

# Embracing Manhood by Nicholas de Castella

I was sitting near the back of the plane on a recent flight from Sydney to Melbourne. By the time the hostess distributing magazines reached me she only had a choice of three. On glancing through them a Men's Health magazine caught my attention...

As I asked for the magazine I felt a wave of embarrassment spread across my face. I held it in my hands and wondered about the cleanliness of a used 'men's magazine'. Shameful associations with porno books flooded my mind and I felt a little repulsed. I braced a little, opened the magazine and began reading.

I vividly remember the first article I read. It was a review of the current features in the major women's magazines just in case your 'woman started acting strangely'. As I read on my interest began rising. I was beginning to like the angle that the magazine was coming from. With some sense of relief I laughed openly at the humorous articles. My wife asked what was I laughing at and I told her it was 'men's business'. Very soon I discovered that I was interested in almost every item in the magazine. This was an unexpected discovery for me. I realised that I was used to seeing women's magazines in which I would only be interested in the occasional story. A strange thing was occurring: there was a sense of recognition and belonging happening. I felt a sense of pride at being part of the male race. I read the entire magazine, cover to cover and reluctantly gave it back at the end of my flight - deciding to subscribe for myself.

As a counsellor and facilitator of men's workshops for 16 years, I have become increasingly aware of the need for healing the confusion and shame that many men face today. Women have had their revolution and now it's the men's turn. Almost every day I talk with men who are struggling to understand what it means to be a man, battling with a sense of emptiness and the challenge of finding contentment in the 21st century. Many men are questioning the role they are playing in their family and work life and are seeking to discover a sense of happiness, but not sure how. By providing an open forum for the discussion of men's

issues, men's forums have assisted me to develop a clearer definition of myself as a man and to love myself more fully.

Men and women are clearly different. They have different values, ways of being, priorities and methods of communicating. John Gray has risen to fame teaching couples to understand and respect the differences. David Deida's work has grown in popularity and he puts it this way: The masculine essence is driven by a sense of mission whilst the feminine essence is seeking the flow of love through family or intimate relationships. Whilst we each have mix of masculine and feminine essences, men tend to express more strongly the masculine essence and women tend to express more strongly the feminine essence.

The three consequences of this are:

1. Men will not be truly happy trying to fulfil a woman's values and expectations (this is largely in regard to men sacrificing their mission for a relationship).
2. No woman will ever fully understand a man's dilemmas (and visa versa).
3. No man is going to fully understand his own nature through the company of women. (A man needs to experience the mirroring of his own masculine essence to know himself as a man [the same is true for woman and feminine essence]).

It seems to me that many men's issues are paradoxical. When it comes to the really important things in our lives men often desire one thing but find they are heading in another direction.

## **THE CONTRADICTIONS OF A MODERN MAN'S DILEMA- Do You Relate?**

- Are your days are full, but you feel empty inside?
- Do you have everything going for you, but too little coming together?
- Do you try and squeeze in lots of fun, but you're not really happy?
- Are you in a race and not sure where the finish line is?
- Do you want peace, but find yourself being moody?
- Do you want a fulfilling sex life, but find yourself being rejected?

- ❑ Do you have a good job, married, healthy kids and a home, but something is still missing?
- ❑ Do you feel trapped and want to break out, but don't know how?
- ❑ Do you work hard, but your wife is not happy?
- ❑ Do you feel like life is going quickly, but your not really living it?
- ❑ Are you a friendly man, but don't have many male friends you are totally honest with?
- ❑ In spite of the many work colleagues, family and friends, do you have a sense of loneliness?
- ❑ Do you feel like there is something holding you back?
- ❑ Are your personal relationships out of wack and you aren't sure why ... but you know you must DO something?

**MASCULINE SHAME: The Male Wound, the Father Wound.**

Today the most common wound boys (and men) suffer from is shame associated with their masculinity. Shame is a sense of being bad, wrong or inadequate. This masculine shame is mainly created through a lack of intimacy with the nature of masculinity. It is experienced most commonly as emptiness, hollowness, numbness, detachment or frozenness. It is expressed either as superhuman optimism or as defeatist pessimism.

Masculine Shame often occurs during childhood and is predominantly caused by two factors: The absence of healthy male role modeling and the absence of the acknowledgement of the passage to manhood. Masculine shame manifests as:

- 1. The unacknowledged man syndrome**
- 2. The superman syndrome: unrealistic expectations**
- 3. The macho man image: out of touch with feelings**

**MASCULINE SHAME CHECK LIST**

How many of the following do you relate to?

