

Modern Day Rites of Passage for Boys/Men – the ultimate form of preventative medicine

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The difference between a man with a vision who wants to make a positive mark on his world and one who is aimless with no hope for the future is immeasurable. The aim of Pathways to Manhood is to bring out the potential in young men and have them full of inspiration as they look to the future.

Consider if you will your own early teenage years. Did you feel comfortable in your body? Were you inspired about your future? Was there someone there to answer all your deepest questions? Did you feel at ease with members of the opposite sex? Or were you like me and the vast majority of people who struggled through those years battling a mixture of loneliness, confusion, depression and sheer frustration. Did you also pray for the time when it would all end and you would finally grow up, feel like an adult and start living the life you'd dreamed of with all that other stuff left far behind in your past? And by the way, has it happened yet?

Why did all indigenous societies and communities place so much emphasis on Rites of Passage? It was recognised that the stages of life often meant great changes in the psyche of the individual and the marking of these points of change with a ritual or ceremony was in order to facilitate this. Birth, marriage and death were obvious times but there were many others that we now ignore in modern Western society. Initiation of boys was performed throughout the world and of all the Rites of Passage this was the one that often took the most effort and energy. It was recognised that the future of the community depended upon having healthy men as opposed to overgrown boys. The shift from boy to man was seen as being so fundamentally important that the boys were removed from the rest of the community and taken away not to return until they were on the pathway to manhood.

The shift from boy to man psychology is not one that occurs naturally. The difference in the two is so fundamental that a significant event is required for this to happen. It is the role of the elders within the community to create such an event or there is a risk that boy psychology will persist into adulthood.

The difference between Boy Psychology and Healthy Man Psychology

Boy Psychology	Healthy Man Psychology
I seek acknowledgement	I seek that which I believe in
I want it all for me.	I share with my community
Power is for my benefit	Power is for the good of all
I am the centre of the universe	I am just part of the universe
I believe I am immortal	I know I am mortal
I take no responsibility for my actions	I take full responsibility for my actions
I want a mother	I want relationship with a woman

Of particular interest is that there are cross-cultural commonalities to the processes used in different parts of the world:

- Boys were removed from the community.
- The relationship of boy and mother with the boy as an infant finished and a new one based on respect began.
- The history and ways of the community were passed on through song, story and dance.
- An event was crafted that showed the boy his mortality.
- The return of the boy as a young man to the community was celebrated.
- Afterwards the elder men in the community watched over, supported and if necessary disciplined the young man.

What happens if we don't create Rites of Passage for our youth?

Do you know of any men who, despite being adults, still function on the model of boy psychology described above? Imagine the frustration and internal stress of a man still continually seeking acknowledgement and power, wanting to be number one all the time, thinking he is the centre of the universe, believing he will live forever, taking no responsibility for his actions and then on top of that looking for a woman who will mother him? It is a disastrous combination and one that often leads to either drugs or alcohol to numb out unhappy states of mind or the setting up of artificial environments at work or in relationships to create a false sense of success.

Put simply, a man cannot lead a healthy and fulfilling life if he is still functioning at the level of boy psychology and his community will also suffer, as he will not provide a positive contribution.

There is a strong belief that much of the risk-taking behaviour displayed by teenage boys is in fact their attempts at self-initiation. Fast cars, binge drinking, fighting in the street and taking drugs are just a few examples of ways that boys try to prove their manliness. Unfortunately the results can be disastrous and have long-term consequences.