



Raising Caring and Competent Boys: The Power of Connection

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Biases in Theory

- “Who’s telling the story and whose interest does the telling serve?” Brueggerman
- Make the biases and values transparent rather than pretend objectivity
- Traditional models purport to be “culture free” but reproduce biases of dominant culture. Draeptomania.

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Boy Crisis or Connection Crisis?

- College stats? White college gender gap 52% women versus 49% men. At NO educational level do women earn more than men nor do they attain leadership positions at the same rate.
- White boys from economic class that always held power aren’t dropping out of college more. But they are the ones naming the “boy crisis”
- Black men are under-represented. 64% Black women graduate versus 27% Black men. Result of Chronic oppression.

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Equality Crisis for Men and Women?

- Inequality soared: in U.S. in 2010 the top 1 percent garnered 93 percent of all income gains. And retained jobs.
- Joblessness isn’t just about money. It’s loss of membership and dignity.
- A rise of 1 percent joblessness in the US is accompanied by an increase of 1 percent suicide rate.
- More violence in cultures of inequality.

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Mental Health Crisis?

- Higher rates of depression and anxiety than ever before. 1 in 4 people have “mental health” problem.
- From 1999 to 2010 suicide rate among Americans ages 35-64 rose by nearly 30 percent.
- AMERICANS OWN MORE THAN FOUR IN TEN OF THE WORLD'S PRIVATELY HELD GUNS AND TWO THIRDS OF U.S. GUN DEATHS ARE SUICIDES.

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Safety Crisis?

- Since recession, 2007, the number of U.S. children killed by maltreatment has risen by about 20 percent to more than five children each day.
- Effect of violence on kids brains greater than effect of lead paint. (direct or witnessing)

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Isolation

- Putnam: 25% Americans say they can trust no one.
- Proportion of people with no close friends or family members tripled between 1985 and 2004
- Economic inequality reduces empathy and trust. In 2008, richest 10 percent of American population had 71 % American net worth. CEO gets 500x salary of their “typical” employee.

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Isolation

- “Isolation is the glue that holds oppression in place”.
Katalyst

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Crisis of Disconnection

- Resnick (1997) In study of 22,000 teenagers, one good relationship provided the best protection against high risk behaviors of violence, substance abuse and suicide.
- Psychology has emphasized fight or flight in response to stress. Dominance bias.
- Tend and befriend (S Taylor, 2002).
Alternative

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Traditional Models of Psychological Development favor Disconnection

- Movement from dependence to independence
- Belief in Separate Self: Stand Alone, Lone Ranger myth.
- Self-interest is seen as Biological mandate.
- Human nature basically selfish, greedy, aggressive and seeking power. Problem resides inside the person.
- Safety comes from having Power-Over.

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Separate Self?

- Self is Concept and Socially Constructed
- Spatial Metaphor in which boundary protects from impinging context. Freud
- Competition and Power-over bias.
- Male Socializations emphasizes separate self.

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Extreme Individualism

- Norm of self-interest is privileged above the norm of empathy or collaboration.
- Self-interest is prescriptive expectation in western culture.
Self –interest is NOT a biological given, nor is it the basis for survival.
- Cooperative flexibility serves the individual and the species. Darwin’s real message.
- Separation especially enforced for boys, especially in relationship with mother..

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Burden of Myth of Separate Self

- Tremendous stress for people who try to achieve essentially unachievable standards of independence.
- Denial of vulnerability and repudiation of our need for connection creates special challenges for us emotionally, physically and neurobiologically. Boys and men in gender strait jackets.

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Separate Self Shame/Isolation Cycle

- We are shamed for needing connection in a world that values “stand on your own two feet” Boys face sanctions for needing others.
- Disconnection spiral: Hardwired to connect in order to thrive, shamed for needing connection, told to “man up”.
- Shame leads to further isolation

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Myth of Mama’s Boy

- Socialization pushes boys to distance from their mothers at an early age.
- Both mothers and sons are shamed for their closeness.
- No data to support negative impact of ongoing closeness between mothers and sons.
- “Shaming men and boys for exhibiting vulnerable feelings may contribute to their risk of engaging in violent behavior” James Gilligan, 1996.

