

Cool/Manly?

Boys Growing into Good and Gorgeous Men

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Abstract

This paper invites counsellors to reflect on ideas about adolescent boys and their relationships with mothers and fathers. The paper responds to ideas circulating at present based on Celia Lashlie's book *He'll Be OK: Growing Gorgeous Boys into Good Men* (2005). The author raises cautions about general interpretations and conclusions based on what adolescent boys say and do in public contexts. In particular, the author reflects on the ways public contexts, gender categorisations and patriarchal masculinity influence adolescent boys' lives. The paper especially highlights how general interpretations and conclusions reproduce the same cultural stories that contribute to the problems in the lives of adolescent boys and those who love them.

... this is the central issue in the lives of adolescent boys: how to get mothers off the bridge and fathers onto it. (Lashlie, 2005)

Loving parents already see that if rigid gender roles are not imposed on boys, they will make decisions about selfhood in relation to their passions, their longings, their gifts. We cannot honour boys rightly, protecting their emotional lives, without ending patriarchy. To pretend otherwise is to collude with the ongoing soul murder that is enacted in the name of turning boys into men. (hooks, 2004)

Introduction

While working in New Zealand this past year I was introduced to Celia Lashlie's book *He'll Be OK: Growing Gorgeous Boys into Good Men* (2005). I was interested in the book because as a family therapist in the United States I have met many adolescent boys and their families. In these meetings I have learned about many different problems that enter adolescent boys' lives, including fights with parents, school trouble, sexual abuse, learning difficulties, violence, and drugs and alcohol.

I was also interested in Lashlie's book because in my position as Visiting Teaching Fellow at the University of Waikato I met many counsellors and colleagues who told

me about the widespread popularity of the book. As I read *He'll Be OK*, my interest turned to concern about how readers might take up some of the book's ideas and draw certain conclusions about adolescent boys. My concern moved me to write about adolescent boys' experiences in light of some of the book's main themes. I offer here reflections on adolescent boys that counsellors may find useful whether or not they have read *He'll Be OK*.

Lashlie (2005) is passionate about helping boys in New Zealand make it through adolescence without ending up in jail, in a car accident, or committing suicide. She interviewed boys in 180 classes about their lives, in 25 boys' secondary schools. Her challenge was to gain a better understanding of what helps boys successfully cross the 'bridge' of adolescence on their way to becoming good men.

Reading *He'll Be OK*, my sense was that the book promotes the idea that adolescent boys need adult men in their lives, and need women to stand off to the side. I fear readers might conclude that women either interfere with or have no significant role to play during adolescent boys' development, and that men innately know how to help adolescent boys become 'good men'. The following quotes from the book are examples of statements that left me with these fears.

I also want to suggest to women, in particular mothers, that, consciously or unconsciously, they're preventing men from using their talents in raising their boys. (p. 13)

The bulk of what now needs to be done is men's work and men must be allowed to get on with it. And get on with it they will, if we women have the courage and the willingness to stand back and allow them to do so. (p. 33)

As part of his adolescent journey, a boy will need to pull away both from his mother and from women in general while he gets his head around the changes occurring in his body and his life. (p. 157)

I worry that *He'll Be OK* will lead readers to conclude that mothers are the problem and men the solution when it comes to helping adolescent boys become good men. If the book is read this way, I think the conclusions are far too simplistic, general, and dangerous.

In this paper, I wish to contribute reflections that challenge these possible conclusions. I first address how interviews in public contexts influence what boys say and do. I then describe how not accounting for the influence of this public context can reproduce dominant (patriarchal) expectations that currently affect adolescent boys' lives. I go on to problematise conclusions based on assumptions about innate gender

differences. Finally, I share how reproducing patriarchal expectations is problematic for adolescent boys, mothers and women, and fathers and men (hooks, 2004).

My purpose in writing is to join Lashlie (2005) and others (Anderson & Accomando, 2002; McLean et al., 1996) in an ongoing dialogue about ways adolescent boys in New Zealand and elsewhere can become good men. I strongly appreciate Lashlie's call for men to become more involved in adolescent boys' lives and for women to reflect on how they are relating with them. She clearly cares about what is best for adolescent boys and the experiences of those who love them.

However, one of the points I most want to emphasise in this paper is how critical it is to examine how we make sense of and present knowledge. Without such an examination, unintended effects can emerge in spite of good intentions. Even with careful consideration, we may be producing effects that we did not anticipate. This paper picks up some of the effects that emerge from Lashlie's conclusions, despite her intentions.

