other authors have recognized this fact also (see Field 1992; Gellhorn and Kiely 1972; Moerman 1979; Lawliss 1996; Rowan 1993).

The MMM thus incorporates many driving activities into its techniques which have been documented as having the potential to effect radical shifts in consciousness, but does not appear (I stress *appear*) to recognize their potential. And while these tools are used repeatedly, they do not appear to be used to produce ASC's, which have been documented as greatly enhancing the healing process. The MMM thus seems to be missing out on the vast potential for accelerating the healing process of techniques it already uses.

A final shortcoming of the mythopoetic men's work that I witnessed is one identified by mythopoetic men themselves. During a couple of conversations with "D", I questioned him about the importance of ritual, and physical enactment, to mythopoetic men's work. I also told him that the groups I was involved in did not seem to involve much "body work," but mainly a lot of talking. He told me that of course physical elements were important to this work; otherwise meetings turned into just "stitch and bitch" sessions.

I never got a full explanation of what "stitch and bitch" meant, but I know that it connotes much of what happened in Gr1, and *all* of what happened in Gr2, during my experience in them. "D" and other men that I worked with made it clear to me many times that the "gold" of mythopoetic men's work was processing, where men did serious work on the things that were making them unhealthy. It also became clear that effective processing involves not only the mind, but the body as well, and in fact that physical embodiment through ritual enactment was crucial to processing.

In the group work that I did, however, processing through ritual enactment and embodiment did not play a dominant role. And yet it was clear from my other experience, and from talking to men like "E" who had a lot of experience in groups, that processing was very effective at surfacing and clearing, and that the men in my groups wanted to process issues, and move on with their lives. "E" actually said that he wished we were doing more processing in Gr1, and many men on the May weekend said that they came there not just to stitch and bitch, but to do some processing.

It was my experience also that in group work we did too much talking and not enough processing. Through my theoretical studies in symbolic anthropology, I had grown to recognize the importance of embodiment in symbolic healing. I thus always felt like a meeting which focused only on discussion was not accomplishing all that it could. My experience in Gr2 bore this out especially, since in Gr2 we never did anything but talk, nor did the other members seem to even be aware of some of the techniques of other mythopoetic men's groups:

Continuing on a past theme, this group seems to be good at cathartic-type therapy, where one gets out what is inside, whether it's a blockage or whatever, but is there any real attempt at processing the underlying issue or blockage? It's a safe place to come to let out emotions and issues, but is anyone being challenged? I think that the "challenge" part that "B" and "C" and others have spoken about before is the processing part of these groups. I don't think anyone is really challenged too much at this group, at least not while I have been there. (Gr2, Feb. 20:3)

I thus always felt during Gr2 meetings, and during many Gr1 meetings, especially after I had witnessed the healing power and effectiveness of embodied ritual enactments, that the potential was present for so much more than what we were actually

accomplishing. This aroused various feelings in me, including frustration, but mainly sadness. I witnessed other men wanting so desperately, and trying so earnestly, to do some healing, yet not utilizing effective tools that were within their reach. I was also sad for myself, because I too wanted very much to heal the pain in my life.

And so I am going to conclude this chapter, and the body of this thesis, with a passage from my fieldnotes which summarizes this sadness, and my experience with the mythopoetic men's movement. I think this is fitting, since I have learned that much of mythopoetic men's work is about sadness, the sadness that men never feel.

My sense at this meeting was that everyone was more relaxed, and beginning to feel deeper connections with each other, opening up more. I certainly felt this way at the meeting, probably because I had experienced profound emotion during it. I still feel like there is potential for so much more though. I wonder how far we can take this group. I'll be sad to leave it, if I ever have to. It's become so much more than just research.

Conclusion

Symbolic and Cultural Appropriation

My greatest curiosity about the mythopoetic men's movement has always been "What is it really about, and does it work?" My journey with it was about answering these questions. Other issues did arise during my research, however, including the very current topic of symbolic and cultural appropriation.

Not only does the appropriation of other people's traditions appear to be rampant in the rest of the MMM, but it was also ubiquitous to the mythopoetic men's work that I participated in. The calling of the four directions, the sage smudge, the burning of sweetgrass, the chants and "Ho!"s, all of these symbolic gestures we performed were "borrowed" or "stolen" from other cultures.