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Costs of Separate Self Isolation

- Separation socialization disconnects people from healing connections
- Break down of system of resilience and repair in connection. Flexibility and creativity diminish
- We’re meant to turn to others when afraid, uncertain, sad.
- Resilience in face of disconnection is about finding connection.

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Special Dilemma for Boys and Men

- “When we say connection is the most life sustaining force in our lives...what are we saying about the lives of men who are systematically cut off from intimacy?”
 - Allan Johnson, The Gender Knot

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Seven Myths of Separation

- 1. **You’re Born Alone**, You Die Alone
 - Rebuttal: To be human is to be connected
- 2. We are **Selfish at the core**.
 - Rebuttal: Empathy and Compassion are fundamental to human nature. We are born to connect and care.

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Separation Myths

- 3. **Self-interest** is biological imperative. Stand Strong Alone.
 - Rebuttal: Neuroscience tells us we are hardwired to connect with others and to participate in mutually growthful relationships. Self-interest is social prescription. Misread of Darwin.
- 4. **Independence** is the hallmark of maturity and wellbeing.
 - Rebuttal: Dependence is neither a choice nor a sign of weakness. We need others. We are vulnerable.

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Separation Myths

- 5. **Competition** provides the key to real success individually and for the species..
 - Rebuttal: Cooperation and collaboration contribute to individual wellbeing, creativity and group survival. Darwin saw the importance of collaboration for species survival
- 6. **Myth of Invulnerability**. The lone hero rises to the top. Invulnerable..
 - Rebuttal: The culture invalidates and makes invisible the interdependent nature of our lives. Emotional responsiveness is impossible without vulnerability. Denial of vulnerability one of greatest costs of male socialization

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Separation Myths

- 7. **Myth of Meritocracy:** those at “top” have earned their place. Deny effect of Privilege, Unearned Advantage. Entitlement.
- Rebuttal: Unearned advantage and disadvantage, accidents of birth powerfully affect a person’s position. Male privilege, white privilege. The playing field is NOT even and it shames people to pretend it is.

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Influence Resistance

- Avoiding being influenced is a power dynamic.
- “Those in power are taught to resist the influence of others. A defining characteristic of boyhood and manhood in this culture is the capacity to resist influence, particularly from females” Maccoby
- Resistance to influence is seen in 3 ½ year old boys and increases with age.

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Outcome of Perpetuating these myths?

- Dependencies get disappeared.
- But Impossible to achieve independence, invulnerability. We are interdependent creatures.
- Competition reinforces idea that it is a “ME-FIRST” world. What about WE-FIRST?
- Expressing needs is shameful. Entitlement arises.
- “I don’t have needs. I DESERVE. I am entitled to”
- In a Separation Culture , We are all, men and women, alike, set up for chronic stress and failure.

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Spiral of Disconnection

- In best of all possible worlds, sense of safety arises in good connection. We are wired for this.
- Lack of growth-fostering connection leads to exercising control over others, power over others in order to feel safe. Dominance
- Vulnerability is denied because in competitive systems vulnerability may be dangerous.

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Domination

- Domination destroys real connection.
- Need safety to be vulnerable. Need to be vulnerable to grow in relationship.
- “Stonewalling” predicts divorce. “Husband refuses to accept influence from his wife” (Gottman, 1998)
- “Male domination is the severest illness of our social organism” Alfred Adler

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Formula for Chronic Stress: The Separation Dilemma

THE DILEMMA

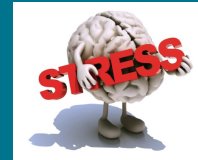
We are born to CONNECT

– We are taught to STAND ALONE

– We value INDEPENDENCE, COMPETITION

– We need CONNECTION and COLLABORATION throughout life

- Pressure on boys to disconnect massive .



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Costs of Power-over systems for those in Power

- Isolation, emotional rigidity, anxiety, depression
- Social isolation comparable to negative effects of high blood pressure, lack of exercise, obesity or smoking.
- Addictions
- Suicide rate 4 times that of women

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Consequences of the Separation Dilemma


- Rather than emotional resilience, we see emotional rigidity, increased stress
- Community is eroded as hyper-individualism is celebrated.
- We are cut off from natural sources of support, encouragement and growth. Power-over replaces Power-with. Domination replaces mutuality. Result: Lack of safety.