Expressions in public contexts

Lashlie (2005) talked to adolescent boys in groups in their classrooms. She intentionally did not use a pre-written survey or ask prescribed questions.

I deliberately focused on keeping things as relaxed and informal as possible, so there were not set questions to work through, just a series of topics I was keen to explore, including sex, alcohol, drugs, peer relationships, parental control and future pathways. (p. 27)

Without understanding the influence of this public group context, Lashlie seems to think that what was said reflects general truths about adolescent boys' experiences. The following statements illustrate some of her summaries based on what the boys said and did.

Demonstrating their innate pragmatism, as they often did, the boys regularly commented that one of the main benefits of not having to worry about, for example, applying hair gel each morning was being able to spend an additional ten minutes in bed. (p. 40)

Maleness is about connection, about linkages to the past that show the pathways to the future, and it is about excellence, striving to be successful in order to honour those who have gone before. It is about loyalty and hard work and belonging. (p. 51)

For the vast majority of boys, sport is an integral part of the journey to manhood both because of its competitive nature and because it can give them a sense of being a part of something bigger than themselves. (p. 51)

Rather than reflecting truths about adolescence, I suggest these quotes show that boys know what is culturally acceptable for them to say among peers. It is not a risk for boys to say they like sleeping in, striving for excellence, and sports and competition. This is what the dominant culture positions them to say. These public performances do not capture the personal and private stories of individual boys' lived experiences.

My experience is that adolescent boys are not usually forthcoming with what they privately think and feel. I am trying to imagine what I would have done in high school if I was asked in class questions about girls, drinking, and so on. I would have said what I knew was acceptable to say, or I would have kept quiet. It is unlikely I would have shared my private experiences of fear, sadness, loneliness, anger, insecurity and confusion, which, in fact, strongly affected me at times in my adolescence.

What might not have been said to Lashlie in public? I doubt a boy who is mostly picked last for sports teams would have expressed how that felt to him. I doubt a boy who is gay and has not come out would have shared his personal experiences of living in a homophobic environment. I do not think a boy who has experienced the negative effects of racism would have shared how much hurt he has experienced. I cannot imagine a boy suffering daily practices of bullying would have talked about being stalked and having to hide in hallways.

During my own adolescence, I attended four different secondary schools. I spent two years at a private Catholic boys' school and two years at co-educational public schools. At the time, I wanted people to like me. I wanted to figure out how to make and keep friends. I paid close attention to what was 'cool' and what was 'not cool'. If someone had asked me questions in a group setting, I would have been quite aware of and influenced by what others were saying and what I imagined they were thinking. Most of what I privately experienced during my adolescence was unspoken and not known publicly. If someone came to my dorm room, instead of the classroom, and asked me some of the same questions in private, I may have offered different responses.

My work as a family therapist also leads me to believe that adolescent boys present themselves in public in ways that are often at odds with their private experiences. Tim was a star lacrosse player at high school, with two older brothers who attended the same school.¹ He was very popular and got on well with both boys and girls. He was also extremely successful and committed as a student. His mother and father worked hard to respond to him in caring, skilful and loving ways. What was not publicly known was that he also had a very problematic relationship with anxiety.

Tim came to counselling because he could no longer attend school without feeling terrified that he was going to defecate before making it to the toilet. However, when

he missed school because of anxiety, the story he told his brothers, friends and teachers was that school was boring and he did not really care about attending. Privately, Tim was suffering in the grips of a very different story, which he did not feel safe sharing.

Why did he not feel safe? I believe for similar reasons I did not feel safe when I was an adolescent. Currently there is not room for anxiety or differences in boys' culture, and boys know it. Most boys, even those with strongly held personally different views, know how to say what is necessary in public or to keep silent to prevent immediate and/or delayed reprisal. What the boys said to Lashlie demonstrates their knowledge of the dominant culture and their ability to put this knowledge into practice.

What do you imagine might have happened if Tim's experience with anxiety had become known at his high school? How do you imagine his peers might have treated Tim if they found out? What kinds of things might they have said about the kind of person Tim is? Do you imagine these responses would have had real effects on Tim's life? Do you think his peers' responses would be likely to increase, decrease or leave Tim's experience of anxiety unchanged?

