

Liminality: The Missing Dimension of the Journey into Adulthood

Parent & Teacher Notes

1. The history of the male and female symbols.

♂ Represents the shield and spear of Mars the Roman god of war and ♀ is the mirror of Venus the goddess of love and beauty. She had experienced no infancy or childhood and was born a grown, beautiful young woman.

According to William T Stearn the male symbol is 'widely used in modern biology to distinguish male ... organs or individuals, have a long complex history which touches upon mythology, astrology, alchemy, palaeography (the study of ancient handwriting), pharmacy, chemistry, heraldry and as regards their biological application.

William T Stearn, "The origin of the Male and Female Symbols of Biology", TAXON the official News Bulletin of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy. May 1962, Vol. XI No. 4. Utrecht, Netherlands.

2. What is Authentic Healthy Masculinity?

Authentic Healthy Masculinity is '**Strength in Action with Character**'. The opposite of masculinity is not femininity but passivity. Narcissism & Selfishness is Cheap Masculinity.

The **ANZAC** spirit gives a clue to Authentic Australian Masculinity.

The Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra captures the ANZAC spirit with fifteen stain glass windows portraying fifteen character traits.

The South Window - **Personal Qualities** of; Resource, Candour, Devotion (a nurse), Curiosity, Independence.

The West Window - **Social Qualities** of; Comradeship, Ancestry, Patriotism, Chivalry, Loyalty.

The East Window - **Fighting Qualities** of, Coolness, Control (of self and others), Audacity, Endurance, Decision.

3. The Four Archetypes of Masculinity

i. The Authentic Healthy Man = Strong, Potent & Controlled Masculinity = Strength in Action with Character.

ii. The Narcissistic & Arrogant Man = Self-Serving Masculinity = Strength in Action WITHOUT Character.

iii. The Peter Pan Man = Immature & Fearful Masculinity = No Action, Just Passivity & Insecurity

iv. The Modern Day Eunuch = Impotent Masculinity = No Strength, Just Passivity

4. What is Liminality?

Liminality as described by Arnold van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1969) occurs in a rite of passage and is the transitional state between two phases, where individuals are "betwixt and between", and consequently they do not belong to the society that they previously were a part of and they were not yet reincorporated into that society. However post-liminality they are reincorporated with a change in their social status as a man within their society.

Liminality is a limbo that is characterized by humility, seclusion, tests, sexual ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. One's sense of identity dissolves to some extent, bringing about disorientation. Liminality is a period of transition where normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behaviour are relaxed - a situation which can lead to new perspectives.

Liminality occurs within *communitas*, which is defined as an unstructured community where all members are equal.

Belgian anthropologist van Gennep, "Rites of Passage" in 1909 (translated into English in 1960). Victor Turner (1969) "The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure".

5. What have been the Social Shifts that Have Resulted in the Loss of Liminality in Modern Society?

1760-1830 - The Industrial Revolution saw a shift from the village and the farm to urbanisation. This resulted in a **shift in family structure & economic structure**. The family (the clan) was no longer the centre of a child's world and the primary produce of the family's needs. Consequently there was the loss of the community of men and the loss of authentic Rites of Passage. In regard to boys the raising of a son became female focused.

1830 - Institutional Education saw a **shift in educational structure**. Where once education was the domain of the rich and privileged it becomes open to all children. This saw the shift from the family, the clan and the village being the primary source of education to "...one teacher per classroom, who was supposed to be the parent, mentor, grandparent, instructor, and everything else to all these young minds." Michael Gurian & Kathy Stevens, "The Minds of Boys", (2005, p.30)

1850 - Saw the first National Woman's Rights Convention which was attended by over one thousand women on 23 and 24 October 1850 in Worcester, Massachusetts. These early Feminist

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primarily focused on gaining the right of women's suffrage - an ideology that aims for full civil and legal equality. It was seeking equal opportunity for all women, the right to vote, equal pay and employment opportunities, and equal value for home makers, & pro-life. Christian Hoff Sommers (2000) calls these **Equity Feminist**. Their work resulted in a **shift in social structure**.

1970 - What Christian Hoff Sommers (2000) calls **Gender Feminism** is often referred to as Contemporary Feminism or 2nd-wave Feminism has been focused on the issue of economic equality including the ability to have careers in addition to motherhood, or the right to choose not to have children. They have also sought to address the rights of female minorities.

Its dominance is seen in Academic Feminism and holds to the belief that has sought a **shift in gender structure** through the belief that;

We are all essentially androgynous,

Patriarchy and male values are the source of violence and all discrimination, being a boy is a condition that needs to be rectified or corrected, and

Masculinity must be redefined through the lens of gender feminism and certainly not by men who are imprisoned by patriarchal male constructs.

Christian Hoff Sommers (2000) "The war against boys: How misguided feminism is harming our young men".

2002 - The house of representatives standing committee on employment, education and

work place relations holds its inquiry into the **education of boys** as the current outcomes conflict with current ideology.

The end result is as Richard Rohr (2004) state, "the permissive society refuses to offer young men any boundaries or rules. Consequently this leads many guys into a path of avoiding commitment and the loss of identity"

Richard Rohr (2004) "Adam's Return: The Five Promises of Male Initiation"

6. The missing dimension for adolescence; van Gennep (1909) suggested that "rites of passage" generally comprised of three components:

1. Pre-liminal phase of **SEPARATION**

2. Liminal phase of **TRANSITION**
from old state to new state

3. Post-liminal phase of reincorporation and **REORIENTATION** into original social structure

The Key Ingredients of Initiation are that;

- ♂ It is conducted by the community of men,
- ♂ There is a change of relationship (especially mother-child),
- ♂ It involves challenge, struggle and/or pain
- ♂ There is a change in social status hence, adult rights and responsibilities are given, and are accompanied with adult expectations.

Liminality Properties

- Communitas
- Equality
- Absence of property & status
- Uniformity of clothing
- Disregard for appearance
- Minimal sex distinctions
- Absence of rank / Humility
- No distinction of wealth
- Unselfishness / Simplicity
- Total obedience
- Sacredness
- Acceptance of pain & suffering

Turner 1969

- Structure
- Inequality
- Property & status
- Distinctions of clothing
- Care for appearance
- Maximization of sex distinctions
- Distinction of rank / Pride
- Distinctions of wealth
- Selfishness / Complexity
- Obedience only to superior rank
- Secularity
- Avoidance of pain & suffering

Status Systems