

Hello Michael,

I was very interested in the NYTimes 8/9/15 article, "Man Deconstructed" and have read it several times. The last time I took notes and am presumptuous enough to think that I can, quoting the article, " take seemingly unrelated phenomena (-male suicide and the fact that men are less likely to talk about their feelings, say, or the financial collapse and the male tendency for risk taking) and try to connect the dots." In blue below.

I'm a male who trained and practiced as a holistic family doctor. Then, in 1984, created a practice where I spent 90 minutes with each patient. I have spent over four decades learning about family systems, stress, gender issues and relationships. I wrote the book, "Why Normal Isn't Healthy" sharing what my patients taught me. It's really about how we learned to do grownup and became the people we used to complain about. We are "them," the men and women who are the parents, the leaders, the grownups about which we used to complain. It's our turn. We carry the cultural baton and if we're not awake we can simply pass on what was given to us unawares. That makes it very difficult for men to do anything other than act out the roles they saw during their development. And doing what they learned can be dangerous for themselves and others.

Becoming them sets us up to not talk about our feelings of inadequacy (our best kept secret) and we then act out on the world stage what's unresolved within the psyche. For example, at the extreme, that can lead to suicide when the financial collapse exposes us as inadequate to provide for the family. And then the insurance policy takes over to supply that which we couldn't provide. Taking risks for men is also psychic compensation for our feelings of inadequacy. Risk taking shows the world "No Fear" here!! So the teenage boy or the grown man with a couple beers under his belt drives too fast around a corner and voila, people get hurt. The alcohol also medicates away to numbness those best kept secret feelings.

Just as no two patients present with precisely the same constellation of complaints, so it is that each of us presents to the world (The Mask We Live In) a distinct character who has been given direction, script and blocking with which we move on the world's stage. Hence, "masculinities" is apropos because of our unique cultural conditioning. That actor is

“normal” but he isn't necessarily healthy. In fact, he may be very “fit” in all the standard wellness parameters but not be healthy in terms of how he thinks, works, loves and plays.

I use Ashley Montagu's definition of health in his book on neoteny titled ***Growing Young***. It's not about percent body fat, blood pressure, cholesterol or whether or not you're diagnosed with some malady. Rather he defines health as the ability to work, to love, to play and to think soundly. His premise with which I agree is that we are not meant to grow old we are meant to grow young. The evolutionary intelligence wants us to stay in a developmental process throughout our lives by staying in touch with the adaptive spirit of the child.

Why? It is our nature, our human nature. We are the most neotenous of all species. Meaning we are men but we are meant to stay in touch with the wonderful behavioral traits of the child throughout the life cycle. Here, from Montagu are some of those traits: the need to love and be loved, curiosity, playfulness, the need to learn, imagination, creativity, open and experimental mindedness, spontaneity, honesty and resilience. Instead we grow up doing what men have done before us and worry about being “manly.” (LBJ said, "he didn't want to pull out of Vietnam because he wouldn't be viewed as manly.") Doing what he learned, he acted out what a "real man" does. (“Take charge: be authoritative” "It means suppressing any kind of weakness" ) (“This is the president of the United States proving his masculinity,”) And doing what he learned was dangerous for the world!

The irony is that all of us, men and women have the same secret. We all have feelings of inadequacy that never go away regardless of fame, recognition or achievement.

But they are not part of the public dialogue. Not being conscious of that part of us which in men I call the **scared guy**, he can run the engine of the psyche. There are benefits that accrue by virtue of letting our ambition loose on the world. The Latin root of ambition is *ambire*, ‘go around (canvassing for votes).’ But what is the driver of that ambition? Could it be the scared one's need to prove his mettle ? But we never get enough votes to extinguish those feelings.

The scared one is driven by the fear that at any moment he could be exposed as inadequate. By the way, having feelings of inadequacy doesn't necessarily mean we're inadequate. Look at all LBJ accomplished yet his scared guy was still active as he sat in his office as the leader of the free world fearful of being seen as unmanly.