What About the Boys?

Understanding and Addressing the Challenges of Developing Healthy Masculinity

A project of Women’s Network PEI
January 2012
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Forward
Understanding and Addressing the Challenges of Developing Healthy Masculinity is a project designed to reduce violence against women and girls on Prince Edward Island by responding to the needs of Island boys. Understanding the needs and challenges PEI boys face will help us create a community response to build respectful, healthy boys who will be less likely to become involved in violent relationships with girls and women. A literary review and scan of resources and best practices was conducted along with community consultations and focus groups with men across the province from a wide socio-economic spectrum and boys between the ages of 10 - 14.

Framing the Initiative
The overall purpose of the project is to reach boys at a young age and help them grow into healthy adult men, lessening the incidences of violence against women and contact with the justice system. From meetings with community organizations, schools and parents/caregivers across the province, Women’s Network PEI heard that, while there are many opportunities for sports, there is a lack of programming that focuses on the “whole boy”.

In 2008/09 women made up 81% of victims of abuse cases and 74.6% of sexual assault cases referred to PEI Victim Services¹. While most men are not violent, men commit most of the violence. Why are some boys growing up to be violent men? Through our work with girls’ programming, we heard over and over again that adults need help in understanding what is going on with tween boys.

“Men must teach each other that real men do not violate or oppress women – and that a woman’s place is not just in the home or the field, but in schools and offices and boardrooms.”
(Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, Global Symposium on Men and Boys, Rio de Janeiro, 2009)

Today, there is a sense that boys are increasingly becoming victims of very narrow definitions of masculinity and both educators and parents/caregivers are unsure how this should be addressed. In addition, societies that enjoy higher levels of equality among genders are more likely to be rated as healthy, secure and wealthy. Addressing the needs of boys and helping them to navigate their way to manhood is an investment in their wellbeing and the wellbeing and increased status of women in our society.

Masculinity and Violence Against Women
The most well documented determinants of violence against girls and women can be found in gender norms and gender relations. Whether at individual, community, or societal levels, there are relationships between how gender is organized and violence against women. One key factor here is men’s gender-role attitudes and beliefs. Men’s agreement with sexist, patriarchal, or

¹ Women in PEI: Statistical Review 2010
sexually hostile attitudes is an important predictor of their use of violence against women. Men who do not hold patriarchal and hostile gender norms are less likely than other men to use violence against an intimate partner.²

“Violence against women and girls is rooted in widely accepted gender norms about men’s authority and use of violence to exert control over women. As half the world’s population, effective interventions must engage men in order to address the underlying discriminatory social norms that legitimize male power, control and use of violence”. (Dunkle and Jewkes 2007). “And, while studies available and their findings at times vary in different settings, some researchers have found that ideas of male privilege and control have been identified among the top factors predicting the perpetration of violence against women.” (Jewkes 2002).

Is violence biological in men?
“If violence were a biological imperative in men, all men would be violent, and they are not. Many men are decent, loving, responsible and respectful people who do not harm women. To understand the problem, we must understand the various factors involved in the socialization of boys. Many boys are goaded into proving their ‘masculinity’ through acts of violence and a lack of compassion. Violent role models for boys, such as wrestlers, boxers, war heroes, action figures, outnumber peaceful, responsible and caring ones. Weak, insecure men sometimes feel they have to control others, especially women, in order to be a ‘real man’.³

Methodology
Women’s Network PEI recently completed two years of projects that researched best practices, consulted widely with community and then delivered successful programming for girls ages 10 - 14. Throughout the process one question was heard many times: What about the boys? Funding for this project was secured through the Interministerial Women’s Secretariat for community consultations and a literature review. Through interviews across the province, an advisory committee was created to help guide Women’s Network in answering this question. This group represents a diversity of Island population of men and women who are interested in the development of programming for healthy boys.

Community consultations began in June 2011 with men and some women from various communities including O’Leary, Lennox Island, Summerside, Charlottetown, Cable Head, St. Peter’s and Souris along with organizations such as PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada, Sport PEI, Eastern School board, Turning Point, Addiction Services, Justice, and workers from Child and Family Services. Confidential individual interviews and focus groups with boys ages 10 - 14 were also conducted and due to the sensitive nature of the conversations, all quotes are anonymous in this report.

² Why violence against women and girls happens, and how to prevent it: A framework and some key strategies, Michael Flood, 2006

The consultations gathered information from 20 men and 20 boys about how PEI boys and men define masculinity; the effects media and mainstream society has on those definitions; and the opportunities our communities are providing young men for positive role modeling and programming. We focused on the stereotypes that men and boys notice in their day-to-day lives. These stereotypes do not necessarily reflect their individual view of masculinity.

As gender roles are widening in society and men and boys are being more accepting of change, we also explored whether traditional gender roles and historical stereotypes still existed in PEI culture. We used a variety of methods to elicit these opinions. Such methods include qualitative interviewing, gender role comparisons, and identification of masculine traits through visual aids.

The project conducted a literature review relating to the discussion of the development of gender identity, common gender definitions and how societal archetypes of gender affect boys and girls. We also created a list of best practices in programming for boys and how these programs seek to build on boys’ capacities to find their innate value and create good lives for themselves and others.

