

Boys and Masculinity in Our Schools

James Meinert

The bottom of the slide features three thick, horizontal stripes. From top to bottom, they are colored light red, purple, and blue.



My dad, mom, sister and me in 1985

About Me:

- Born and raised in rural Missouri.
- Moved and sent to Catholic Schools at age 11.
- Went to college here in St Louis.
- Lived for 2 years in Nicaragua working in a school.
- Worked in pre-school, middle-school, high-school, and college!
- Talk quickly sometimes, feel free to interrupt!

Where are we going together?

Why talk about boys?

What has happened to boys as a group?

How does that impact schools?

What can schools do for boys?



Dyads! (or triads or quads)

- Counteract sense of isolation.
- Space for you to clarify your thinking and move through some emotions.
- One person is the listener and listens!
- One person is the “talker” and processes.

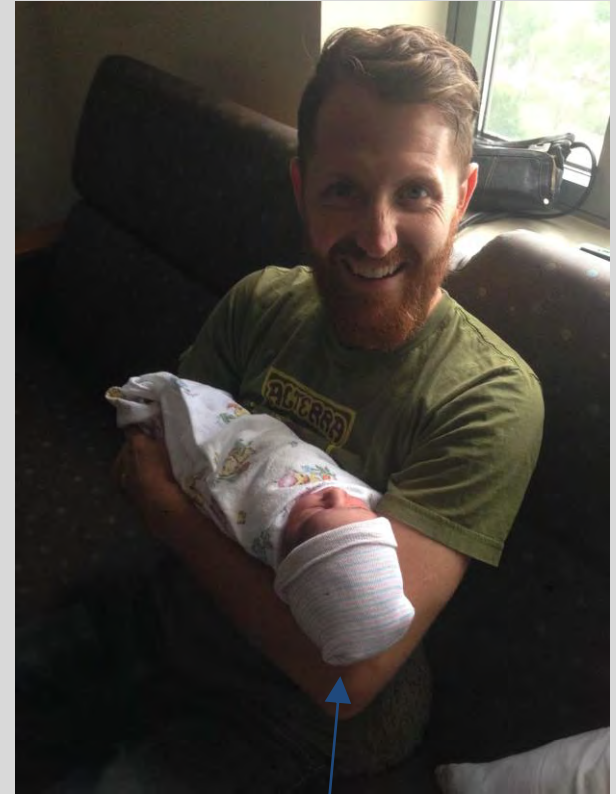
Much thanks to Julian Weisglass for this model.

Dyads! (or triads or quads)

- What is your name?
- Where are you coming from?
- Why do you want to talk about boys?

We all carry hurts.

- We look for attention when we are initially hurt and want help to heal it.
- Many of us have seen how much attention and emotions it takes to heal big hurts.
- Many of us have given up on healing old hurts - but it shows up in our behaviors!



Except him, he is brand new!

Societal and Identity hurts

- Some of our hurts come because of the way we are seen by our society -- age, race, gender
- Hurt people hurt people. Look at mass shootings, sexual assaults, relationship violence etc.
- How do we move forward toward healing?

Girls, Women, Trans*, and Non-binary people are hurting and are the targets of much abuse and violence.



The “Lady Box”

Dainty

Pretty

Gentle

Sweet

Submissive

Sexy

Play sports that
show your body

Find a partner

Date Men but
One at a time

Wear Makeup/
Jewelry/Hair
Products to
get attention.

Hide your
intelligence

Make Space

Listen

Show affection

Take care of
people

WHAT HAPPENS TO BOYS?



My friend Antajuan's beautiful boys.

- Exasperated by expectations
- Act out in unaware ways towards others.
- Not helpful to blame them, but we turn males into men...

The "Man Box"

Strong

Tough

No sadness

No Fear

Show Anger

**Play Sports that
risk your health**

Be in charge

Be Dominant

Get respect

Make Money

Date Women

Lots of women

Objectify

Women always

**Do Masculine
activities -**

**trucks, sports,
yard work, etc.**

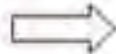
**Drink Beer and
Liquor**

Take up space

Not "gay"

The "Man Box"

Bits



Strong

Date Women

Threatened

Tough

Lots of women



No sadness

Objectify

Gay

No Fear

Women always

Mama's boy

Show Anger

Do Masculine

Beat-Up

Play Sports that
risk your health

activities -
trucks, sports,
yard work, etc.

Queer



Be in charge

Drink Beer and



Be Dominant

Liquor

Girl



Get respect

Take up space

Pus

Make Money

Not "gay"

Shunned



Killed

Fa

Hon



- Trying to stay in a box always and knowing we'll be targeted outside of it leads us to feeling insecure about our masculinity or femininity.
- Can lead to unhealthy behaviors to prove ourselves or to escape the feelings

What was most significant thing we talked about?

