

Boy Code

By Ian Lillico



In the book "Real Boys" by William Pollack, it is stated that the boy code is what we are facing in our current concerns with young men. The four major elements of the boy code are:

- The sturdy oak - stoic, steady, no weakness, no crying, no complaining.
- Give 'em hell - Clint Eastwood, some sports coaches, Bruce Lee, bravado and attraction to violence. This stems from the "boys will be boys" myth.
- The big wheel - status, dominance, power - avoiding shame at all costs, the mask of coolness - "she's right!"
- No sissy stuff - the gender straightjacket, which (mistakenly) prohibits feminine feelings, dependence, warmth and empathy.

This fourth aspect of the boy code is of particular concern, as when boys get into relationships with women, they often cannot draw upon empathy and warmth to keep the relationship alive. I am not saying that boys have to be so in touch with their feelings that they cry at the drop of a hat, but they must be able to bring their feelings to the surface when appropriate.

Pollack suggests that this boy code separates boys from their parents too early. Current researchers in the USA are claiming that premature separation of boys from their mothers is the cause of many boys having to look to their father, who is often not present or distant. William Pollack claims this relational rupture can last forever.

For many boys, being a boy becomes defined in the negative of not being a girl. From very early ages, boys see what their mother and sisters are doing, and even though they are unsure of what males do, they know they are not females and consequently act out opposite ways of behaving from females. Thus if women are seen to be nurturing, reading and doing housework, boys feel that they shouldn't.

Anger has become the common pathway for a boy's strong feelings - the emotional funnel through which boys express their vulnerability and powerlessness. Peer groups systematically disallow the 65 (or more) feelings and emotions that our boys are born with - leaving only two - laughter and anger. As parents and teachers, we must open up the funnel to have boys re-identify a whole range of vulnerabilities, emotions and feelings. When boys become hardened through the boy code, they often take major risks and endure both emotional and physical pain to win the approval of their peers.