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The Power of Connection

- “To embrace the power of relationships will revolutionize society as well as psychology”

Jean Baker Miller



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Power Systems


| | |
|---|---|
| <h3>Power-Over Systems</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power over • The Separate Self • Selfish, aggressive • Self-interest is biological imperative • Essential Aloneness • Unilateral Change • Competition | <h3>Power of Connection</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power-with • Growth in Connection • Hardwired to connect • Self-interest is social prescription. • Essential connectedness • Mutual Change • Cooperation |
|---|---|

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POWER REDEFINED

DR. JEAN BAKER MILLER

- “THE CAPACITY TO PRODUCE CHANGE....TO FACILITATE MOVEMENT.....TO INDUCE RESPONSIVENESS.....TO MOVE AND BE MOVED BY ANOTHER.”



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Relationship at the Core: New Developmental Models

- Relational-Cultural Theory suggests that we all need to engage in mutually empathic relationships in order to thrive, indeed to stay alive.
- We need relationships the way we need air and water, throughout life.

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Putting Relationship at the Center Relational-Cultural Theory

- We grow through and toward relationship throughout the lifespan.
- An increasing capacity for empathy and mutuality characterizes positive growth.
- Dilemma: WE ARE HARDWIRED TO CONNECT BUT TAUGHT TO SEPARATE, TO STAND ALONE.

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New Understanding of Human Nature

- We are born with motivation to connect.
- From early on, growth-fostering relationships are Mutual and based on Empathy (e.g. mother/ infant mutual growth)
- Our brains require safe, loving and empathic connections to develop fully.
- Our entire wellbeing depends on being included, belonging, engaging in safe relationships. And contributing to others.

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LOVE & SURVIVAL

THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS FOR THE
HEALING POWER OF INTIMACY



DEAN ORNISH, M.D.

"I am not aware of any other factor in medicine – not diet, not smoking, not exercise, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery – that has a greater impact on our quality of life, incidence of illness, and premature death from all causes."
—Dean Ornish
MD, on the healing power of love and intimacy

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Empathy

- Empathy heals by decreasing stress of isolation.
- Resonance, responsiveness, feeling-thoughts
- Feeling joined with another person
- Creates personal wellbeing
- Impetus for social justice



Mutual Empathy

- Openness to being affected by and affecting another person. Mutual respect, an intention for mutual growth. Must see, know and feel that we are being responded to. We Matter.
- Lessens Isolation. Formula for growth-fostering relationship
- Mutual impact is Power in Connection

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What Neuroscience Tells about the Power of Connection

- We are hardwired to be empathic
- Our brains, hearts and immune systems function best when we engage in warm, safe relationships.
- Well-being= When Neurobiology and Culture are aligned
- Neuroscience supports every one of the tenets of Relational-Cultural Theory developed over the last 30 years.

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Neuroplasticity



- Neurobiological emphasis NOT involve neurogenetic determinism.
- Brains Change in Connection.
- Relational theory suggests much of this change occurs in relationship. Hence, the Power of Connection.

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How Neuroscience Supports Social Change

- If we attend to how our bodies and brains thrive, we will work to build more collaborative and relationship-centered cultures, for the good of all.
- Heal the individuals AND change the culture.

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Four Pillars of Neurobiology of Connection (Banks)

- Mirror Neurons (Iacobono)
- SPOT theory(Eisenberger and Lieberman)
- Smart Vagus (Porges)
- Dopamine Reward System and Oxytocin (Feel good hormones)(Cozolino; Frederickson)

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Mirror Neurons

- We are biologically wired and evolutionarily designed to be deeply interconnected with one another. Mirror neurons fire in response to viewing another's actions or feelings.
- Mirror neuron activity is involuntary...Not a choice.
- Increased mirror neuron activity is associated with an increase in social competence and increase in emotional empathy.