Which of these two terms is a more accurate description of the appropriation that occurs in the MMM might be impossible to determine. On one hand, during our first meeting of Gr1, "E" said that Native men he had worked with were fine with white men using their traditions, and even cooperated with them in the process of appropriation. Yet on the other hand, "A" expressed anger and resentment at the theft of his culture's most sacred traditions. Two things in particular upset "A" about this theft. The first was the disrespect showed by others. After years of persecution by white men, and their theft of Native lands, they were now stealing the only thing that Native people had left—their sacred traditions:

You see a lot of it in California where they're using rattles, wheels and drums, eagle feathers, they're using pipes, and they're non-natives, and they sell their services for 6, 7, 8 hundred dollars a week, and they take someone to the top of a hill and they say this is the ancient shaman mystic healing, and it's all a bunch of baloney... When these people do that, they're exploiting, and once again, it's exploiting everything that our relatives, our grandparents did, for financial gain... They've taken so much from us, now they want our spirituality too... (A1:5)

The second thing that bothered "A" was the practice of charging money for healing. Although he wasn't very familiar with mythopoetic men's retreats in particular, he was well-acquainted with the "workshop circuit" and the current proliferation of \$500 miracle healing weekends. To "A", charging money for healing was blasphemous; all healing should be free.

I think for the one that benefits from it, the one that gets 350 dollars from it, he's got money in his pocket and he's doing what he thinks is right. And maybe some of this stuff is working for them. But any healing should never cost anybody anything. It should be done for free. It comes from the heart and it is given to the heart. So there should never be money passed between people... What if you were charged every time you took a breath? Fifty cents every time your heart beats. A dollar for every time that blood goes through your body. What right do we have to charge people for healing? It's the same thing. Five bucks you have a good sleep tonight. It doesn't make sense. It's the same thing with healing. (A1:6,7)

As with the rest of what I have written in this thesis, I feel the only academically responsible commentary I can offer about this issue should stem from my own perspective and experience. There is no rule or law, written or unwritten, proclaiming that healing should be free. I believe it ultimately reduces to subjective experience. My own feeling is similar to "A"'s, that healing should not have a price.

And yet writing this makes me a hypocrite, for after "Men's Spirit Camp '97" was over, 1/5 of the surplus from fees we charged for the weekend, \$80, was given to

me, and I accepted it. I can rationalize this fact every way, by saying that I needed the money, that I deserve to be compensated for the legwork I did, or that I really don't like the idea and I probably will never do it again. But the bottom line is that I helped to put on a event whose purpose was healing, and I profited from it. I broached this subject with the other "leaders" I worked with, but they seemed reluctant to discuss it. At times they appeared uncomfortable with profiting from healing, and at others, perfectly natural.

Like some of the men that I worked with, there are many men and women who feel it is their calling to help people heal, and yet are not supported by their community as the medicine people of many smaller societies are. and so they charge money for what they do. Yet not only are these people offering healing workshops, retreats, and private counseling, but some of the most respected scholars in Western academic disciplines are also. One can attend workshops by Stanley Krippner and Michael Harner at the Omega Institute for fees of a few hundred dollars. and even in smaller urban centres like Ottawa, anthropologists and psychologists are offering the indigenous healing techniques that they studied in their professional research to laypeople. The appropriation of other people's traditions is indeed ubiquitous in North America. Just as many people are profiting from the sale of aboriginal art, some are profiting from the sale of indigenous healing services. I do not know whether there can be any resolution with this issue, or if its debate is even fruitful. The matter appears to be one of conscience on the part of the person offering the healing.

In addition, some believe that there can be no theft of true symbols, since they are archetypal complexes that reside within all of us; true symbols thus belong to all

humans and should be open to their use. Some of the mythopoetic men I worked with expressed similar sentiments. The symbols of the 4 quadrants belonged to everyone, and the Warrior was within us all.

