

Men's group explores feelings, issues

By ANN TRENEMAN
Of the Emerald

"What exactly is a men's awareness group?"

The four men sitting around the room looked at each other and laughed.

"We'll probably all have a different answer for that question," Michael Pitrone, a member of a newly formed men's awareness group, said.

"The group is a real non-threatening place and a real helpful place," James Lanz, another group member said.

"In the group someone might point out something I said was sexist and since it's a supportive place, I might be able to say, 'Well, what do you mean by sexist?'"

"Maybe in another situation involving a woman very aware of sex roles, who might come out and attack me, I'd feel threatened. Being attacked is not going to make me change," Lanz added.

"People come to the group with

different ideas: political reasons, fighting sexism and support for changes..." Pitrone said.

The men's group, formed about seven weeks ago, has about 10 members, ages 20-30, involved in all sorts of occupations ranging from teacher to nurse to "bum."

"We talk about problems, issues and feelings," Bob Reuter, another group member said.

Lanz was quick to point out, "It doesn't have to be a problem to be discussed. At the beginning of the group last week we went around and asked 'How was your week?'"

Issues the men in the group decided were important to discuss are dependency, sex roles, strokes, homosexuality and parent-child relationships.

"Sexism causes men to separate from one another," Pitrone said. "It's pretty unusual for men to have a best friend."

"Men's support gives me support to step out of the roles — to hug men etc.," Matthew Rainbow,

another group member, added. James Reuter, a social worker at the Family Shelter House, thinks "It's extremely important for men to start to talk to men and to be able to talk to someone who is able to understand what they're saying."

Reuter works with wife-beaters, and he said, "Just communicating has a very good potential in solving some of the problems in sexism and aggression."

The group helps men to voice their feelings on homosexuality. Reuter said, "It was real threatening to me at first to touch other men. We're taught to hate and fear homosexuality. You have to deal with those fears."

When asked what changes

have occurred in their lives since joining the group, Reuter said, "Since I've started going to men's groups I've gone through many changes in every part of my life. The group has been real supportive."

"I don't feel like I'm doing everything by myself," Pitrone said.

"The group is providing me with a whole nucleus of friends," Lanz said. Lanz just moved to Eugene from Ann Arbor, Mich. and feels Eugene is a "pretty unfriendly town."

The members all think the men's awareness movement is expanding.

"I think there is a growing idea of consciousness along with the growing men's movement," Reuter said.

When asked how the men's movement compares with the women's movement, Rainbow answered, "The men's movement seems to have less extremism. There's not as much anger in men, so there's not as much need to be extreme."

"I think the more men try to become liberated the more they are becoming conscious of the ways in which they oppress women," he added.

Lanz said he thinks a lot of men

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feel guilty concerning women.

"A lot of attitudes are 'Oh, we're such shits because we oppress women,' I think we're all real beautiful people. A lot of shit has been laid on us that we weren't aware of and we're starting to become aware of it."

Lanz, a nurse, says he felt very uncomfortable with his profession at first, but now, "I'm feeling better about it."

Although the group itself has taken no political stand, some of the members are actively involved in support of the local gay rights issue.

When asked if the men's movement is ridden with the splits present in the women's movement, Pitrone said there is a split in the men's movement between Marxist and capitalist-oriented men. The gay movement is another section of the men's movement, although they're linked, he said.

"There are a lot of men out there who are feeling the same things. We hope some respond and check it out," Reuter said when asked how he thought the group will fare in Eugene.

Anyone interested in joining the group can call 342-2841.

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