A one-day conference will be held in early 2012 where the community can explore the results of the project’s findings and make recommendations to help us design and deliver programming for boys that enhance gender interactions and relationships. Dr. Bill Patrick, researcher and member of the New Brunswick Gender Justice Collaborative along with Lorraine Whalley, Executive Director of the Fredericton Sexual Assault Crisis Center will be joining us during the presentation to discuss the “Man-to-Man” tool kit which explores male gender socialization and sexism.
“It’s a struggle showing your masculinity when you’re a gay boy. If you’re growing up in rural PEI and you’re gay, you’re perceived as not being masculine. You really have to have strong confidence in yourself to climb those walls...we need to talk about these things. Growing up being gay and showing masculinity is a struggle because even though you’re gay you’re still masculine.” (PEI man)

Defining Masculinity

Social scientists Deborah David and Robert Brannon (1976) give the following four rules for establishing masculinity:

1. *No Sissy Stuff:* anything that even remotely hints of femininity is prohibited. A real man must avoid any behaviour or characteristic associated with women.
2. *Be a Big Wheel:* masculinity is measured by success, power, and the admiration of others. One must possess wealth, fame, and status to be considered manly.
3. *Be a Sturdy Oak:* manliness requires rationality, toughness, and self-reliance. A man must remain calm in any situation, show no emotion, and admit no weakness.
4. *Give 'em Hell:* men must exude an aura of daring and aggression, and must be willing to take risks, to "go for it" even when reason and fear suggest otherwise.

Even though this was written more than 30 years ago, these ideas still exist today and from talking with men on Prince Edward Island we heard how masculinity on the Island is often defined.

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**Masculinity on PEI is defined (by the men interviewed) as:**

- Wearing a baseball cap
- Being dominant
- Being heterosexual
- Looking rugged
- Being a hockey player/ being interested in hockey
- Being competitive (constantly and with other males)
- Not overweight or underweight, physically fit, large build unless you are a small man with a big attitude
- Not crying or showing emotions, other than anger, unless you are intoxicated
- Making more money than your partner
- Drinking alcohol/ using drugs
- Working in a traditional male role where there is a tangible product at the end of the day (ie: fishing, carpentry, farming)
- Fitting the stereotype of an alpha male (unemotional, tough, strong, competent, provider)
And masculinity is NOT defined as:

- Being an office worker/computer savvy
- Working in a non-traditional male job (e.g. male nurse)
- Being transgendered/ a transvestite
- Being gay
- Having a disability
- Being involved in the performing arts
- Being stylish
- Not enjoying sports
- Being polite and helpful
- Having feminine qualities

“Guys want to be tough... where do boys learn that? Society as a whole teaches boys and they are bombarded with images. If you look at sports figures [they have] changed over the decades. Bigger, faster, more violent, lack of respect for your fellow man... they are all enforcers. The smallest guy on the team is 6’2” and winning at all costs is a masculine thing now too.” (PEI man)

**Competition**

For many men, it appears that winning competitions and asserting dominance over others (particularly women and less masculine men) is an important part of their psychological wellbeing (Pence & Paymer, 1993; O’Neil, 1990). Similarly, Zeichner, Parrott and Frey (2003) found that when confronted with a competitive situation in a lab-based setting, men tend to exhibit heightened aggressive behaviors when they lose a competition when compared to women (Zeichner et al., 2003). Through our interviews, men admitted they often feel an overwhelming sense of competition between each other, just as they did when they were boys. In society today, gender roles assign competitive/aggressive games, toys and types of play to boys such as team sports, video games, toy guns, action figures and wrestling. Girls are often taught to play cooperative/nurturing games like house, school and Barbies and have toys such as baby dolls, kitchen sets, make-up kits and Easy-Bake ovens. For boys, these gender roles are rewarded even more in adolescence when sports teams become more competitive and boys that excel in competition are regarded as the most masculine. It appears that although some men feel as though they thrive on competition, many men we spoke to seem tired of the feeling that there is constant competition among one another and would like to see it stop.

“This ideal role model would be someone... that is not competitive, someone who is not dominant but can enjoy activities and life for the sake of enjoying and having fun and not about winning.” (PEI man)
**Gender Roles**

In our literary search, we found that “men and boys who adhere to more rigid views about gender roles and masculinity ... are more likely to report having used violence against a partner among other negative outcomes” (Courtenay 1998, Pulerwitz and Barker 2008). We also found that men who adhere to more rigid stereotypical masculine behavior were more likely to be tolerant of abuse of drugs, alcohol & people and take part in risk-taking behaviors. When we talked to boys on PEI about gender roles, we found out that boys still have a rigid idea of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. Out of a large list of occupations and activities PEI boys chose the ones they thought more masculine people did better and ones more feminine people did better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI boys said MEN are better at:</th>
<th>PEI boys said WOMEN are better at:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Being carpenters</td>
<td>• Babysitting/taking care of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being police/RCMP officers</td>
<td>• Planting a garden</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being firefighters</td>
<td>• Vacuuming</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being electricians</td>
<td>• Being clothing designers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lifting weights</td>
<td>• Being dancers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being welders</td>
<td>• Making a piece of clothing</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fighting</td>
<td>• Being nurses</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being mechanics</td>
<td>• Being day care workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Shooting guns</td>
<td>• Sewing a hole in a sweater</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Watching sports on TV</td>
<td>• Being models</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being a football player</td>
<td>• Being hair stylists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Playing video games</td>
<td>• Watching TV about dancing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Gender Stereotypes Persist**

Plan International, an international development agency, recently surveyed Canadian youth (aged 12 to 17). Some of the survey results found that 96 percent of Canadian youth believe girls should have the same opportunities and rights as boys, to make their own life choices. Almost as many (95 percent) also believe that parents should take equal responsibility for their children. Again, 91 percent believe that gender equality is good for both boys and girls.