My first caution, then, is about the uncritical application of the findings that Lashlie (2005) reports. These findings were produced in a group situation that made it much more possible for boys to share some things rather than others. The group context made it likely the boys would say things that would meet with adolescent boys' public approval and support, and unlikely boys would make statements that would risk exclusion from the group. Thus, it is the uncritical process of not taking account of the context of the research interviews to which I wish to draw attention.

Reproducing patriarchal culture

I have argued thus far that cultural expectations produce what is said and done in public contexts. Patriarchal expectations shape boys' impressions of what counts as 'cool' and 'not cool'. What is important here is the relationship between what is considered 'cool' for adolescent boys and dominant ideas about masculinity, which influence what boys say and do. To refer to this relationship, I use the term cool/manly.

It is cool/manly, for example, to talk about girls as sexual objects (Stoltenberg, 1989) because boys believe doing so will be received well by their peers. These performances of patriarchal masculinity were evident in Lashlie's reports of what the boys said to her.

Almost all boys I spoke to mentioned close female friends within their immediate peer group, often referred to as 'chick-mates'. The discussion about how a girl

became a chick-mate, given that the students had previously agreed they viewed all girls of their age as potential sexual conquests, was always entertaining. The most common explanation being 'she said no.' (pp. 109–110)

All categories that supposedly define patriarchal masculinity are generally considered 'cool/manly'. For example, adolescent boys who are skilled athletes, show no fear, and are highly competitive are considered more cool/manly. On the other hand, adolescent boys who show interest in learning, express fear, and emphasise cooperation are considered less cool/manly. Cool/manly categories, and many others like them, are so common and accepted that they habitually shape what happens between people (and within a person) without reflection or critique.

When boys' performances in public are talked about as if they reflect truths about adolescence, then patriarchal masculinity is reproduced. The net effect of accepting public performances of cool/manly as truths about what it means to be an adolescent boy is that expressions that do not fit with what counts as cool/manly continue to be marginalised. Referring to the dominant culture in the United States, and its patriarchal influence, Terence Real (2002) stated, 'We live in an anti-relational, vulnerability-despising culture, one that not only fails to nurture the skills of connection but actively fears them.'

Relevant to this argument are the conclusions written up in a recent international literature review on adolescent boys' health and development.

A national survey of adolescent males age 15–19 in the U.S. found that beliefs about manhood emerged as the strongest predictor of risk-taking behaviours: young men who adhered to traditional views of manhood were more likely to report substance use, violence, and delinquency, and unsafe sexual practices (Courtenay, 1998). Pleck (1995) asserts that violating gender norms has significant mental health consequences for men – ridicule, family pressure, and social sanctions – and that a significant proportion of males feel stress as a result of not being able to live up to the norms of 'true manhood.' (Barker, 2000, p. 20)

The problem, then, is with dominant ideas about masculinity, because conforming and not conforming both put boys at risk. We saw the problematic effects for Tim of the dominant prescriptions of masculinity even though he appeared publicly to have met them. James, however, was systematically mistreated because he did not fit with what is considered cool/manly.

James experienced loneliness, wanted a girlfriend, enjoyed playing computer games, and was not particularly athletic. He belonged to a group of kids categorised as 'nerds'.

When I met him, he was seriously thinking about killing himself. Talking with James, I learned he had gone to some rather amazing extremes to respond to his belief that he was 'less of a man' at his high school. He realised he was very attracted to some of the most popular white girls, and had a strong and wise knowledge that it was unlikely these girls would be interested in him since he was black, not a 'jock', and did not look like the 'All-American (white) Boy'.

James tried out for the football (gridiron) team. In spite of regular humiliations, he persevered throughout the entire season. He did not improve as a player and was physically quite battered. He became 'the kid' that everyone on the team picked on, and they carried it into classrooms with ongoing public humiliations. Even though this experience did not improve his position in the world of white cool/manly, he tried another sport only to receive similar treatment.

It disturbed me greatly to learn from James that many coaches, teachers and other adults witnessed this behaviour without responding. The idea 'boys will be boys' blinded the adults because from that perspective what was happening was considered normal. The effect was that no one in James' life suspected his distress. He kept his pain and desperation very private, as a cool/manly person is expected to do. James did some tremendous personal gymnastics to try and become a person who could be treated with respect and kindness.