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Spot Theory Social Pain Overlap Theory (Eisenberger and Lieberman)

- Distress of social exclusion is registered in the same part of the brain as the distress of physical illness or injury – anterior cingulate. Social pain registers as urgent.
- We need connection just as we need air, water, food.
- Relationships are like oxygen. Brain is wired to detect their absence just as it is to detect loss of oxygen.
- Social Pain (racism, heterosexism, sexism, classism, marginalization) is REAL PAIN.

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Smart Vagus (Stephen Porges)

- Healthy relationships stimulate a neural pathway (the “smart vagus nerve”) that regulates the stress response system.
- Good safe connections contribute to flexibility of responding and to activation of the smart vagus; modulating the fight, flight or freeze response. Most recently developed part of autonomic nervous system. (sympathetic and parasympathetic)

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Dopamine Reward System

- Dopamine is the “feel good” hormone.
- The Dopamine reward system initially wired to release dopamine in close, warm mutual connections, also with food, water and reproduction.
- Separation socialization challenges, sometimes breaks this reward system.

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Oxytocin The Affiliative Hormone

- Surges during orgasm and childbirth (massage, dancing, closeness). Estrogen enhances.
- Intranasal blast of oxytocin: 44% percent increase in trust. Increases generosity by 80%
- More sensitive to environmental cues linked to positive social connection
- The parts of amygdala that tune into threats are muted whereas the parts that tune into positive social opportunities are amplified
- Reduces stress hormones.

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Neuroscience tells us :The Separation System Isn't Working

- Irony: Separation is enforced to support independence, invulnerability and “strength” of boy but actually leaves him more vulnerable
- The built-in systems that create calm, peace of mind, sense of safety are weakened
- Safe relational context gets lost at early age.
- Sense of vulnerability linked with shame
- Longings for connection treated as sign of weakness. Keep parts of self hidden from others...lead to more shame, isolation, reactivity.

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HEALING

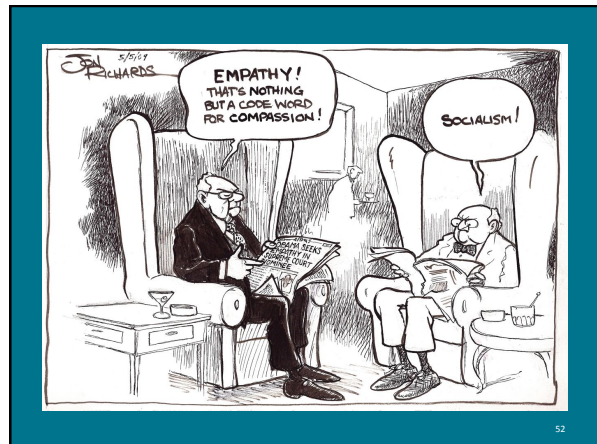
- “Healing involves reestablishing the connections between reward circuitry and healthy relationship”. (Cozolino 2006).

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Empathic Possibility

- Healing: Re-establish sense of empathic possibility. Rejoin human community
- Counter Shame: You are not alone. Notice and name separation pressures and name human need to connect in order to create personal and social wellbeing and change

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The Power of Connection? For Girls and Boys

- “Power-with” and “ Power-to” equals MUTUALITY. The power to make change.
- Power joined with vulnerability and empathy. Open to being affected.
- Growth and change are fostered in both people (or groups)
- Together “we” can more effectively act to make social change, improve the common lot. Challenge forces that obstruct change.

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Finding Courage in Connection Challenging the Status Quo

“ Courage is the capacity to act meaningfully and with integrity in the face of acknowledged vulnerability. Some of the best work we can do is en-courage one another and join together in communities of change where we can exercise the Power of Connection.”
Jordan

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Personal and Cultural Integration What can we do?

- Change cultural pressures and restrictions that disrupt our capacity to connect - for the health of the individual and the culture.
- Notice and name difference rather than judging and excluding . (Banks)
- Create Culture of Inclusion and Mutuality.
- Emphasize belonging rather than belongings.

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Psychotherapy

- Isolation is the source of most Psychological Suffering. Condemned Isolation.
- Psychotherapy can provide an experience of safe-enough connection, corrective relationship, and shift in neurobiology.
- Empathy lessens the experience of isolation.