However, the study also found that one third of Canadian boys (31 percent) believe that a woman’s most important role is to take care of her home, family and to cook. Almost half (48 percent) of Canadian youth believe that men should be responsible for earning income and providing for the family. This study and some of the findings from our interviews lead us to wonder if boys are conditioned to repeat the politically correct views they are taught (e.g. gender equality is good for all), while still identifying with traditional gender roles (e.g. mom’s most important job is caring for her family). Given this, we question if the current generation understands what true equality is.
The Plan International study goes on to say that almost half of Canadian youth agree with the statement "to be a man you need to be tough" — three-quarters (77 percent) believe that boys are likely to be ridiculed by others if they cry.⁴

One major theme that emerged from the community consultations was that, in general, men felt they were not supposed to cry in front of each other and that they learned this from their parents, especially their fathers. Men felt uncomfortable, for the most part, with other men or boys crying in front of them. On the other hand, boys felt it is okay to cry in front of other boys if they were experiencing significant physical pain but not emotional pain.

Some men admitted to telling young boys to toughen up, “to man up”, show your muscles, that big boys don’t cry, etc. in situations when boys were crying. However, if they had been in a similar situation with a young girl, they would have had a more nurturing response and allowed them to cry. This suggests that PEI men are passing along messages to young boys that their fathers and other role models gave to them. Men in the community consultations seem to agree that these messages hurt them emotionally in many ways and although they disagreed with them, they continue to pass them on to boys.

Many men in the consultations agreed they should have been given messages that they should be allowed to cry. Yet all men didn’t agree that crying whenever you feel like it is a good thing. Some believe there is an historical importance to men not crying, not showing emotion and staying strong emotionally. For example, if something tragic happened, you needed someone to be a rock, make a decision and to act under duress. There is a belief that if boys give in to emotion they won’t be able to handle stress. These men also believe that boys should be able to cry during emotional pain (after a crisis is over) but should still be able to endure some extent of physical pain in order to be a strong person.

When asked about being men, the boys we spoke to told us:

- “You need to have a job that makes a lot of money and have a family.”
- “I wouldn’t usually use violence but it’s something you need sometimes…”
- “[A man] thinks he’s tough and cool. [He is] strong, medium height, athletic looking, middle aged man [and] plays sports.”
- “Cool guys have motorcycles, work out, they might practice something to get their anger out of them [such as] police man tests/practice guns… Cool guys can be nice and can be mean.”
- “…work out, sometimes do things that help like the environment, teach how to swim…”

⁴ Plan International, Because I am a Girl, THE STATE OF THE WORLD’S GIRLS 2011, So, what about boys?
During the consultations, we discussed definitions of three common stereotypes of men in our society, a “Man’s Man”, a “Good Man” and a “Mama’s Boy”. We chose these three stereotypes to explore because they represent a spectrum of perceived masculinity.

The PEI men and boys we talked to pointed out the following characteristics:

**Characteristics of a “Man’s Man”**

- Builds things/ Good with his hands
- Buddy in basement watching hockey
- Hard working
- Is rough ‘n tough/ Someone who acts tough
- Rough around the edges/ “not right polished”
- Vulgar/ Derogatory
- Helps people out
- Negative connotations towards women/ You don't want him around your sister
- Beers with the boys but not that nice to women
- A Bully/ Hard fighting
- Treats people reasonably well but is gruff
- Wears flannels and jeans
- Drives a truck/ The Chevy Truck kind of guy
- Gets along with guys/ Someone who gets along well with men
- Drinks alcohol/ Smokes
- Big, strong brute/ Fits in the very particular role that needs “grit”
- Gets along with women (ladies’ man)/ Womanizer
- Someone who is dominant even around other men
- He isn’t a man that sits home with his wife
- Alpha Male/ Exudes masculine traits
- Pollutes a lot
- Hurts people/ Hates people

“Even though there are negative attributes attached to being a man's man, every guy wants to be that guy... those guys that don't grow out of it aren't cool anymore when they are in their 30's or 40's”. (PEI man)
## Characteristics of a “Good Man”

- A gentle man/ Sensitive
- A good father/ Is good to children
- Loving and nurturing
- Funny
- Cares about local and global communities/ Interested in community
- Provides for his family/ A hard worker/ Interested in employment
- Respectful
- Well rounded
- A good husband
- Talks about and shows emotion/ Shows love
- Religious/ Spiritual
- Giving
- Gets along with everybody
- A stand-up person in the community
- Is understanding of/ Listens to others
- Has never wronged anyone
- A hockey coach
- Is reliable/ Someone who helps out
- A barrier breaker like Stephen Lewis and Jack Layton
- A good man will stand up to a man's man and advocate for those who can't advocate for themselves
- Good to the environment
- Helpful in people’s life problems

## Characteristics of a “Mama’s Boy”

- Is attached to his mother/ Loves his mother a lot
- Has a good relationship with his mother
- Still lives at home
- Relies on his mother extensively and well beyond when he should be leaving the nest
- Lets his mother make decisions for him
- Calls his mother every day
- Listens to his mother/ Takes advice from mother over his father
- Is someone who’s interests/ profession are not relatable to the common man
- Someone that other men can’t relate to
- Is gentle/ Can be a tough guy too
- Lets his mother do things for him/ Mom bails him out
- Not a “Man’s Man”
PEI men comment:

“At *some point in their life, every man has been a mama’s boy, a good man, and a man’s man...* a “Good Man” wants approval from his community, a “Man’s Man” wants approval from his buddies and a “Mama’s Boy” wants approval from Mother.”