Carrying with me stories of Tim, James, and many other adolescent boys, I cannot help but ask about the kinds of personal gymnastics some of the boys in Lashlie's classroom conversations might have been called into. Uncritical acceptance of the boys' public performances as truths about adolescent boys supports and maintains dominant patriarchal culture and thus contributes to its ongoing reproduction.

My second caution then is that accepting boys' public performance as general truths, independent of patriarchal culture, serves to sustain the status quo. As this section has shown, sustaining the status quo is not in the best interest of boys and their personal journeys to becoming good men. The problems that affect young men's lives, the public risk-taking and the private suffering, are supported through the taken-for-granted constructions and habitual reproductions of cultural norms around what it means to be cool/manly.

Problematizing gender categories

On the basis of these cautions, it is critical to explore how gender influences lives. Gender analysis is most useful when absolutes are challenged so that new possibilities can emerge for the acceptance of diverse ways of living and relating. New possibilities for boys and men can emerge only by destabilising dominant practices of cool/manly

behaviour. We also need to destabilise absolutes that distinguish men from women, masculine from feminine, and male from female, since these serve to reify and solidify the narrow perspectives that already exist.

A third caution, then, is related to Lashlie's conclusions based on supposedly innate gender differences.

I received my first real lesson about the real differences between the genders: men are silent because they are thinking. The foremost difference between men and women is that we women think and talk at the same time. (p. 21)

There is no doubt in my mind that men do things differently ... I've learned that silence on a woman's part can often allow the communication channel between an adult man and an adolescent boy to operate more effectively than it does when a woman interrupts the transmission, as we are often wont to do. (p. 39)

I've decided that the ability to cut to the chase, to focus on the actual issue rather than on all the associated matters we women might be aware of and seek to consider and manage, is an inherently male trait. We women seem to move in a circle, expanding its edges as we move and drawing in more and more 'stuff'. Men move in a straight line, often ignoring everything that's off to the sides as they focus on what needs to be done. (p. 59)

These statements include many assumptions about innate gender differences. Yet my own experience is that both men and women are capable of talking without thinking, thinking without talking, and talking to think. I have experiences that do not fit with Lashlie's conclusion in the second quote; I have witnessed both men and women being silent or 'interrupting transmissions'. I have also seen both men and women 'cut to the chase'. Perhaps even more importantly, I think defining what is an 'actual issue' is a negotiable undertaking and not one that is predetermined on male terms, as Lashlie implies.

Rather than dividing ways of being according to innate gender categories, it is relationship skills that need attention. The skills that go into relating in ways that support what is unique and most precious to a person are not innate, but learned. Many adolescent boys suffer greatly and unnecessarily when relationship skills are tied to gender absolutes. Too much energy goes into reproducing dominant culture prescriptions and categories of gender.

Too little energy is invested in learning the skills of relating that make it possible for individual boys to connect to and live by their personal hopes, values, dreams and intentions, without having to demonstrate cultural prescriptions of gender. Without

these relational supports, boys are left to line their lives up according to cultural expectations like cool/manly ideas.

I am thinking now about my son, who has not yet reached adolescence, and my hopes for him as a father. I want him to have a sense of belonging and support for whatever may be precious to him. I want him to be celebrated as a full and equal member in the club of adolescent boys whatever his abilities or interests. I do not want looks, sexual orientation, athletic skill, gender, class, ethnicity or other social categories to determine membership qualification or status.

Rather, I want how he relates to people to shape his life. When he relates to people in ways that are respectful, caring and accountable for his actions, I want him to learn about the positive effects of doing so. I want his kind actions to be supported. When he relates to people in demeaning and devaluing ways, I want him to learn about the negative effects this has on him and others.

To summarise thus far, I have argued that the public context of Lashlie's interviews likely influenced what the boys said. I have expressed how missing this contextual influence, and concluding that public performances reflect general truths, reproduces patriarchal expectations that currently shape what boys think they should do and say. Next, I questioned dividing gender into distinct categories according to supposedly innate truths. I go on now to consider how Lashlie's distinguishing can affect relationships between adolescent boys and mothers and women.

Mothers and women

I have a message for mothers, a message from your sons. When I asked the boys what I could tell their mothers on their behalf, the answer was simple and very clear: 'Chill out.' (Lashlie, 2005, p. 151)

This message alarms me. I have had many personal and professional experiences that let me know mothers can relate to their sons in ways that range from not helpful to abusive. I support a call for mothers, and fathers, to critique how they relate with adolescent boys. However, in my life it was primarily women, not men, who stood by me in my most difficult times and who helped me feel like I mattered, had value, and had a purpose.