Prattis (1997:212) addresses the matter by stating that from an archetypal perspective, the borrowing of symbols and rituals is to be expected and perhaps encouraged, all things being equal. "But," he states, "all things are not equal. Factors such as conquest, dependency, exploitation and colonialism provide a volatile political context as the arena within which symbols are borrowed, reconstructed and used" (ibid). This power dynamic was apparent in what "A" said to me about cultural and symbolic appropriation. It was clear that the issue was a political one for him, as is evidenced in his statements above about colonial theft and exploitative practices. What seemed to bother "A", and what was indeed missing from the ritual experimentation I was involved with, was the element of respect. Little or no effort was made to earnestly engage with and understand the symbolic elements we were borrowing in their original contexts. Respect for the sacredness of the elements we were borrowing was absent except at very superficial levels. Perhaps this was due to the demographic makeup of those doing the borrowing, since white affluent males in our society are used to having immediate access to whatever they need, and to taking shortcuts to get it.

Speaking again from my own experience, I can say that I did feel uncomfortable with engaging in rituals which I knew were very sacred to other cultures, yet which we were experimenting with, and probably doing a poor job of performing. Sitting in my position of white maleness, I experienced being on the opposite end from "A" of the dynamic of appropriation, and I felt guilty.

But what I felt the most during these rituals was a sense of symbolic illiteracy. I was brought up a Roman Catholic, and whether or not its rituals have any life for me any longer, I know them well. Obversely, during mythopoetic rituals, I was always left wondering what would happen next, what the symbols meant, and how I should be feeling.

Upon reading recent work on ritual studies, I was struck by the importance of play and getting into the body through ritualization. There is, however, a real and necessary process whereby spontaneous, body-centred ritualization and ludic elements combine to form a ritual, a performance whose meaning and gestures are well-known to participants, and which is efficacious in evoking some form of transformation in them. I believe most of the performances I engaged in and witnessed during mythopoetic men's work were somewhere between the stages of ritualization and formal ritual. The first stage in the symbolic process seemed to be missing in these ritual enactments—there was little cognitive engagement with the metaphor, little dialogue around the meaning of the symbols. This was the result of a lack of due process, a lack of seriously engaging with and understanding the symbols in their indigenous contexts, and of granting them the respect and sacredness that they warranted. The efficacy of ritual enactments suffered as a result. I felt that the direct experience they facilitated was not as numinous as it could have been, the experience of the metaphors was not very deep.

Issues of Safety and Guidance, and Reifying the Archetypes

Completing this research was a difficult experience for me, but I am glad that I did it. Among the many things it taught me was that growth comes through suffering.

With this knowledge, I look with some trepidation to the future, because I see that I am now firmly on a path of growth.

The mythopoetic men's movement was one factor in my beginning this path. In my engagement with it I did some healing, and saw its potential to help me and other men achieve more than it already has. There is power in its use of ritual and archetypes, and its focus on the body, the emotional, the erotic.

During my research, however, I witnessed occurrences which raised concerns of safety. For example, although I was a minor participant in Carpet Work pieces, I refused to help directly facilitate because I had concerns with the whole process. Throughout my study, I was concerned with the ease with which mythopoetic men played with people's shadows and deep psychological traumas. Only one of the men I worked with had any type of formal psychological training, and it was not at a major institution. These men were in fields like computer science and consulting, and were not trained therapists. To me this presented a dangerous situation. I told them on many occasions that they were manipulating extremely powerful forces, and I had some anxieties about being involved in the process in any capacity. Their response alarmed me also—they said that one had to start somewhere, and it was a process of experimentation.

During a piece of Carpet Work done on the May weekend, my concerns appeared to have been justified, as blatant signs of serious abuse surfaced. The other facilitators and I discussed the situation later. They were visibly shaken by the incident, and admitted they were not equipped to deal with it. To make matters worse, a participant of the weekend who also had experience in facilitating Carpet Work had

tried repeatedly to take over the facilitation process from “D”, who later told me that the man kept prompting “D” to “go after it,” meaning to try to expose the abuse overtly.

Returning to Laughlin’s model of the Cycle of Meaning, it is immediately apparent that what was missing in the mythopoetic men’s work that I witnessed and participated in were competent spiritual guides, what would be called shamans in many other cultures. It was stressed to me many times that one of the strengths of mythopoetic men’s work was its leaderless quality, and its stress on self-directed healing. And yet, within mythopoetic techniques such as psychodrama, Carpet Work, and Shadow Dancing, *immensely* powerful psychic forces and contents are *deliberately manipulated*: despite numerous reassurances by mythopoetic “leaders” that men “drove” the healing process themselves and were in no danger, these techniques are deliberately designed to prod archetypal and other unconscious material. As I stated in Chapter 5 in my discussion of the Cycle of Meaning, the role of the shaman in facilitating and interpreting the experience of the ritual participant is crucial and necessary. The absence of such experienced and competent guides in the mythopoetic men’s work I witnessed presented a real and serious danger to participants in it, who submitted themselves to potentially devastating psychological processes. The mythopoetic “leaders” that I worked with, although possessing some experience with the techniques they used, were not extensively trained in dealing with powerful, archetypal material. Prattis (1997) summarizes the dangers inherent in what I witnessed in the MMM, and in Western civilization’s current ritual tinkering, combined with our preference for “seven-second-sound-bytes”:

When this latter logic and preference [for seven-second-sound-bytes] is transferred to ritual activities, the potential for highly dangerous consequences is created. In non-industrial societies the underlying mythology, ritual preparation and attention to due process enables initiates to engage safely with archetypal material. This occurs under the guidance of shamans or medicine people who have the requisite knowledge of entire cycles of meaning and of the symbolic transformations involved. Without this kind of knowledge, preparation and guidance, modern day wild man retreats, healing circles, or masking workshops, for instance, may well do more harm than good in terms of releasing unconscious material in circumstances where nobody has the requisite knowledge or procedures to facilitate archetypal integration. (222)

I thus had many concerns over safety and the absence of qualified spiritual guides in the mythopoetic men's work that I witnessed. Additionally, coming from an academic background, I was often repulsed by the way that mythopoetic men seemed to reify archetypes. They often reminded me of chefs who opened their archetypal cookbook, wondering, "Hmm, what kind of energy will I whip up for myself today, Warrior or Magician?" Through my education, I had developed a sense of reverence for Jung's work and the archetypes of the collective unconscious. I did not see the same kind of reverence in these men, and it bothered me.

Yet despite these issues of safety and the sometimes questionable use of archetypes, I cannot deny the dramatic results that I witnessed. The Carpet Work I saw done, and the blessing ritual of the May weekend were extremely powerful experiences, and revealed to me the potential in mythopoetic men's work. If there were things about it that I would change, it would be to ensure that competent, well-trained spiritual and psychological guides did the facilitating, and that due process was followed in working with the archetypes, involving respect, reverence, and proper preparation.

The Spiritual Evolution of Western Culture

In my opinion, the approach of the MMM, with its attempt to put the *ritual* back into *spiritual*, is typical of the current spiritual climate of North America, and perhaps the Western Hemisphere. Turner's exposition of the dialectical relationship between structure and anti-structure as being fundamental to less technological societies is true of our own also. It is no surprise that we are witnessing the flourishing of movements like the MMM, which centre around syncretic ritual and body-centred ritualization and exotic symbolic complexes—our churches and the rest of our technocratic, logocentric, secularized society have lost the ability to captivate and transform us, two needs which we will never outgrow no matter how technological and modern we become. Our dalliance to the "structure" end of Turner's spectrum, which began with the Industrial Revolution and perhaps before it, is being counterbalanced with the humanistic, consciousness-altering, alternative-religious counterculture that began in the 1960's, and is continuing today with spiritual experimentation and the New Age movement. Turner and Jung had it right—life and society are fluctuations between opposites, oscillations around a perfect middle, the hidden centre.

What we are witnessing with the mythopoetic men's movement and other nascent spiritual forms are thus manifestations of the period of accelerated spiritual evolution which is currently occurring. Mainstream religions, which no longer appear to be efficacious for people, are being usurped by small-scale nascent spiritual groups, which have returned their focus to the numinous, the experiential, the ritual: the place where today's structurally overloaded religions began hundreds of years ago.

We are not witnessing a revolutionary occurrence, but an *evolutionary* one, and one which great minds like Turner and Jung predicted long ago. Yet this *is* an exciting time. Who knows what new large scale religious forms will result from this current experimentation? Who knows if they even will result? Will we worship in gendered spaces, at mythopoetic men's temples, and mythopoetic women's? All we can do is wait for time to answer these questions.

But in the meantime we can also do the important work that I have tried to do in this thesis. Instead of documenting other cultures before they disappear, we can document the rebirth of our own.

Appendix 1

LETTER OF CONSENT

I am in the process of gathering information on contemporary men's spiritual and healing groups. I'm interested in finding out what needs these groups serve, how they serve them, and the success that they have in serving them. This interview will focus on your experience of and thoughts about these groups.