“In order to be a “Good Man,” he has to have something about him that caters to everyone, otherwise he’d just be a man.”

“The guys that are ‘still livin’ the dream’ [womanizing, etc.], we laugh and make fun of him now.”

Each type of man generally fits a certain stereotype but can go between the stereotypes in certain circumstances. For example, a “Man’s Man” can be sensitive with his wife but not with his co-workers, teammates or “buddies.” It’s generally not okay for a “Man’s Man” to cry and release emotions (other than anger) unless he is intoxicated. A “Good Man” has to be respectful (unless he’s with his buddies or in a locker room [e.g. a “Man’s Man” domain], then he can get away with things he normally would never say). A “Mama’s Boy” can be a type of “Man’s Man” in his own domain (e.g. Steve Jobs was “The Man” to computer guys) but not in the stereotypical “Man’s Man” domain. We heard that a “Man’s Man” is “…the man that every man wants to be...” but secretly men and boys want to be a “Good Man”.

“Most boys want to be seen as a good man but it’s not cool to be a good man... It’s not attractive for boys to be gentlemen, ask for help [and] have good relationships with their mothers... If you ask for help you are weak.”

The Boy Code

“*Parenting, in past and current generations, has certain views of gender and very strict gender rules. It’s about fitting in with everyone else and fitting into their parents’ views.*” (PEI man)

As mentioned previously, men (and women) pass messages to their children that define their own biases, gender roles, sexism and fears. Some parents have very strict ideas of how a man and a woman should behave publicly and privately while others worry their child will be bullied, picked on, left out or ostracized and, therefore, push their son to “fit in” with the other boys even though they know their son is not like other boys in many ways and may not even want to be like other boys. When a child appears to venture outside the norm in their community, a parent often struggles with addressing their own issues as well their son’s issues. But where else do boys learn this unwritten rule of “fitting in”?

"When boys speak about 'being themselves', many describe a double life in which they are one person in public – a cool guy who plays fast and lives by the rules of the Boy Code – and
somebody completely different in his private life, often a much more creative, gentle, caring sort of guy."\textsuperscript{5}

In his book \textit{Real Boys}, William Pollack examines the detrimental influence of societal stereotypes on masculinity - and how a steady process of humiliation serves to indoctrinate boys to an unhealthy mode of being. Pollack writes about the serious problems he has encountered in his practice as a clinical psychologist in Canada.

As boys grow up, he says, they experience steady indoctrination by well-meaning fathers, mothers, teachers and coaches who use shame and humiliation to force them into something he calls “the boy code” (defined as the belief that there is only one route to healthy masculinity that a boy should never “act like a girl”). Pollack feels that this “boy code” prevents boys from expressing their feelings in class or to other people in general; it makes them ashamed of interests they may have in almost anything outside of sports; it makes them feel that they should be as unlike girls as possible, therefore ashamed of having any friendships with members of the opposite sex; and it makes them feel ashamed of confiding in their moms.

“As soon as a boy behaves in a way that is not considered manly, that falls outside the Boy Code, he is likely to meet resistance from society - he may merely be stared at or whispered about, he may be humiliated, he may get a punch in the gut, or he may just feel terribly ashamed.”\textsuperscript{6}

“When boys were in warm and trusting environments, they opened up and shared their feelings of isolation and loneliness. When removed from the peer-pressures to be ‘cool’, boys began talking openly about their emotions and personal relationships, explaining that they usually hold all of their emotions in for fear of being made fun of by others. Clearly, there are negative psychological ramifications for boys who ascribe to boy-code ... particularly when they gravitate towards stereotypical masculine behaviors and discredit feminine behaviors (e.g., express low levels of gender egalitarian views) without realizing that it is psychologically beneficial to engage in both.”\textsuperscript{7}

There is also another code among boys and men. It is about sharing emotions and sharing your “true self”. Throughout the interviews of men and boys, from one tip of the island to the other, we heard a narrative about how boys and men portray themselves in a certain way in public and a different way in private. For example, a boy may dress similar to Justin Bieber, have a similar haircut to Justin Bieber, listen to Justin Bieber songs in private but in public they exclaim that, “Justin’s gay. I don’t like Justin.” They would be very embarrassed if anyone heard them listening to him.

\textsuperscript{6} IBID
\textsuperscript{7} Lamb, Lindsay Marie, Sex-typing, Contingent Self-Esteem, and Peer Relations Among Adolescents Males, University of Texas (2009)
Boys are afraid to show their true selves in public and this was reflected many times in our conversations. Even though boys have similar private feelings, it is important to portray a stereotypical version of themselves. Reflecting on their childhood the men we spoke to, even if they knew every boy agreed with their private feelings, they still would never have shared their feelings with other boys. They felt they would still have to act as a stereotypical boy in a stereotypical masculine role. Men that work with young boys agree with this too. Often they see boys one-on-one being emotional, vulnerable, having worries and fears but in a group of peers all these same boys are acting tough, unemotional (except for anger), “cool”, and have an attitude that nothing bothers or phases them.