I am concerned about what might have happened for me if these women had accepted the idea that what boys need most are more male role models and less female involvement. If the women in my life believed they should have been peripheral, they might have spent more energy searching for male role models than offering their skill and knowledge to guide me on my life's journey.

I cannot imagine where I would be today without the primary support I received from my mother, my grandmother, girlfriends, a friend's mother, certain teachers, one therapist in particular, and others. I had some support from men, but male support was not central. It was the women in my life who showed me how I most wish to relate to my self, others, and the world in general. This knowledge forms the basis for what is most important to me as a man today, and I am grateful.

Though it was mostly women in my life who related to me in helpful ways, I do not believe it was because of their gender. Rather, I believe it had to do with their knowledge and skills of relating that made the difference, and these knowledges and skills are not innate.

As I thought about the role that women and mothers can and do play in the lives of adolescent boys, I thought I might talk with some people who know New Zealand culture much better than I do. As part of an on-line discussion, I asked some graduate students to reflect on whether they knew about this book, and any effects it had. One woman wrote:

Firstly, I liked the idea of talking about gorgeous boys and good men. I think my boys are gorgeous and I have the hope they will be good men. As I read, I felt a rising sense of trouble in my stomach which had me questioning what I was doing in my relationships with not only my children but my partner. We hadn't had these conversations about when I would step off, and my partner would step on!!!! And how would I get him to 'step on' in ways that were talked of in the book if he hadn't read it. How did that work? I worried there wasn't enough man stuff happening!! But I couldn't imagine what kind of man stuff this might be either. I noticed my friend and his teenage son went hunting together and hanging out with other 'hunters'. That didn't really fit in my family! I really did start to think I didn't know anything about men and boys, I lost sight of the relationships and paid too much attention to the suggestions in the book of what to do and what not to do, and I was doing this in spite of protesting the ideas at the same time. (J.H., personal communication, 2006)

It is familiarity that tricks us into concluding that things are the way they seem, or the way authorities say they are. It is only when ideas are exposed as perspectives, not truths, that new possibilities emerge. My colleague Elmarie Kotzé introduced me to an example from Kaethe Weingarten's book *In A Mother's Voice* (1994). This example shows how we can go past what we usually think about relationships between mothers and adolescent boys. Weingarten recounts a time when she experienced anxiety on a plane as it was preparing to land. She was seated next to her adolescent son, Ben.

On impulse, I decided to treat Ben no differently than I would treat a friend. I wanted comfort and I wanted to believe that Ben could and would want to comfort me. I knew that the level of fear I was experiencing was nearly manageable; I could afford to risk asking Ben, not Hilary [her partner, sitting across the aisle], for help, and could handle it if Ben was unwilling to deal with me. I wanted to believe that in our ongoing loving relationship, I could ask something of my son that would reveal me intimately to him, even though our relationship hadn't felt particularly close in recent weeks and months.

I turned to Ben. 'I'm scared. Could you help me?'

At first he looked puzzled.

'How?' he said. 'What should I do?'

I took a deep breath and said, 'Think of all the times that Daddy and I have comforted you, especially when you were a little boy. You've got tons of memories there, somewhere.'

'Oh,' he said. He picked up my hand and laid it on my knee. He then began stroking it with his thumb, gently and continuously for the five minutes until we landed.

'Thank you,' I said. 'That made all the difference.' (Weingarten, 1994, p. 164)

I delight in Weingarten's demonstration that there are no innate forces designed by nature that require adolescent boys and mothers to separate and lose intimacy.

If adolescence is a bridge, I find hope in mothers staying on the bridge and walking it with their sons. Sons who have these experiences, and mothers who share them – Ben and Kaethe and others – then show us how the problems that emerge between adolescent boys and their mothers are constructions of dominant patriarchal culture (hooks, 2004; Real, 2002). The span of the bridge is wide enough for mothers and fathers, and men and women, to accompany adolescent boys.

Men and fathers

Lashlie's (2005) encouragement for men to join adolescent boys' on the bridge to responsible adulthood is a very important invitation. I hope men take up this call to action wholeheartedly. I am concerned, however, that readers of *He'll Be OK* might conclude that men innately know how to help adolescent boys become good men. My own experiences suggest otherwise.