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Mutual Empathy in Therapy

- Therapist must be able to “feel with” the client and the client must “feel the therapist feeling with her/him”. Re-Connect.
- Therapist honors the client’s strategies of disconnection.
- Client brings more of her/his truths into the relationship. Authentic connection

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Mindfulness



- Meditation is about inner calm but also about Brain Change and Social Change. Challenges experience of Separate Self.
- Meditation cultivates empathy
- We become Responsive not Reactive – responses mediated by prefrontal cortex.

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Kindness

- “Behaving in a kind way raises your levels of oxytocin which in turn curbs stress-induced rises in heart rate and blood pressure, reduces feelings of depression and increases our pain thresholds” (Frederickson).
- Kindness is good for everyone. Mutual Benefit

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Resonance

- To understand and to be understood.
- “I am not alone”. “I’m not the only one”
- Affecting each other’s brains all the time. Question is not **If** but **HOW???** Constructive? Or Destructive?
- Synchrony of brains shows up on fMRI (Hasson). More so with loved ones.

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“I am grateful that I have a heart that is touched by the suffering of others.”

M Leonard



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Compassion

- Caring for others is often more beneficial than receiving help. Need to contribute to others wellbeing. (Luk)
- Left prefrontal cortex, site associated with happiness more activated during compassion meditation.
- Part of brain that distinguishes self and not self gets quieter in compassion meditation.

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Compassion

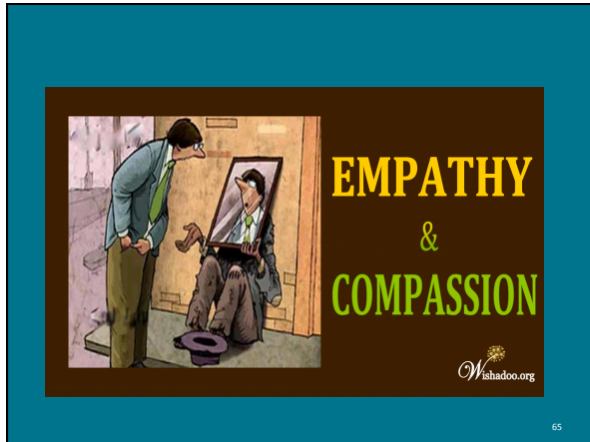


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True Compassion

- “True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”
 - Martin Luther King.

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Impact of Mutual Empathy on Person and Culture

Society that values empathy:

Bonds extend beyond immediate kin or those people we identify with. Widening community.

- Less economic inequity
- Less violence
- Better treatment of women and children

-(Wilkinson and Pickett)

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Belonging and Mattering

We all need to feel that we matter, to be loved and respected. "Rather than being hyper-individualists, Homo Sapiens are profoundly social creatures, the most social of all species."

Frederikson

- We fear a loss of dignity and being cast out of the human community. Condemned isolation.

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Hope for Change: A Connection Centered Culture

- In a culture of disconnection, discovering that we are hardwired to connect can serve as a source of hope.... IF we work to bring culture into alignment with our needs.
- Overcome what Einstein called "the delusion of separation."
- JK Rowling spoke of the "transformative power of human empathy to forge collective action."

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Transformation

- In order to transform a culture of disconnection into a culture of connection we need to develop new images of strength, in which vulnerability, connection building, serving others, seeking justice and being encouraged and emboldened by community are at the core.
- The way we raise boys offers an opportunity to begin this transformation for them and for the larger society. An essential shift.

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*Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries.
Without them humanity cannot survive.
- His Holiness the Dalai Lama*



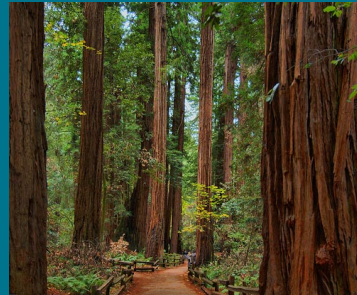
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Love and Therapy

- “It has become even clearer to me that love is what it’s all about. Not only at this time but throughout our relationship, I have felt your love and deep caring for me. In turn, I hope that you feel my love for you. My hope is that you will hold onto this love and build on it in your life. Thank you for the privilege of being part of your life.” Irene Stiver

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The Redwoods



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