

Taming The Dragon
Power, Conflict & Love
with Teenage Boys

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Introduction

“a dragon is dangerous whether it is awake or asleep . . .” J.R.R. Tolkien

Teenage boys behave a lot like dragons. They can act loud, boisterous, in-your-face blowing fire and smoke, stubborn, demanding, physically intimidating, obnoxious, verbally abusive, and seemingly invulnerable. Or they may act quiet, removed, keep to themselves, guarding their private horde and only aroused when faced with a threatening “knight” (generally a grownup making a demand). They mystify adults, both repelling and drawing them into endless and seemingly unresolvable battles. While the “warriors” walk around wounded, the “dragons” appear untouchable. It is not a lot of fun to live with one.

I am a psychologist, musician, and a black belt in the Japanese martial art Aikido. In August of 1995 I joined the staff of a psychotherapy center in Birmingham, Michigan. I announced in a staff meeting that I would work with teenage boys. My colleagues cheered and clapped. I practically got a standing ovation.

Not a lot of therapists like to work with teenage boys. I do. Aside from whatever personal histories that promote clinical issues, each and every one of them is faced with the perilous passage of becoming a man. Most of them are backing away from it.

Frankly, I don't blame them. What do they really have to look forward to? How are their capabilities being groomed to prepare them for the world they will meet? What about becoming a man engages their souls, develops their deepest potentials and desires, and calls upon their creativity and talents to mature? What about manhood offers them a manner for being their best in the World?

The teenage boys living today face challenges that call for the best of their capabilities as mature men. In their hands lie a good deal of the fate of humanity. Yet the path we offer them more often than not short circuits their potentials developing , interferes with a positive and healthy masculinity, and deludes them with more false images than can be counted. In short, it robs them of a cultural context in which they can become their best.

Curiously, they know it and they don't want to grow up. They don't either like or believe the images of an adult man in American society. Much like Peter Pan, they don't see the fun in becoming a man. They'd just as soon put it off for as long as possible (if ever).

If the boys don't grow up, who will the women marry? Who will face the challenges of creating a humane, sustainable society with courage, dedication, persistence, and humility?

Taming the Dragon is like the Ugly Duckling story. Not only are the boys full of self doubt and misperceive themselves, but they are rejected, misunderstood and mistreated by many whom they come into contact with. It's only when they are in a social context that “sees” them for who they really are that they begin to own

their true natures and identities. Otherwise, they move through life as “pretend” ducks either quietly or loudly in despair. Don’t believe me? Ask any adult man about his lost youth that didn’t make it into mature masculinity. Teenage boys are much much more than what they “appear” to be and most adults are fooled.

Their dragon-like qualities draw a lot of attention, perpetuate the games they engage the grown ups in, and most importantly distract from Reality: with smoke and fire they conceal their true natures and avoid their approaching manhood. Unfortunately, the grownups who don’t know better enable them to be dragons.

Adults accomplish this by viewing them as lazy, irresponsible, and disobedient. They sure can act lazy, irresponsible and disobedient. Yet, when confrontation occurs, the grownups fall into a game with the teen that is predictable, repetitive, and unresolvable. Everybody gets angry and frustrated. Worse, they play right into an unrecognized conspiracy to ignore the obvious.

From the dragon’s point of view, what does the adult world offer them to be excited about? Entertainment? Good grades in school? A driver’s license and a car? A “good job” that pays a lot of money?

These are not the things that draw upon a boy’s soul. It is purpose, meaning, and the successful application of his unique talents and abilities in the World that call him to fruition: the chance and risk of living his dreams and his dream having a place in larger world.

The United States Army appropriated this truth when it marketed the idea: “be all that you can be” because that is what boys want and everything else is gravy. It just happens that the United States Army cannot offer all boys the chance to “be all that you can be.”

It is important to acknowledge that boys grow up in families and social contexts that impact their development. My colleagues have written eloquently on these issues. That having been said, the phenomena of their futures, the fact that they are approaching manhood, dominates everything in their development.

There are real, life threatening challenges facing humanity. The most modern understandings of consciousness make it obvious that the children, including the boys, intuitively know the fate of humanity is hanging in the balance. Each boy was born into this lifetime for a reason. He will want an opportunity to bring all he can bear to the daunting and rigorous task of continuing the human story.

Taming the Dragon comes from a deep love for boys. This isn’t a sexist comment or a politically correct (or incorrect for that matter) statement. It is a simple truth. I’m impressed with the machinations of their minds and the depth of their hidden feelings. I delight in the energy, vitality, curiosity, cleverness, and beauty they

have to offer. I love the truths, talents, skills, and creativity they give to Life and the longing, deep and mysterious, to become their very best: to belong in the World; to be their very best and have their best be meaningful and of service in the World.

I've designed the book in three sections. The first is Knowledge of the Beast. I offer my understanding of teenage boys: how they are as I've come to know them, how they see themselves and how they view the world. This is neither a textbook or formal research presentation, rather a subjective context drawn from my personal experiences with teenage boys only validated from having addressed hundreds, maybe thousands, of adults who've corroborated these views.

The second section is Power, Conflict and Love. It addresses the common concepts of these fundamental human conditions and re-imagines them in a context that I've found is functionally more appropriate, successful, indeed true. Their importance is simple. Power is everything to teenage boys. Conflict is inevitable. Love is intrinsic, albeit mostly invisible. I've learned that the common concepts of these three, along with the lack of understanding of teenage boys create profound confusion, frustration and anger. The end result is a lot of unnecessary anguish for adults and teens and most importantly a lack of development for the boys: it hinders, if not stunts their growing up.

The third section is Taming the Dragon and answers the question, "so now what do I do?". Using the knowledge from the previous sections, it introduces practical methods for managing and resolving conflicts, creating change, and promoting the positive and purposeful development of the boys' potentials. Through connecting with that soft spot on the dragon's underbelly, we can bring him home to dinner. It is a Way to help shepherd him into manhood.

