

Modelling for Manhood

LIGHT AIRS

DRIVING BACK FROM visiting grandchildren in Brisbane on a recent early morning I turned on *Radio National* lifestyle.

I did try to podcast the program later, but have to admit to a lack of proficiency in the cyber world. Please forgive me, but it seems the purpose of the speaker was promotion of his latest book.

He was questioning the current trend of men trying to get in touch with their feminine sides, an aspiration for the modern man. Why should men look for their sensitive side by adulating women? Is the feminine intrinsically superior? Some people say there would be fewer wars if women were in charge.

He brought up a refreshing idea that men can aspire to be in touch with their masculine side, as this is after all the core of man, and can be nurtured without shame.

He added that respect for women is more likely in the man with a well formed male psyche but remarked that the usual heroes for this role are professional sportsmen who perform dishonourable acts in public associated with alcohol, usually late at night.

He asked 'Where do we turn for honourable role models for boys?'

Some boys have an active father, wise uncle or grandparent to give guidance. Many don't.

This is not a word for word account of the talk and I have to own filling in gaps with my own thoughts, but the radio discussion was food for thought as can happen when driving alone at an odd hour.

The speaker touched on a subject mostly taboo, about boys masturbating. He quoted a survey saying that 95% of boys masturbate and the researchers suggested

Control of impulses and emotions was the unspoken way to go



that the other 5% were possibly lying.

He openly admitted that he didn't know the answer but suggested voluntary limits, say once every 8 days.

Personal conscious control genders self-respect, according to this author. Who knows? In any case, I can't remember any patient raising the topic.

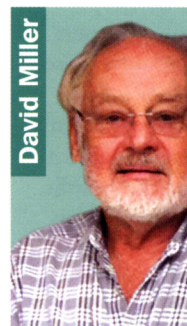
'I'm not saying that you bring 3 times a day down to once a week overnight'. I remember that bit. This guy has balls.

Ritual matters. Everybody knows strong feelings emerge at weddings and funerals. Initiation and rite of passage is a neglected ritual in Caucasian society, although vestiges do exist in the major religions, demonstrating that it was once considered important. I vaguely remember the sacrament of Catholic Confirmation, during which I, the adolescent, knelt to kiss the ring of a seated bishop who then delivered the boy-become-man a gentle slap on the face. What did this achieve other than saying 'obey'?

In real life, lost young men can be inadvertently initiated by women, for example the only male child to a mother who has suffered everything for her boy, or the older influential first girlfriend who can spoil him for his female peers.

Memories of my own boyhood are pretty sketchy but I do recall puberty as a lonely and uncomfortable time, a shock awakening from the dreamtime of boyhood and no-one to talk with, except equally confused school friends.

My father had recently returned from his hospital posting in Bethlehem after the Second World War. Many of my friends had war generation dads and they were very masculine



David Miller

indeed. War and Victory created the distant father model for baby boomer children.

As a child growing up, I craved the approval of my own dad. He was a good father and we went to his farm and boiled the billy over a fire which I helped him make and he allowed me to light. But even then, there was an invisible barrier that I did not know was there and had no skills to penetrate.

'Because I said so,' was a common negative answer to requests to hire a boat, let me drive, a day off school. Deeper questions about testosterone-based anxieties were not on the agenda. Control of impulses and emotions was the unspoken way to go. The needs of young men in middle class society were generally unmet until the old fable of 'Iron John' was popularised by Robert Bly in the 1990s. That parable was instrumental in spawning the men's movement.

In this story, the young prince has to steal the precious key (to manhood) from under his mother's pillow. In the living laboratory of Byron and in other seminal parts of the western world, the challenge to enact the rituals for initiation into manhood have been taken up by men's groups, such as 'Pathways to Manhood.'

What happens in these rituals? I don't really know. It's secret Men's business.