**THE UNACKNOWLEDGED MAN SYNDROME**

- ❑ A lack of appreciation of the good qualities of manhood leading to poor self worth.
- ❑ A lack of understanding of the differences between men and women leading to unrealistic expectations feelings of inadequacy, insecurity and frustration.
- ❑ Not feeling strong enough inside to stand up and claim the right to be here, leading to reluctance to take responsibility and a tendency towards lethargy.
- ❑ Tendency to base sense of self-worth on what others (especially women) think leading to very insecure relationships where one is likely to over compromise, have a tendency to please rather than be being totally honest.
- ❑ Compulsive competition leading to loneliness and isolation.

**THE SUPERMAN SYNDROME: UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

- ❑ Super human expectations to attempt to allay the feeling of shame (the feeling of inadequacy or the fear of being a failure).
- ❑ Inability to acknowledge normal human limits leading to stress and illness due to overworking and feelings of inadequacy and isolation.
- ❑ Unrealistic expectations on self, leading to high blood pressure and a perpetual sense of not being good enough, leading to the inability to relax, have fun, play and enjoy life.
- ❑ Inability to accept failures and mistakes and move on leading to lack of self-confidence and a likelihood of collapsing into hopelessness and depression.
- ❑ Inability to share about troubles with other males leading to isolation and suicidal thoughts.
- ❑ Inability to be present with other males going through life traumas.
- ❑ Being out of touch with feelings leading to difficulty in communication.
- ❑ Difficulty in expressing needs and asking for assistance directly because of not wanting to appear weak.
- ❑ Hiding shame, insecurities and doubts creates a fear of being found out

which creates anxiety, more shame and isolation.

- ❑ Physical pain due to the suppression of emotion and driving oneself beyond healthy limits.

### **THE MACHO MAN IMAGE: OUT OF TOUCH WITH FEELINGS**

- ❑ Inability to manage life's stresses in healthy ways leading to anxiety, substance abuse, and compulsive behaviours and illnesses.
- ❑ Difficulty showing intense emotions leading to stress, loss of passion, illness and a sense of being weak (not being authentic).
- ❑ Difficulty managing anger in healthy ways leading to violence, or a sense of powerlessness anxiety, stress and then depression.
- ❑ Lack of inner connection to 'heart' or passion leading to loss of sense of power and self worth.
- ❑ Lack of sense of purpose leading to loss of direction, loss of enthusiasm feeling empty, unfulfilled, unsatisfied and unhappy.
- ❑ A tendency to withdraw and hide when feeling hurt or upset leading to a lack of connection with partners, feeling stuck, withdrawal from the world and depression.
- ❑ Sexual numbing and distortions leading to loss of sacredness in sexuality and a lack of passionate satisfying sexual experiences.
- ❑ Difficulty connecting with children.

### **EMBRACING OUR MANHOOD**

The process of healing masculine shame and embracing manhood is one of coming to recognise and value the distinct qualities of masculine essence that have largely been unacknowledged and in fact often shamed in our culture. I am referring to qualities of masculinity such as: the fascination with machines and the ability to understand and fix things, the tendency to reflect on things (most of the great philosophers are men), the desire and appreciation for sex (well some one has to initiate it), the willingness to fight for what needs to be defended (family, country etc...), and the desire to constantly explore new frontiers.

There are 10 steps men can take to feel free, strong, alive and fulfilled:

### **1. Complete our childhood with mum and dad**

Since the industrial revolution fathers (and all adult men) have headed off for the day to the factory or office. Consequently, boys (and men) are suffering from the absence of powerful, emotionally available, loving fathers and other strong, nurturing male role models during their formative years.

Indeed in a traditional tribal system the father is present to assist the young boy in cutting mother's apron strings. But what if dad is not around? The boy does not make the transition, remains enmeshed with mum and stays a boy inside. He will then project his unfinished business on to his relationships with women.

As young boys our image of what it means to be a man is primarily shaped by our experiences with our father. We tend to grow up either being a replica of dad ('A chip off the old block') or attempt to be the opposite of him. If dad was absent it is quite likely we will be absent to parts of our masculinity and unconsciously learn that being a man means being distant or disconnected. In this way our relationship to our fathers is symbolic of our relationship to ourselves as men. If our father behaved shamefully, then we cannot help but take on some shame about being a man. Whilst we carry resentments and even detachment from our father we will not fully embrace our masculine essence. As we heal unresolved issues with our fathers we are free to embrace our masculinity in an honourable way and claim our own authority. We gain the power to claim and express ourselves fully as men.