Your participation in this project will require ____ interview(s). You are free to stop or withdraw from this interview at any time, for whatever reason. You are also free to respond only to those questions which you feel comfortable answering.

This letter of consent clarifies the nature of my research, my responsibilities as a researcher, and your insights as a respondent. Any complaints relating to this interview process may be communicated to Jacques Chevalier, Chair of the Anthropology/ Sociology Department, Carleton University. The supervisor for this thesis is Ian Prattis, Department of Anthropology, Carleton University.

With regard to confidentiality, the following precautions will be taken:

1. I will personally transcribe each tape recorded interview.
2. I will eliminate any identifying information from the transcripts of this interview, from my thesis product, and from any research, or articles or books not yet written or published.
3. If you wish, you may sign this letter of consent with an "X", to further ensure anonymity.

Whenever possible, I will provide you with the opportunity to examine drafts of the thesis product containing information or insight which you have provided. At this time you will have an opportunity to offer revisions and guidance with respect to the final draft. My aim is to represent as accurately as possible **your** experience and insight on this topic.

Thank you very much for your time and input.

Tim Olaveson
1202-211 Bell St. N
Ottawa, ON
K1R 7E3
e-mail: tolaveso@ccs.carleton.ca

Signature of Interviewee _____

Signature of Researcher _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2

Sample Interview Questions

1. How did you get involved in men's groups?
2. Why did you join a men's group? What are you looking for in a group?
3. Is this type of men's work about healing?
4. How do men get what they get out of these groups? How are they healed?
5. How do you assess whether a man has gotten something out of a group, or do you worry about that as a facilitator? How do you know when healing is occurring?
6. Are there any specific techniques or methods that you employ in men's work?
7. You mentioned that you use ritual in group work. How do you use it, and what do you use it for?
8. How do you conceive of ritual, or define it?
9. You used the word "blockage" the last time we talked. What did you mean by that?
10. You described having a "toolbox" for facilitating men's circles. What's in your toolbox?
11. The last time we met, you talked about men being like rocks, and women being like water. What did you mean by that?
12. Tell me about the weekend you went on? What were your experiences during it?

Appendix 3

Informant Key

(Brief Profiles of Informants)

Mythopoetic “Leaders”

Informant A

- Native Canadian, late 30’s to early 40’s, facilitates healing circles for Native men. Involved in this work for at least 3 years.

Informant B

- white male, late 40’s, involved in MMM since approximately 1991. Facilitates men’s groups and personal counseling, participates in workshops, conferences, and does public and activist work in the men’s rights movement. Was a facilitator at the May men’s weekend.

Informant C

- white male, late 40’s, involved in MMM for the last 5 years. Has been to many conferences and a few weekends. Facilitates groups and counseling. Was a facilitator at the May men’s weekend.

Informant D

- white male, late 40’s, involved in MMM for the last 5 years. Has attended and staffed numerous conferences, weekends, and gatherings. Owns extensive library of mythopoetic men’s books. Was a facilitator at the May men’s weekend.

Mythopoetic “Group Participants”

Informant E

- white male, late 40’s to early 50’s. Has been involved in MMM for the past 5 years. Has attended and staffed mythopoetic weekends. Was a member of Gr1

Informant F

- white male, mid-forties. Was a member of Gr1, his first men’s group.

Informant G

- white male, early 40’s. Was a member of Gr1. Joined the group as a follow-up to initiatory weekend he had recently attended.

Appendix 3 (cont'd)

Informant H

- white male, late 30's. Has been a member of Gr2 for 4 years. Previous experience in MMM unknown.

Informant I

- white male, early 40's. Has been a member of Gr2 for 4 years. Also involved in other counseling groups.

Informant J

- white male, late 40's. Has been a member of Gr2 for 4 years.

Informant K

- white male, late 30's to early 40's. Member of a Sterling Men's Team, went on a Sterling Weekend. Meets with his Team every month. Vehemently encouraged me to come to Team meeting.

Informant L

- white male, early 40's. Member of a men's group for four years. Was a facilitator at the May men's weekend.