When asked if it is important to have conversations about feelings, one boy replied, “Yes. You can get rid of the things inside you that you don’t like. You can tell your parents. If you don’t have someone to talk to, you break down and cry.”

When asked if it is hard for boys to talk about feelings, one man reflected, “Sometimes. They don’t want to look like a softy because they want to look like someone that is tough and that they look up to.”

The Media
According to Children Now, a national American child advocacy organization, almost three fourths of children aged 10-17 describe males on television as violent. More than two thirds describe them as angry. The children’s perceptions are validated by the study’s independent analysis of how men act and how masculinity is portrayed in the most popular programs boys watch.

"Our study shows that boys are exposed relentlessly to a narrow, confining picture of masculinity in America, one that reinforces anger and violence as the way to solve problems." Dr. William Pollack, co-director of the Center for Men at McLean Hospital/Harvard Medical School and author of Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood, said, "As I talk to boys across America, I'm struck by how trapped they feel. Our culture puts boys in a gender straitjacket, channeling their full range of healthy emotions into narrow forms of expression, often-aggressive ones. Media legitimates these constraints at a time when we desperately need to reinvent manhood in America.”8

According to the report, Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8 to 18-year-olds, a survey of more than 2,000 students nationwide, “young people now devote an average of 7 hours, 38 minutes to daily media use, or about 53 hours a week.” Our youth are being bombarded with images on a daily basis and these images have been changing over time to encourage boys to be bigger, faster, tougher, cooler, sexier, more sexually aggressive, more of a risk taker, more, more, MORE!

8 Website: www.childrennow.org
“YOUR masculinity is defined by YOUR heroes.” (PEI man)

PEI men and boys have identified media characters or celebrities such as MMA/UFC fighters, Trailer Park Boys, Lil Wayne, Eminem, EPIC MEAL TIME and Borat (Sasha Baron Cohen) to be negative role models for young boys. They described movie and video game scenes that portray violence against women, womanizing, risk-taking behaviors like drinking, using drugs and fighting as having a major effect on boys’ ideas of masculinity. We also heard about the effect successful people such as Tiger Woods, Mel Gibson, Arnold Schwarzenegger, David Hasselhoff and Charlie Sheen have on boys. Boys see these men in the midst of scandal, cheating, abuse, arrest, drugs, and alcohol and that there are virtually no consequences in their lives.

Boys are left to think that if you become successful (by whatever means necessary), society allows you to take part in these activities at no cost. If you consider the “Jackass” crew, a group of young men, who video themselves jumping out of moving cars, hurting each other purposely, destroying property, competing to do the most disgusting things in order to make the other members vomit, it would appear to young boys (the majority of their followers), that doing reckless, destructive and dangerous things will make you popular and famous. There is also an impulse to dismiss such behaviours because they are “funny”.

So, if you are a young man on PEI and you don’t play hockey or other masculine sports, don’t
have muscles like your favorite super heroes, don’t enjoy being tough/rugged or working with your hands, you now have a new group men to look up to. Unfortunately, these men are just as unhealthy as many other stereotypes and you can forget about being a smart, good boy if you want to fit in. Characters on television such as “Alan” on CBS’s Two and Half Men played by Jon Cryer and “Finn” on Fox’s GLEE, played by Cory Monteith, are the butt of every joke for trying to be a good guy, show emotion, stand up for what is right or have a feminine side.

“If a boy doesn’t have a positive male role model all they have is media to go by”. (PEI man)

In our discussion with boys on PEI, they consistently chose images of partying, winning and risk-taking, over images of leadership, education, and nurturing. When we asked them to look at pictures of men and women and choose the most masculine they consistently and overwhelming chose this picture...

... until they found out that he is a gay man. Encouragingly, this did not affect some boys’ attitudes toward him but most boys had negative reactions. One boy became angry and destructive towards the picture when he found out it was of a gay man.

Also, consistently and overwhelmingly, boys chose the picture on the left as the least masculine. Even though these pictures are similar in nature, they saw the first man as significantly less masculine than the second because the second man “had a lot of muscles and was jumping really high”.
Statements such as these reinforce the idea that having feminine qualities means you ARE NOT MASCULINE. This is a problem for boys that are growing up in rural PEI. Boys are deemed as being “gay” if they do not fit the stereotype of a boy on PEI and from our conversations, being gay is the worst thing you can call a heterosexual male. When we talked about boys growing up in rural PEI who were not interested in stereotypical male activities, we heard there were not many role models for them and it would be difficult for some fathers because they worried that they wouldn’t know how to relate to their sons or they didn’t want their sons to be picked on by others.

“It would be tough because of the comments from other people. [You would] have to stick up for him to prove he’s not gay.” (PEI man)
Advice to Your Younger Selves on Growing Up

We asked men to give advice to their younger selves or to young boys today and the response was overwhelming. “Be true to yourself” was the most common advice men would give. This means that men would like to see boys not hiding who they are, being happy with themselves, talking about and expressing a spectrum of emotions and focusing on what’s important to them in life.

