

The Secret Lives of Men

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Introduction / overview

1. Notes on gender differences and trying to find the common ground
2. Using a common language with clients
3. Relational psychodynamic metaphor

I. The 10 commandments of growing up male (see Table 1.)

*The metaphor of the “secret shoebox”

- a. Commandment 1: “There is only one way to be a man”
- b. Commandment 2: “Fear the feminine”
- c. Commandment 3: “Males must funnel all their feelings into sex or aggression”
- d. Commandment 4: “Affection is always associated with sex”
- e. Commandment 5: “You big ape: Boy society is based on power, strength, and paranoia”
- f. Commandment 6: “A boy needs a male role model or his sense of being a man is flawed”
- g. Commandment 7: “If your father is rejecting, you must learn to please him”
- h. Commandment 8: “If you don’t please your mother, you must marry someone like her”
- i. Commandment 9: “Being a man is a 24/7 job”
- j. Commandment 10: “A man must follow the Commandments even if it causes him to be emotionally stunted or leads him off track”

******The Peter Pan man and the Lost Boy: Two men often encountered: One man lives a joyless life and the other never really grows up.***

II. The Peter Pan man

A. J. M. Barrie’s classic tale *Peter Pan*; art mirroring real life

B. When we use the word fantasy, we are referring more to daydreams, hopes, or wishes that a little boy has. They are probably not based in objective reality, nor will many of them ever come to pass. As a boy, these hopes or dreams are age-appropriate, but for various reasons, some men don’t outgrow them when they become adults

How to Identify a Peter Pan Man

1. You hear too often that commitment is an overblown concept.
2. In his life, people are easily replaced.
3. He has a history of feeling like jobs or relationships are a constant infringement upon his freedom.

4. He has a blank stare when asked what he thinks being in a mature relationship really means.
5. He has lived off of his boyish charm at work or in relationships while really making no substantial contributions.
6. He pulls for a maternal reaction from you that lets him off the hook from adult responsibilities, like keeping a job or doing the needed work in a relationship.

C. Cures of the Peter Pan man

1. A Peter Pan Man is created under one or more of the following circumstances: (1) he has not been encouraged to really grow up in particular areas of his life, (2) he has experienced emotional trauma that leads to emotional arrest.
2. Pan Man must understand and put into effect if he is to cross the Neverland barrier and become a grown man: (1) A Peter Pan Man must realize that growing up is not synonymous with death or personal oblivion; (2) The escape from Neverland is about committing to the steady day-to-day effort involved in work and love; and (3) Everyday responsibilities can bring joy into life.
3. When only a part of you is stuck in “Neverland,” some common fantasies many non-Peter Pan men have to reconcile.

- *A man’s partner cannot meet all his emotional needs. He has to build meaningful relationships outside of the couple.*
- *There is no such thing as a relationship that won’t let you down at times*
- *The areas of communication and emotions are not exclusively the territory of women; men can master those skills as well.*
- *Sports teams cannot really provide a sense of family & He does not have a personal relationship with his sports hero*
- *At some point, twenty-one-year-olds won’t find him sexually attractive anymore. Instead, they will refer to him as “sir” or “mister.”*

4. Lost Boys to Renaissance Men

A loss of innocence involves seeing and experiencing the world in a much different way than the uncomplicated perspective associated with the formative years. As we mature, we move into a more complex understanding of people, the world, and ourselves. For instance, one moves beyond the simple good and bad dichotomous categorizations of others. Instead, we are forced to integrate more ambiguous pictures of the important people in our lives. There are inherent dangers in this process of growing up, like becoming disillusioned and making the mistake of leaving *all* the magic of childhood behind. If these psychological shifts occur, they leave an adult’s life colorless, dull, or even worse. Somehow we have to figure out how to reside in the middle of these challenges and difficulties and still have a good life. In some cases, we make this challenge of affirming our existence amid life’s ups and downs even more difficult by adding unnecessary troubles.

It is the act of crossing the Neverland barrier that allows a Peter Pan Man to grow up,

while the Lost Boy crosses it too soon and under harsh circumstances. The Lost Boy is either pushed through the Neverland barrier before he is emotionally ready, or he crashes through it because of circumstances beyond his control. The result of this disorienting experience is that he becomes truly lost—lost to himself and what he holds as personal truths.

A. Defining a Lost Boy

1. Lost Boys have crashed through the Neverland barrier, leaving them disoriented.
2. They have lost the ability to feel things and are often numb inside.
3. Lost Boys have lost touch with their authentic sense of being—their compass does not point true north.
4. Lost Boys have lost a sense of purpose and meaning.

*Lost Boy can also be created in adult life after painful divorces, unintended career changes/losses, changes in health, etc.

B. Cures for Lost Boys

A Lost Boy's challenge is to become a Renaissance Man by making peace with that part of himself that has been lost. He can do so by:

1. Rediscovering the Eternal Boy (i.e., discover affect through grieve)
2. Finding his true-north self (i.e., find his sense of meaning)
3. Service to others (by assisting other Lost Boys in crossing the Neverland barrier or through service to a higher purpose beyond themselves)

V. Beyond the Body Armor

A. Anthropologist David Gilmore did a comprehensive study of masculinity across cultures in the world. He concluded that in the vast majority of instances, masculinity is defined by the ability to achieve three major roles: protector, provider, and progenitor (“Three P’s”).