The man-box, you really do get shunned if you're outside it or some will call you a name. In guys group you could open up and no one was going to shun you.

Key Ingredients for making a man

- Isolation
- Shut down emotions/
healing process
- Violence/threat of violence
- Poor modeling
from older males
- Confusion about
sex and boundaries



My uncle holding me as a baby!

ISOLATION



With my friend Josh, a brilliant and sweet Dad.

- Males are cuddled less, held less. “They have to be tough” or “Can’t make them feminine, or gay”
- Cut off from close connection with other boys and with girls -- fears of gayness and of being predators.
- Not supposed to talk about it because we are supposed to be fine.



ISOLATION (AGAIN)

- Key to leaving those open hurts.
- We carry the feeling with us and it persists in our minds even when in reality we are surrounded by people wanting to be with us!



My twin nephews loving each other.

EMOTIONS

- Males feel the same emotions that other humans do
- Boys are responded to slower when they cry, or their crying is shut down quicker and harsher. (crying is a natural neural-biological way humans process feelings of disconnection, loss, and other emotions)
- Fear is considered a feminine feeling.



Nick and his perfect baby boy Hollis

VIOLENCE/THREATS



My Grandpa, a very sweet man.

- Boys staying within the “Man-Box” is enforced with violence or threat of violence.
- Boys isolation is enforced through violence and threat of violence

MALE ROLE MODELS

- What options are we giving our boys from early on for what being a man looks like?





Me around
age 8!

SEX! YAY!

- Boys are systematically denied closeness with others.
- Boys are given the message in society that sex is only acceptable outlet for intimacy and vulnerability.
- Porn is used to confuse boys about sex and teach them to objectify women.
- Language around sex is dominant and aggressive. Did you hit it?
- Boys love having space to process this.

Boys and Race

- Being a boy doesn't happen in vacuum - interacts with other identities.
- White people have difficulty looking at and thinking about the impact of race.
- Trauma-informed perspective can lead to deficit based approach to youth.
- Black youth/families have had to be resilient!



White people get to think together about how to support anti-racism work in their schools and communities-- me with some of the white men I do this work with.