• *Don’t be afraid of who you are. Don’t be afraid to talk to someone. Talk about what you’re feeling and how you’re feeling. Don’t be ashamed of whoever you think you are. Use the kids help phone. People think that “help” is for when you are in crisis and most of us think that we are just messed up.*

• *You don’t have to drink and fight and carouse to be a man. I wish I didn’t do that. I wish I had followed my passions. Be your own person.*

• *It's alright to be yourself. It's alright to be you [and] be comfortable. Don't worry about what your wearing...people will like you. The people you tried to impress all through school don't really matter when you're an adult.*

• *The most powerful and strongest act you can do is being your own person and doing your own thing.*

• *Be true to yourself. Respect your parents and peers and the people that are educating you but you need to be true to yourself. You need to love yourself first. You need to accept who you are in your masculinity. They [boys] need to be taught at an early age it’s okay to cry and to be yourself. Pink doesn’t make you gay. Playing with dolls doesn’t make you gay. We can change the way people think just by being ourselves and being confident enough to be true to ourselves.*

• *Honesty can’t hurt you. You can be bullied but honesty is never a bad thing. The men being bullies and bashing others aren’t being true to themselves because they are just scared.*

• *Realize that the people who think you aren’t manly are wrong. The people who question your masculinity think the stereotype is what the man should be and that is wrong. Who knows what a man should be? The problem with gender roles is that you can’t just be yourself... you have to be a man or a woman. We are all exactly the same until a very pivotal point in our development. We all start off the same and are socialized to be a certain way.*
Bullying
One question kept coming up after each man gave his advice. Is it safe for boys to be themselves? What happens when boys don’t adhere to the gender roles their parents, teachers, coaches and peers expect them to live up to?

Most of the boys that we talked to told us that they do not believe bullying exists in their schools. They could explain what bullies do and what to do if you are bullied or are witness to someone else being bullied but they were not able to identify bullying in their own environment. We believe this is due to “bullying” being more of a manipulative manner that involves making jokes, teasing, name calling in humorous ways, and bullying via technology (e.g. facebook, cell phones). Typically, in anti-bullying campaigns, the bully is easy to point out as mean and physically/verbally abusive but in the lives of these boys, bullying each other is so engrained in every day life that it is almost unrecognizable to them. One boy reported that “it depends on who it is said to and how it is said” that determines if it is playful joking with your friends or if it is bullying. It also seems as though victims are determined by whether or not they can “take it”.

The literature is in agreement. One study (Artz et al, 2000) looked at gender differences in how receptive some Canadian students are to peer helping, as in peer mediation, often used in anti-bullying programs. Nearly one-quarter of the elementary school boys rated peer helping as a waste of time ‘often’ or ‘always’, while less that one-tenth of the girls agreed. Artz and colleagues examined elementary children’s attitudes towards seeking help when bullied and attitudes towards those victimized by bullies. When compared to girls, boys were more likely to agree that victims should not ‘complain’ about the bullying incident, while girls were more likely to endorse telling a teacher or other adult. Boys were significantly more likely, than girls to see name-calling and teasing as acceptable and to regard bullies as cowards. Boys were also less likely to befriend children who are bullied and more likely to see them as ‘wimps’.

Boys need to be aware that the undermining of anyone’s self-esteem is a form of bullying and that it is unhealthy for them to continue this behavior.

How does bullying makes boys feel? PEI boys and men say:

“How horrible. If someone is smarter than you or doesn’t have as much brawn [it] doesn’t mean they should be beaten up. They want to be smarter but they aren’t so they beat up the smart boys because they have anger in them.”

“Some boys/men commit suicide because they cannot find people to talk to.”

“There is a certain loyalty between guys but if a boy is different and doesn’t have the group of loyal friends and they live in a rural area it is very difficult to find a person to talk to.”

“… boys don’t do it [talk about their feelings] because they don’t want to look like a softy or they want to look tougher. They probably know they will be bullied.”
We can change the stereotype
There are many negative stereotypical traits associated to masculinity that come to the minds of the men interviewed more easily than the positive ones. However, once they thought about it, there are just as many positive ones. The ones they identified are:

- Provider/ Working with your hands/ Reliable/ Independent
- Confident
- Gentle
- Works hard
- Wholesome
- Compassionate
- Strong (Physically and Emotionally)/ Strong will
- Intelligent
- A Protector
- Good Hygiene/ Takes care of himself
- Approachable
- Has charisma
- A leader / Involved in your community
- Selfless
- Dedicated
- Has a sense of family
- Understanding
- Sensitive/ Caring/ Thoughtful
- Nurturing
- Able to cry
- Loyal
- Can vocally stimulate crowd (Pierre Trudeau, Martin Luther King, Jack Layton)

“When you have confidence in yourself you are comfortable in your masculinity.”
(PEI man)

Examples given of Positive Masculine men would be guys in a hockey rink helping little kids, a man helping out at school functions, a man who can show some understanding about bullying and not teach “An eye for an eye.” In the words of PEI men and boys, talking about masculinity:

“It’s all in how you market it...helping the weak sounds masculine and as though you have more power than them, however, helping those that can’t help themselves or being a caretaker sounds like maternal. Being a caretaker is like serving someone else and therefore sounds less masculine.”

“We’re just as scared as women and so we overcompensate for that by being mean and putting people down in order to feel better and not be scared. We want to dominant... it is biological and cultural. For a lot of people, they have no idea what they are feeling and it feels good to beat someone up, it feels powerful, we all want to feel a sense of power and there is no doubt that shooting a gun, punching someone in the face, driving a car fast or hurting someone makes you feel powerful.”
“Feeling you have to be a certain way to be considered masculine like it’s some sort of title you have to work at upholding, feeling like you have to be aggressive to the point where it limits you socially and limits your interactions with people, fighting. Guys get in fights a lot. Men have to butt heads together to prove who is more masculine. There is a constant competition between men and boys.”