### **2. Find honour in manhood**

One of the major reasons for masculine shame is the lack of acknowledgement of the coming of manhood in our culture. Culturally we lack ritual honouring of the transition from boyhood to manhood. Traditional rites of passage recognise the positive masculinity. Through these rituals men gain a sense of honour in their masculinity and a validation of the essence of who they are.

The men's movement heals masculine shame. Through open honest and respectful interactions men come to understand more deeply what it means to be a man and appreciate the unique positive attributes of masculinity. They explore the nature of

masculinity through self reflection, by learning new models for manhood. They come to recognise and feel a resonance with the unique and honourable qualities of manhood. In this space of truth they receive, often through osmosis, a sense of the masculine essence which resonates deeply within their being. With an appreciation of our true nature we are no longer dependant on other peoples acceptance or approval.

As men gain a sense of pride in their masculinity and distinguish their fundamental mental and emotional differences with women, they are able to accept gender differences and feel less threatened. They are able to respect, appreciate and celebrate the uniquely different qualities of masculinity and femininity. Relationships take on a new depth and sexuality becomes more sacred - a meeting and merging of the two essences for communion to a higher order. The polarities become more accentuated and as you know, opposites attract!

Take a moment and identify 5 men that you admire and would like to consider as a healthy role model for you.

### **3. Develop 'Emotional Mastery'**

The 'John Wayne' tough guy/macho image has reinforced the idea that men should not (and don't) feel emotional. Consequently men today can be divided into three groups:

1. **The Tough Guys** that are out there driving themselves until something breaks (a divorce, or a health crisis is common).
2. **The Sensitive Men** who struggle to cope in a world where he is not allowed to feel and express his emotions freely. These guys often suffer from feelings of emptiness, isolation and depression.
3. **The Emotionally Intelligent Men** who have developed some level of Emotional Mastery. These guys are often seem to be naturally successful.

Current research is proving overwhelmingly that those men who manage their emotions effectively outperform others who have a higher IQ in work, sport and home life. According to Daniel Goleman: "What really matters for success, character, happiness and life long achievements is a definable set of emotional skills - your E.Q. - not just

purely cognitive abilities that are measured by conventional I.Q. tests."

Emotional Mastery involves:

1. Understanding the role of emotion and its good purpose in our lives.
2. Learning to recognise which emotion we are feeling.
3. Emotional Literacy: communicating our feelings.
4. Opening our hearts: connecting with our hearts love current.
5. Accessing inner guidance by connecting with the messages of the heart.
6. Developing the capacity to transform intense emotion into peace or happiness.
7. Channelling emotional energy into being creative and having fun.
8. Relating to others in empathetic (feeling based) ways.

### **4. Make real male friendships**

The traditional tribal village cultures incorporated the active interaction of young boys with adult males in everyday life. Through working together developing boys learnt to share, and trust each other.

With a lack of presence of elders, men base their sense of self worth on conquests instead of self-respect. Compulsive competition between men puts up barriers and creates separation. Indeed a major issue facing men today is isolation. Whilst women get together and discuss personal issues most men hold them inside. This creates feelings of loneliness, separation, shame, depression and confusion.

Through the development of real male friends men experience understanding of their issues as a man, by other men and experience being part of the brotherhood of men. They come to a place of inner strength, peace, freedom and discover a truer, freer, more authentic self.

Go on, grab that phone and give your mate a call. Oh, and tell him honestly about what you are going through at the moment. You may be surprised to find you are not alone!

### **5. Identify our deepest purpose and live it**

Discovering and living our mission is a prime directive for men. When men are not living

from their deepest truth they feel empty, lost and lack self worth.

Each of us has a unique set of gifts and talents and we are here to make the world a better place. Your purpose in life is what you need to do or achieve in this lifetime that when you die you can die with a smile on your face.

When men are giving the gift they are here to give they feel strong and good about themselves. They experience new levels of aliveness, gain passion, motivation and courage to take their next step along life's challenging road.

What do you do that stretches you to grow and gives you a sense of achievement? Are you doing it? What is your next step? Don't sit on your dreams.