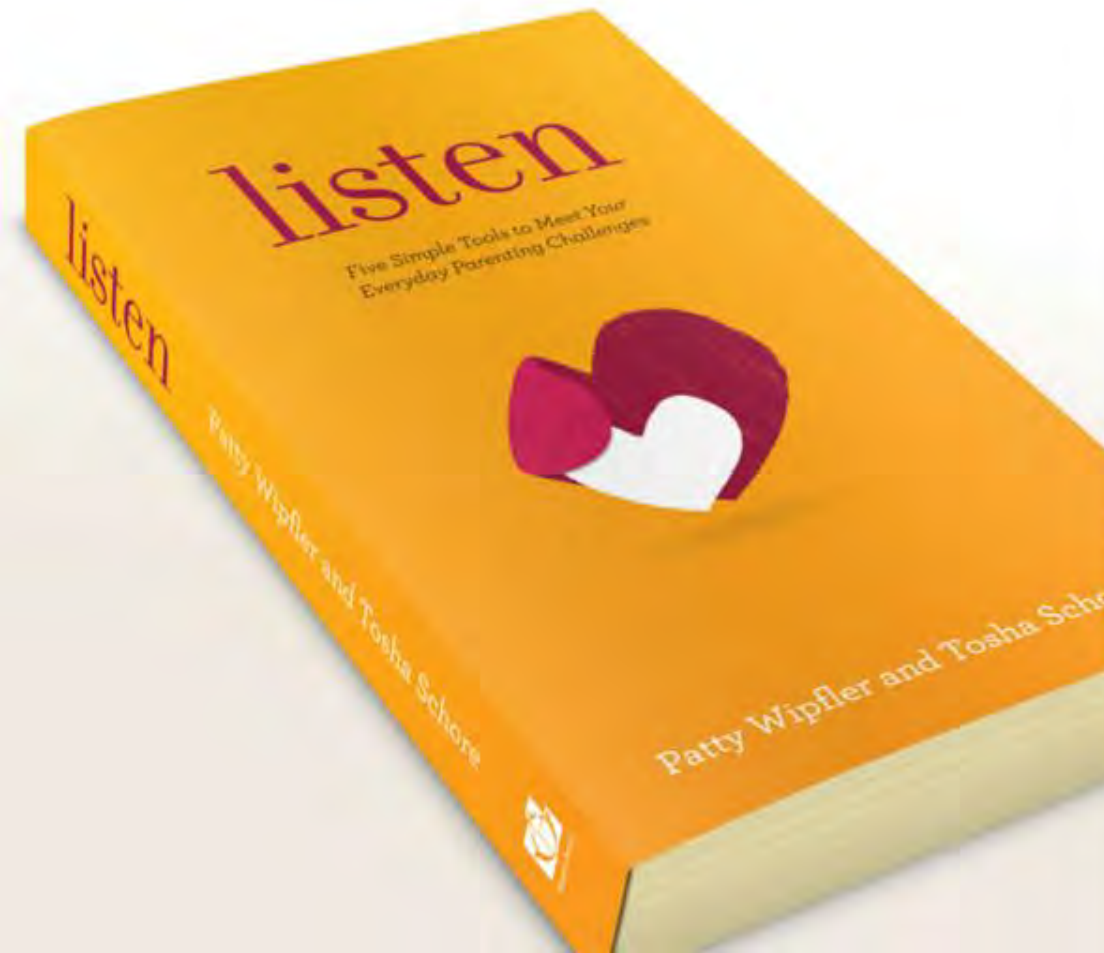
Strengths-based approach



- Do we see the resilience and strength?
- What is possible for our youth of color?
- How do you hold up high expectations and then show up for their feelings?
- How well do we listen to our youth?
Even when the way they are asking to be listened to isn't what we're used to?

Another Dyad! (or triad)

- What do you think so far about what I've shared? What has been done to boys in general or ways it has intersected with other identities?



Offers a new and practical understanding of children's emotions and upset moments, and shares effective tools for easing the stress of parenting during even the most challenging interactions parents face each day.

Patty Wipfler and
Tosha Schore

 hand in hand

Groups for boys in our schools



This image of a boys group is taken from the Representation Project's film, *The Mask You Live In*.

Making groups go well!

- Target influential boys at first.
 - Balance the group for behavior dynamics.
 - 7-12 boys
 - Think of a time this could work for your school.
- **Not about teaching boys to “Man-Up”**

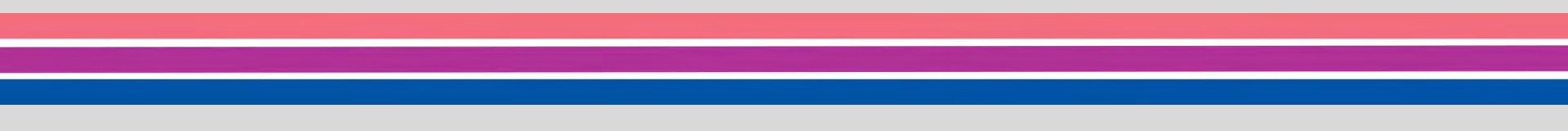


What are your thoughts about masculinity after this group?

“I get a lot of pressure to be a certain type of guy, you know, people will say ‘don’t be a b****’ and then pressure you to do things, but I can tell now it’s just because they’re insecure and they were pressured to do thing they didn’t want to do.”

What was the most impactful topic for you to talk about?

“**probably the man**-box, and being yourself, most of us put on a front and act like another person. We’re afraid to be who we are.”



Making groups go well! (cont.)

- Think about the specific boys you will have
 - Learn about the impacts of class, race, religion, sexuality on masculinity.
 - If you can't show the boys you have put some effort into understanding where they are coming from they won't trust you.

Different from how boys treat each other in other spaces.

- Establish Guidelines so this group will not operate like how boys have to treat each other out there!
 - No identity insults like g** or b**** etc. or *even things that infer homophobia or sexism.*
 - Establish Confidentiality and clarity of boundaries.

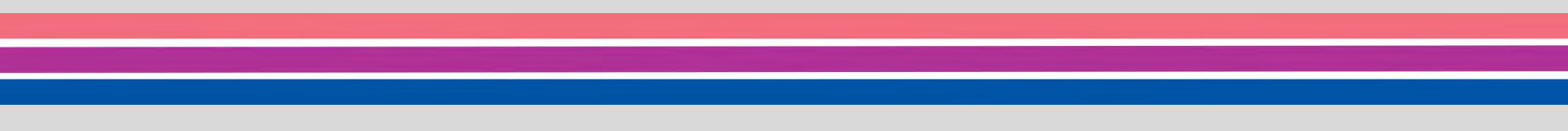


Me with Drew, an amazing, thoughtful, gentle man.



Just like we need support while hiking.

Working in a school, being a teacher, is
HARD. We slip up often. We need to
support each other -- Teacher Support
Groups!

- Hold out high expectations for your students, especially boys.
 - Expect them to act in disruptive ways when feelings come up trying to meet your expectations.
 - Listen to them, show up for their feelings, let them process those feelings.
 - Hold out that expectation again and higher!
 - Work on your feelings when it gets hard, discouraging, etc.
 - Believe in what's possible for boys and girls
- 

**I don't really care about [the man box]. I
wanna show my feelings. I used to believe in
it and didn't cry, but now I wanna show my
feelings and I wanna be there for other guys.**

James Meinert

thinking together
about
men, masculinity,
equity, and justice

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My Family!