I spent long periods of time during my adolescence living with only men. I lived

alone with my father and then in dorms at a boys' school. It was not my experience that when women were absent men became available and knew how to help, guide and support me. In fact, it was in the company of men and other adolescent boys that I experienced some of the most lonely and painful periods of my life.

There were many men in my life throughout my adolescence, including my step-father, uncles, teachers, counsellors, coaches, and so on. Many of these men could have stepped onto the bridge of my adolescence in ways that were helpful, but that was not my experience. I do not think these men did not care about me. On the contrary, I think they cared about me significantly. However, the knowledge and skills they used to relate to me were not helpful.

Mostly, the men in my life attempted to help me to manhood by 'toughening' me up, disciplining me, speaking in authoritarian ways, and generally engaging in practices of domination and coercion through threats and punishment. There were of course times when other ways of relating were attempted but they were not sustained, perhaps for lack of support and skill. It is not surprising to me that the men in my life lacked alternative relationship skills given the dominant patriarchal traditions that have shaped men's ways of thinking and being, and produced the toughening up practices they employ.

It is not whether men are on the bridge that matters. It is what they bring to accompanying boys on the journey that is critical. There are many men with relationship skills who support adolescent boys on their journeys to become good men. These skills go well beyond the limits of cool/manly practices of patriarchal culture. They go beyond those we witness in cultural images of men in the news and entertainment media. These skills and practices may be rendered invisible when the focus is on the gender of the adult rather than on the relationship the person offers a young man. Matt and Rick touched my heart:

I met with 15-year-old Matt whose father, Rick, returned home early from work while Matt was watching a documentary on sexual abuse. Rick sat down with Matt to watch the rest of the documentary. When it was finished, Rick said, 'This is a really important subject. I am sad that so many adults know how to trick and frighten kids so they can do these terrible things to them.'

'Yeah.'

'I've tried to keep you safe but I know I may not have been able to keep this from happening to you.'

'It didn't happen to me, but it happened to Ben.'

'Really? Has Ben had to keep it a secret?'

'Yeah, I'm the only one he's told.'

'Why do you think he shared it with you?'

Long pause.

'Because he knows it wouldn't change our friendship.'

'Do you think he keeps it a secret because of how people will treat him if he tells?'

'Yeah. And he's right, people at school would treat him like shit.'

'What do you think about that?'

'It's messed up. It shouldn't be that way. I think it is having to keep it a secret that is messing Ben up inside.'

'Do you want to do something about that?'

'Yeah, but nothing is ever going to change.'

'If there was something we could do, would you like that?'

'Yeah.'

'Why?'

'Because I don't like that Ben has to feel so bad for something that was not his fault.'

'I agree with you. Can we think about this together?'

'Sure.'

Rick and Matt, as father and son, show men practising relationship skills as they grapple with painful experiences. These are skills to be learned by stepping past narrow patriarchal prescriptions of what it means to be a man. I believe that one task for us as counsellors is to invite men to grow their skills and knowledge for responding to and relating with adolescent boys. I would like to be in conversations with men that celebrate and circulate stories of men practising relationship skills that help adolescent boys become good men. I would like us to share our different struggles, successes, dilemmas and experiences in conversations across genders and alongside adolescent boys. Documenting and circulating these varied stories, without searching for consensus, would be a welcome development in the project of supporting individual adolescent boys in their various journeys to living as adults.

Conclusion

My reflections on *He'll Be OK* are intended to stand alongside Lashlie's interest in supporting adolescent boys and reducing the alarming rates of incarceration, car accidents and suicide that she cites. To that end, I urge that we think critically about the ways we participate in producing the dominant culture that shapes what boys think is cool and simultaneously puts them 'at risk'. I want us to question and change the cultural expectations that produce narrow ideas of what counts as cool and that divide relationship skills according to gender categories. I want this so that adolescent

boys are positioned better for their lives to be shaped by values developed in the context of caring relationships.

... our struggles to end domination must begin where we live, in the communities we call home. It is there that we experience our power to create revolutions, to make life-transforming change. We already know that men do not have to remain wedded to patriarchy. Individual men have again and again staked a different claim, claiming their rights to life and love. They are beacons of hope embodying the truth that men can love. (hooks, 2004, p. 172)

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