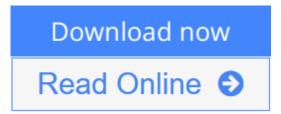


From Boys to Men: Spiritual Rites of Passage in an Indulgent Age

By Bret Stephenson



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Bret Stephenson shows readers that older cultures didn't magically avoid adolescence; instead they developed successful rituals and rites of passage for sculpting teen boys into healthy young men. Stephenson explains how to reintroduce these successful practices and traditional understandings into modern family life and programs for youth to create a society with happy and healthy adolescent boys.





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From Boys to Men: Spiritual Rites of Passage in an Indulgent Age By Bret Stephenson Bibliography

Sales Rank: #562897 in eBooks
Published on: 2006-10-25
Released on: 2011-07-15
Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

"SLAYING THE DRAGON is a crucial read for parents, teachers, grandparents, and everyone who makes policies about young men. Bret Stephenson, a noted authority in adolescent male development, begins his exciting book by explaining how our cultural erasure of an organized and ritualized male adolescence has done great harm to our children. Then he re-invents rites of passage and the rituals of male adolescence to fit our contemporary age. Stephenson is masterful in his presentation of how to help boys "slay the dragon" and thus find a contributive, healthy and successful manhood. I highly recommend this book!"

--Michael Gurian, Author of A FINE YOUNG MAN, THE WONDER OF BOYS and THE WONDER OF GIRLS

"Bret Stephenson takes a hard look at how we are raising boys and explores how ancient wisdom and traditional practices can be used to help adolescent males become healthy young men and active members of the community."

--Aaron Kipnis, Author of ANGRY YOUNG MEN, KNIGHTS WITHOUT ARMOR, GENDER WAR-GENDER PEACE

From the Author

This book may be a difficult read for some of you. Why? Because itmakes us adults take a hard look at the state of our children. In my opinion, it's a state of emergency. I'm an adolescent counselor, and I make my livinghelping twelve-year-old girls who have had two abortions, fourteen-year-oldheroin addicts, boys who have been punching bags for their fathers, and kids onmedications who have never spoken to the prescribing doctor. I've worked withkids whose father taught them how to steal and paid them to do so, and kids whogrew up in the backseats of cars. I've also had a lot of success with suchkids, and I am constantly amazed by their resiliency and their ability to stillhave a sense of humor after all they've been through.

What I do for a living is a twentieth-century invention. My jobdidn't exist in America a few generations ago, nor did it have a counterpart innative cultures throughout history. I tell my clients and those who attend myworkshops and seminars that my overall career goal is to actually unemploy myself. My goal is for no parents to need my skills to get their kids off drugs or out of the gang. My goal is for teens not to need counseling therapy. My goal is for kids to be able to perform in life without mood-altering drugs. If we couldfix these problems, I think to myself, I'd be happy to be out of a job andmoving on to something else.

Awhile back my wife commented on the fact that after a career filledwith damaged, difficult, and often violent kids, the only thing I ever bringhome with me is frustration with *adults*. She's right. In a world filledwith challenging teens, my only problem is with the adults who limit my ability help the kids. I see the machinery of the system--schools, social services, juvenile justice--as an impediment to really helping kids.

The cure for adolescent problems in America, like so many other moderncultural issues we're dealing with such as homelessness, environmental destruction, and pollution, will come from a consciousness shift in the country. So I'mtrying to help create that consciousness shift. Along with great youth workerslike Aaron

Kipnis, David Oldfield, and Michael Gurian, I'm trying to tellAmerica it's time to rethink how we interact with and guide our boys into adulthood and manhood. And, as you will see, I propose that we look to traditional initiations and rites of passage to provide models for this transformation.

A number of people close to me have remarked about how passionate even obstinate I am about teen issues. My soapbox never seems to be faraway. Am I zealous and opinionated? Yes, I admit that. Am I driven and demanding? Yes again. In the eighteen years I've worked in counseling I've known too manykids who self-destructed on drugs and alcohol, were abused and neglected bytheir parents, were viewed as rebels and failures because they didn't fit theone school model we offer them. I've had too many kids commit suicide. I've hadkids who have been shot and who have shot others. One kid I worked withactually killed another kid I was working with.

The plight of our children must rise higher on our adult prioritylists. My sincere hope is that this book will help you see the problems teenboys face and gain some skills and techniques to help you deal moresuccessfully with them. We grown-ups need to respond to the culturalemergencies facing our teens and recognize the need for implementing adifferent approach to molding our young men. In this book we'll look attraditional ways of promoting teens to adulthood by using time-honored ritualsand concepts.

From the Inside Flap

For years we have followed BretStephenson's work as he tackled one of the most difficult areas in our immatureculture: the lack of a grounded and effective passage to manhood for adolescentboys. Scholars such as Campbell and Jung have pointed out that this absenceleaves the psyche open to self-initiation--but often in destructive or pathologicalways. *From Boys to Men* thus steps into a cultural and existential gulf,to help the lost young heroes of our world and time find their way out of thelabyrinth, their luminous shamanic path through the zone of perils, theirpersonal "path with heart" (even as this book seems to us to be BretStephenson's "path with heart").

Stephenson makes it clear thatthe rewards are equal to the difficulty of travel in this cultural "no-man'sland." The way is littered with the lost young souls wearing labels such as ADHD, autism,

oppositional-defiant disorder, and Youth at Risk, as well as downright criminalsociopaths who murder their schoolmates. Stephenson's work shows that it takesnot only guidance and mentorship, but extraordinary personal courage, and accessto the time-honored mythic maps (the "Hero's Journey," the "ShamanicInitiation") to thread such a zone of perils.

This book fills an important psychological and mythological need of our time. Parents, counselors, and educators can all profit by its

commonsense and timeless wisdom. Stephenson takes the reader through this zonewith expertise, compassion, and some darn good storytelling!

Stephen Larsen, Ph.D., and Robin Larsen, Ph.D.

Stephen Larsen is psychology professor emeritus at the StateUniversity of New York, Ulster, and the author of *The Healing Power ofNeurofeedback*, The Shaman's Doorway, and The Mythic Imagination. Robin Larsen is an exhibiting artist andart historian and coauthor, with her husband, Stephen, of Joseph Campbell: A Fire in the Mind and *The Fashioning of Angels*. The Larsens co-direct the Center for Symbolic Studies, a nonprofit organization that works with youth at risk and offers educational programs for youngartists, dancers, and athletes.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Raymond Roth:

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Patricia Koop:

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