“I’ve never met a guy that wasn’t considered masculine who didn’t have some kind of buffness to them unless they are in track [and field]. If you are going to be sensitive, in order to still be considered stereotypically masculine you have to at least look the part. If a guy is 5’3’ and sensitive he’s not really going to be considered masculine in the stereotypical way.”

“We need to be taught that it’s ok to be in the middle...not to be extreme.”

“To be healthy and masculine would almost be, by stereotypical definition, to not be masculine.”

“If you’re sensitive to other’s people’s feelings you’re not necessarily seen as being masculine.”

We need to be careful in the messages that we give boys and define what we mean. Although many men reported that in order to feel masculine you need to feel confident in yourself, some professionals are wary of this message and feel many men portray a false sense of confidence in order to prove they are masculine. We need to teach boys the healthy meaning of confidence where they genuinely feel a sense of well being toward themselves, others around them and their communities.

What is healthy masculinity?

For decades a great deal of study has gone into understanding the impacts of gender identities in relation to male violence against women. Several feminist-inspired men (Michael Kaufman, Jackson Katz, Michael Flood, etc.) have done tremendous work in engaging men and boys in expanding their thinking about what it means to be a man and how to develop a healthy masculinity.

According to Dr. Patrick McGann, co-author of a sexual assault prevention strategy for the U.S. Department of Defense, healthy masculinity:

- involves the ability to recognize unhealthy aspects of masculinity – those features that are harmful to the self and others
- replaces risky and violent masculine attitudes and behaviors with empathetic behaviors and attitudes that benefit men and others
- is based on supporting gender equity and other forms of equity
- includes social and emotional skills used to positively challenge in yourself and in others unhealthy masculine attitudes and behaviors
In speaking with boys and men, we have determined that healthy masculinity is a combination of the traits we have discussed earlier. Some of these include:

- Is expressive of emotions in a non-aggressive manner and shows love toward males and females without the fear of judgment of others
- Provides for/takes care of family
- Is a good father/partner
- Has healthy sex and cares about his partner
- Can find a balance by allowing himself to explore both masculine and feminine side of his self
- Has self respect and feels good about himself
- Is open-minded/patient/understanding/friendly/caring/thoughtful/articulate/unique/thankful/a good listener/loving/independent
- Can stand up for what he believes in
- Is willing to be part of the solution
- Takes care of his health and his body
- Is able to take part in full time work and he is happy and satisfied with himself
- Can be masculine without being macho
- Still interested in traditional male activities like sports and beers

**How can we balance the messages in the media?**

During this project we consistently heard that having someone positive in a boy’s life overrides the messages the media puts out regularly. Teachers, coaches/instructors, religious leaders in the community, local politicians, uncles, brothers, mothers - but mostly fathers - had the most effect on boys’ ideas of masculinity. It is clear that boys want attention and acceptance from the males in their lives however, if there are no strong male leaders in their lives, strong women seem to be able to affect boys just as much. The unfortunate side of this information is that when boys don’t have anyone positive in their life that they can relate to, confide in, be accepted by and learn from, they look for it wherever they can get it. It may be a drug dealer who shows him his skills and gives him jobs to do or it may be one of the many violent, aggressive, risk-taking, successful men he sees on TV, in the movies, in video games and on the Internet.

*“Feeling masculine and having confidence in your masculinity doesn’t spontaneously come out of boys with no guidance and no role models to teach them. We need to teach them how to find that confidence in themselves.”* (PEI man)

Overall, we heard that there needs to be more education for boys and their parents through schools and media. Stereotypes and social barriers need to be broken down for boys.

*“We need to be a more open, understanding, and accepting society as a whole. Boys need to be exposed at an early age to many different things such as arts, music, drama... not just competitive sports. Even when they are into sports we need to focus on the lessons and skills*
they are learning and not competition.” (PEI man)

“There is a lot of pressure on men... A LOT of pressure. You have to act a certain way, you have to dress a certain way, you have to constantly maintain an effort to hold up this image of masculinity. To make this better you’d really have to re-teach people you don’t need to be this way and it’s absolutely foolish. In the real world, when you all grow up, being great at sports doesn’t necessarily mean anything. Being a good husband and a father is usually what people amount to having to learn to be.” (PEI man)

Best Practices in Healthy Boy’s Programming

Thousands of programs have been developed internationally over the last decade in efforts to help boys and girls develop healthy minds, bodies, and spirits and to eliminate gender violence. In 2008, the National Crime Prevention Centre undertook a literature review of some crime prevention programs and provides concise descriptions of many model and promising programs. Visit www.publicsafety.gc.ca to view or download the document.