1. There is a personal Man Checklist based on the Three P’s (protector, provider, and progenitor) that emphasizes tangible markers of masculinity, each of which centers on the development of the body and its prowess (e.g., bigger is better, or being powerful in one way covers other forms of insecurities).
2. The Man Checklist is confusing and limiting because it emphasizes only a young man’s notion of masculinity, yet it governs men across the life span
3. A skewed rite-of-passage mentality is often applied to masculinity where men are taught to master their bodies by not feeling physical sensations or emotions.
4. While men may experience moments of “full exposure” as failures, such occurrences actually can be opportunities that lead to a more authentic and potentially lasting notion of what it means to be a man. This definition is not bound to the temporal functioning of the body, but rather is established as a more permanent place in the psychological realm.

VI. Treatment (tx) considerations (e.g., early, middle-late work)

A. Caveats / many metaphors for therapy/ can lead to evocative discussions about (TO)

1. My metaphor

B. Early Treatment considerations

1. Current trends in research in men

Attitudes toward help-seeking; expectancy variables as a predictor of outcomes

Client variables (sense of masculinity) related to negative attitudes but not

Necessarily gender discrepancy in men going to therapy far less; traditional men still go to therapy

2. Diffuse “expectancy issues” as well as conflicted aspects of masculinity through the therapeutic relationship; includes the use of corrective emotional experiences and interpersonal interventions;

3. Issue: Stigma of tx; can feel like it erodes sense of masculinity

Intervention: Offering two definitions of strength; containment and mindfully exploring one’s vulnerability

4. Issue: tx feels like a sign of “brokenness;” this especially applies to a more fundamental notion of being broken beyond hope of redemption or expectation of being loved

Intervention: “fine-tuning” is not the same as being unworthy; the safety of the relationship allows others to reveal

5. Issue: restricted affect;

Intervention: learned- numbness to cope with hurt/disappointment;

6. Issue: funneling a wide range of emotions into two: sex and aggression

Intervention: grieving unfulfilled hopes and fantasies of parents and one’s own life, open up wide vistas of emotions

7. Issue: being “exposed” protect one’s flanks at all costs;

Intervention: this can pull for a reaction in the therapist to work harder at exposing the clients issues; this a tug of war that therapist can not win; instead work harder in a relational context;

C. Middle-Late Treatment considerations

1. Issue: splitting in the intrapsychic realm; manifests as rigid one-dimensional notion of being a man that is stretched across all roles;

Intervention: sense of masculinity is both deepened and broadened

a. Masculinity as a superordinate sense of self; the psychological spine and skeleton that supports most divergent roles

b. Masculinity and the masculine self; in a health way masculinity is authentic become fluid being adjusted across contexts (turn volume up or down) draw from various aspects of who you are; needing to find a sense of “all of me” across various roles

c. Carving out a signature way of being a man; this includes processing some of the damaging or did not fit past experiences about “how to be as a man;” refit with one’s that authentically work;

- d. The psychological fuel that propels this work is a relational connection found in a “guardian/ally.”
- e. Goal is to change the landscape of the inner world; living comfortable in ones own skin seeing how that impacts connection with outer world;
- f. Goal is to become “parent” to oneself; though never outgrowing the need for guardians/allies in one life; just adjusting expectations and responsibilities;
- g. Also being able to function as guardian for others in one life;

Table1. The Commandments and (*)Counter Commandments of Being Male

<p>1. There is only one way to be a man.</p> <p><i>*There are a number of healthy ways to be a man.</i></p>	<p>6. A boy needs a male role model or their sense of being a man is flawed.</p> <p><i>*A boys needs a guardian to realize his ultimate sense of being a man.</i></p>
<p>2. Fear the feminine.</p> <p><i>*Men can learn that those aspects labeled as feminine are actually an innate part of all members of the human race.</i></p>	<p>7. If your father is rejecting you must learn to please him.</p> <p><i>*Finding peace with your shadow parent(s) allows for peace and more choice in your life as a man.</i></p>
<p>3. Males must funnel all their emotions into sex or aggression.</p> <p><i>*Men can become competent and skilled in the use of all emotions.</i></p>	<p>8. If your mother is rejecting you must marry someone like her.</p> <p><i>*Finding peace with your shadow parent(s) allows you to make better choices about romantic partners.</i></p>
<p>4. Affection is always associated with sex.</p> <p><i>*Tender feelings do not always equal sexual feelings.</i></p>	<p>9. Being a man is a 24/7 job.</p> <p><i>*A man's sense of masculinity is found in every avenue of his life and can serve as a vast resource, not a detriment.</i></p>
<p>5. You big ape: Masculinity is based on power, strength, and paranoia.</p> <p><i>*Men can discover their masculine shadow side and develop all aspects of their personality.</i></p>	<p>10. A man must follow the Commandments even if that causes him to be emotionally stunted or leads him off track.</p> <p><i>*The power of being your own man is carving out an authentic sense of individualism amidst the inevitable pressures to conform to personas and other societal falsehoods.</i></p>