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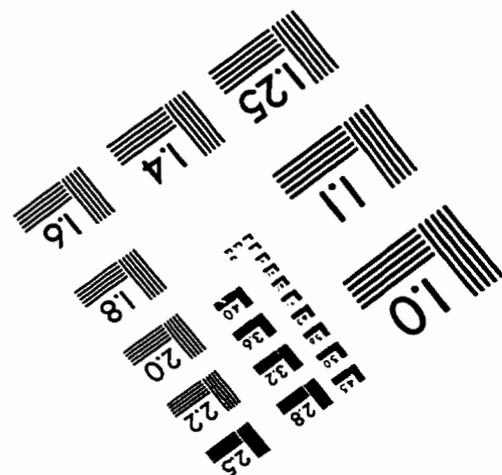
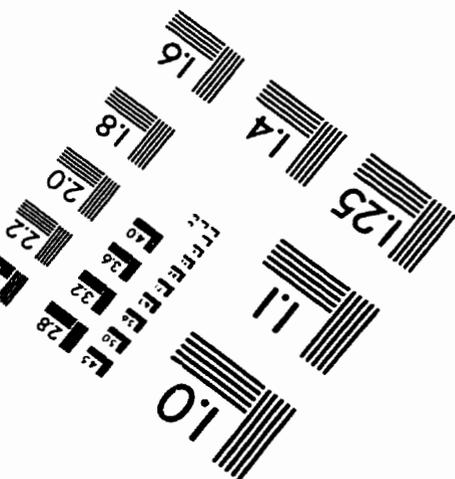
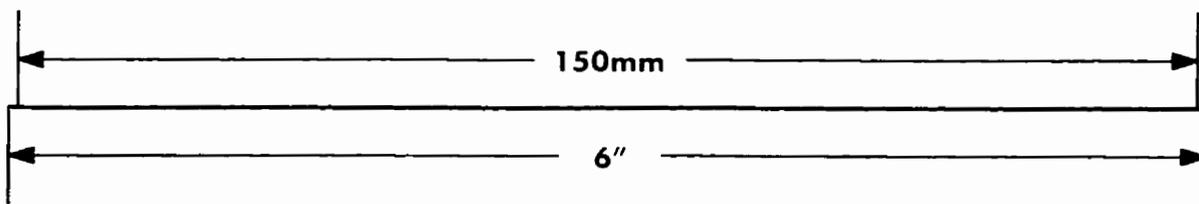
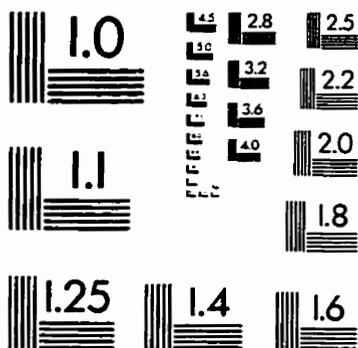
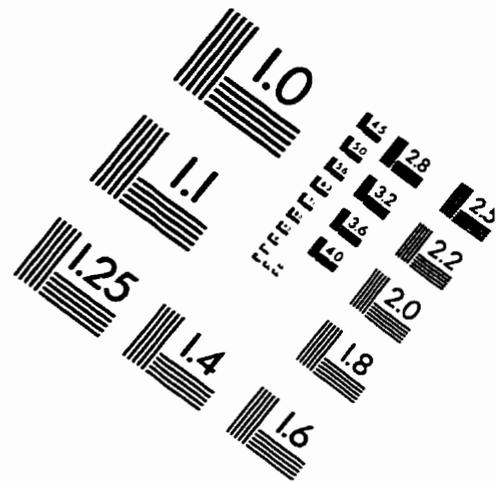
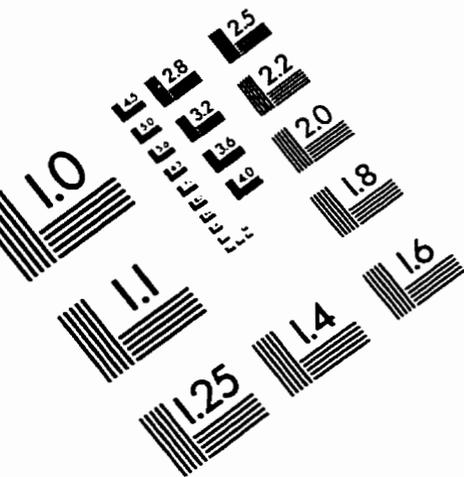
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