### **Continue to take risks and grow**

The search for freedom is inherent in the masculine drive whether it's expressed in the liberation of kicking a goal on the football field or signing a major contract in business or rising to a challenge in a relationship. For men to feel alive and awake they need to constantly be testing and challenging themselves to stretch to the next level. When men stop taking risks they wither from within. The lower emotional volatility of men is strength in this area because it enables them to take risks and remain centred and focused.

Are you currently challenging yourself by stepping up to the next project that is going to require more of you than you currently know or have to give? Where are you staying safe in your intimate relationships and your career? Take a risk, dare to live.

### **6. Engage actively in our relationships**

Men are famous for retreating into their caves. Clearly the tendency to withdraw in conflict does not lead to resolution of issues. Men's tendency to withdraw leaves them isolated, can lead to depression and weakens a relationship. The old role models of the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the nurturer are no longer satisfactory. Women are able to earn their own income and they expect more input from their husbands in family matters. Too often I meet men who came home from work one day to

find their wife gone – sadly they thought they were doing what was required.

Fully empowered men engage in disagreements with their partners in an open, non-competitive and non-threatening manner to seek mutual understanding and connection. More relationships shrivel up and die from a lack of engagement (and passion) as from fighting too much. When people sweep issues under the carpet they end up tripping over the rug. Avoiding engaging leads to growing distance between partners.

Where you are being challenged in your relationship is exactly where you are stuck. Your partner is not just a thorn in your side. They are gods voice calling you to pay attention to some aspect of yourself that needs to change. Ask yourself 'If I did not take this personally, how am I being asked to grow?'

### **7. Free the 'Wild Man' within**

Every man has a million year history of savagery and wildness. To lock these powerful energies up in a cage is as destructive as letting them out recklessly. Contrary to most men's belief, women actually get quite excited witnessing the power of the masculine. Learning to find a creative outlet for raw masculine energy is refreshing and liberating for men and women. In workshops that I run I always get the women to share after a group of men have expressed this primal energy and the feedback is always "we want more".

When this primal energy is locked away it becomes disconnected from our core energy and we lose sexual passion. It is not about walking around like a Neanderthal, but about having a healthy channel for the outlet of this energy. This may be through sport, by drumming, singing (bass baritone of course) and even dancing (stomping for those guys who feel unsure about the dance floor).

### **8. Find sacredness in our sexuality**

A common trait for most men is their enjoyment of sexual experiences. Sexual experiences have the potential to open men's hearts and create expanded states of consciousness and spiritual experiences. The primary way that a man experiences being loved is through fulfilling sexual experiences. Most men that are past their twenties are over the testosterone drive to copulate and

are looking for deeper and more meaningful sexual experiences. Obviously most men receive virtually no training in how to have spiritual meetings during sexual intercourse. This leaves sex with a rather empty after taste.

The Eastern Tantric traditions have thousands of developing practices to enhance lovemaking and transform sex into spiritual experiences. Spiritual sexual experiences arise out of a deep state of connection between lovers and an ability to circulate sexual energy through the body in a way that induces heart opening and love.

Life is too precious to miss the rich potential that lies within our sexuality for finding fulfilment and enriching loving relationships. Explore unknown realms of sexual fulfilment by learning about Tantric sexuality.

### **9. Rekindle a sense of playfulness and humour**

One of the common qualities of men is their capacity to laugh at themselves and lark around. You only have to listen to SEN the sports radio station to appreciate the freeing and lifting of the human spirit that men induce through being able to make fun of and laugh at themselves. A great attribute to cultivate is the ability to witness ourselves in an argument when we are being ridiculous or petty and have a laugh about it. Men are commonly known for their desire to tinker; they love taking something apart and seeing how it works. Too often men lose themselves in demands of work, and other responsibilities and do not give themselves permission to take time out and play. How long is it since you did something that had no tangible productive output? Maybe it's time to dust off your golf clubs or hire a canoe and go for a paddle. How long is it since you told a joke?

### **Men Empowering Men**

I have discovered unexpected and important gifts when travelling realms outside my ordinary path. Men's work was one of these realms. If you are looking for answers then I highly encourage you to broaden your horizons and take a risk to seek out a men's support network in your area. Sadly, many men fear the idea of getting together with men they do not know. This is testimony to both how distrusting we are of our own gender and how much we need to heal our

manhood. The world desperately needs more men who have opened their hearts, connected to their feelings and rediscovered the beauty, the strength and the honour of being MEN!

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This is an abridged version of 'Embracing Manhood'. The full version is available at [www.eq.net.au](http://www.eq.net.au) or you can contact Nicholas on 03 9482 5332.