Some best practices in developing healthy masculinity programs include:

- Beginning in elementary school (or earlier)
- Using a gender-based and culturally-sensitive approach
- Building on innate individual strengths and capabilities
- Increasing positive male and self-identity
- Strengthening peaceful conflict resolution skills
- Increasing respect for and comfort with diversity
- Understanding the way in which the popular media reinforces sexism, violence against girls and women, sexual stereotypes and racism
- Increasing interpersonal competence including friendship skills and emotional literacy
- Improving planning and decision-making skills
- Providing health information: discussion of pubertal changes, nutrition and good personal hygiene
- Providing collaborative activities

PEI Boys’ Healthy Masculinity Programs

While there are many sports, recreational, and arts programs for PEI youth, many of those interviewed expressed a feeling that there is a need for programming that addresses key health and social issues specifically for boys, including self-esteem, emotional literacy, positive male identity, healthy living, media literacy and healthy relationships.
Next Steps

- Review input and feedback from “What About the Boys?” Conference (February 2012)
- Follow-up on topics that arose from interviews and consultations
- Consult with Advisory Committee
- Continue outreach and building community support to create healthy boys’ programming
- Continue reviewing successful boys’ programming across Canada and internationally
- Design Made-in-PEI Boys’ Program
- Pilot Made-in-PEI Boys’ Program
- Evaluate

Prescriptive, not descriptive

“These messages about manhood do not describe how we actually are. Rather, they attempt to tell us how we should be. They are marching orders for boys as they grow and develop into men. Most of us will not follow all of these orders. But at the same time, very few of us will be able to ignore them entirely…” [http://www.xyonline.net/blogs/bill-patrick](http://www.xyonline.net/blogs/bill-patrick)

Understanding and Addressing the Challenges of Developing Healthy Masculinity

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Appendix 1 – Sample Interview Questions

Qualitative research discussions were separated into 3 categories: Defining Masculinity, Media and Community. Some examples of questions that were used for conversation starters are:

1. What does it mean to be a “man” in PEI?
2. What kinds of men are not viewed as masculine (characteristics, careers, etc) on PEI? In the media?
3. There are positive and negative stereotypes of masculinity such as being a good provider or not being able to show emotions... What are three positive masculine traits? What are three negative ones?
4. What is considered a healthy masculinity in our society? What are some traits? What does a man with a healthy masculinity look like? How does he act? How does he treat others? What are his interests?
5. How can boys show masculinity without being stereotypically masculine?
6. What effects do you think the media has on a boy’s image of masculinity?
7. Who on PEI is most at risk of being influenced by the negative role models?
8. What messages does the media give to boys about relationships and how you treat women?
9. What messages does the media give to boys about how they are supposed to treat each other?
10. What messages does the media give to boys about showing their emotions?
11. What messages does the media give to boys about pursuing non-masculine goals/activities/games, etc?
12. How do these messages play out in their every-day lives? How do they tend to act in relationships with girls/women, peers? How do they deal with emotions? What kinds of games, activities, TV shows, Movies are they drawn to?
13. Who are our role models in the communities across PEI?
14. What kinds of resources are available in your community for boys that do not want to take part in stereotypical masculine activities?
15. Who is the biggest influence to young boys on PEI (family members/ media/ peers) and how do we communicate to boys the importance of having a healthy masculinity? How do we best get our message out?
16. At what age do you think we should be teaching boys about healthy masculinity?
Appendix 2 – Masculine Versus Feminine Activity

For the Masculine versus Feminine activity the facilitator listed activities and jobs and boys were asked to quickly, without thinking, choose if the activity was more masculine, feminine, or both. These exercises were not used for quantitative purposes but as conversation starters with boys about the gender roles they see existing around them.

The “Preferences” activity was used to discover if boys were most drawn to adventure, risk-taking, extreme behaviours, leadership, success, or nurturing. A discussion after the activity revolved around why boys were attracted to the pictures they chose and why they didn’t choose other pictures.

The “Women Preferences” activity asked boys to choose pictures of women they thought were successful, (not) smart, criminals, (not) beautiful, weak, mothers, athletes, fun, aggressive, mean, strong, competitive, nerdy, caring, etc. We talked about our society’s ideas of what women should be like and how we judge women and girls.

The “Most Masculine versus Least Masculine” activity was used to ask the boys to rate the most masculine picture to the least masculine picture. A discussion afterward revolved around what determines masculinity and what doesn’t.
Appendix 3 - About Gender Based Analysis

“The goal of gender based analysis is achieving a society in which both women and men are equally valued and in which people’s life choices are not limited because of their gender, ethnicity, social position or non-relevant characteristics.” (Newfoundland and Labrador Women’s Policy Office)

Gender based analysis is a tool that examines the differences in the lives of women and men or boys and girls. It also recognizes that all females (and males) are the not the same by examining the varying perspectives of age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability/disability and socio-economic status.

This understanding is then applied in creating effective policy and programs, with the aim of achieving equity rather than equal treatment, recognizing that treating everyone the same may not necessarily produce equitable results because men and women have different life experiences to consider.

For example, according to Statistics Canada, middle-aged Canadian men commit suicide four times more often then their female counterparts. Using gender based analysis will help policy-makers better understand the conditions that lead some men to take their own lives and to create suicide-prevention programs that address these conditions.

Another example of the importance of applying gender based analysis is in health research. Up until a very short time ago, men’s bodies were considered the “norm” and clinical drug trials were often done only on men. Two widely publicized American studies on the effect of low doses of aspirin and the risk of heart attack were conducted using study samples of 12,866 general subjects and 22,071 physicians, respectively. All subjects in both studies were male (Rosser, 1994). The reduced heart attack risk that emerged from this research was considered so spectacular that the public was made aware of the potential results before the findings were published. These findings cannot be generalized to women, in part because the role of estrogen needs to be considered.

Gender based analysis is essential in understanding and eliminating violence against women and girls.

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