

A Few Good Men

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Much has been written and spoken about the “*Crises of Masculinity*”—(under)achievement, abuse, apathy, and anomie—and the concomitant consequences. While there is just cause for this concern, requiring continuous interventions at multiple levels simultaneously, I want in this post-Fathers’ Day reflection to honour the men and masculinities that have contributed to the educator that I am becoming and, by extension, the diversity of men and masculinities in education who courageously rub against the grain of our “*carrion culture*.”

I have many fathers. But I am Azam’s son. My father worked hard to provide for his family. Leaving home just as we awoke for school, he would often pass in to kiss us good morning, and coming home, sometimes after we had already finished our homework, would settle in front of the television to watch his comedies where he often fell asleep. He is a member of the Scout movement and Rotary International. He has taught me to work hard, value money, drive safely, and serve others. Recently I heard him cry. He was delivering the eulogy of one of his fathers, George (SM) Sammy, a former primary school principal and his Scoutmaster; a man he loved dearly. In that moment I learnt how deep a man’s love could be. Not enough men yet weep publicly and fearlessly for their brothers. We are the weaker sex in this regard.

A predisposition to diabetes and heart disease is part of my paternal inheritance. I have been trying to postpone this diagnosis by not writing my life along the exact same lines as my relations. I try to eat healthier, exercise more frequently, and reduce stress at work—but I could do better. I have male relatives and friends who by their examples serve to inspire and support these aspirations. They congregate weekly to “run ball” and “talk sh...” These are important occasions for us men to be together, to re-member boyhood bliss, and rejuvenate our masculine relationships and identities as well as improve our health. The educational contributions of fathers, uncles, PE teachers, and coaches who teach men the basic skills of sport and friendly competition, are invaluable in this regard.

In reflecting upon my school career and talking with others, I have come to appreciate that my experience of having many male teachers throughout my education and across disciplines was not typical. Take RAFA, a small man with big Art, who taught us boys to look lovingly at the world and revel in the wonder of being present to the presence of even the least significant of objects; or Mr. Mercier, who taught us to care for words and how we put them together; and Prof Duncan, whose first injunction was to read; men of this ilk and ken taught us boys to think and do and be. It is important for educators to examine good teaching. It is critical for us men, as a minority group in education, to reflect, talk about, and draw upon the relationships between our experiences of teaching/learning and our evolving pedagogical identities, if we are not to re-inscribe our fathers’ failures and frustrations.

The masculine embrace is an important part of my pedagogical identity. It is not the embrace of lovers in which a dissolution of the space between and unification is sought. Rather, it is the physical and psychological reduction of the space that separates individuals, in mutual recognition and constitution of a maternal-paternal “safe” space. It is a space from which trust and friendship emerge and are renewed. It was Mikey who taught me its importance. As a

teacher-principal he was able to do what many men are afraid, unwilling, or incapable of doing—publicly and privately demonstrating love, affection, nurturing, and vulnerability while maintaining respect. I came to value this part of my pedagogical practice when one of my (male) students spontaneously and surprisingly hugged me as we were parting ways. I had not realised how atypical it was for men to hug other men publicly. Recognising and valuing this particular aspect of my practice as a male educator has made me more cognizant of the damaging aspects of discourses of homophobia and hegemonic masculinities, which parallel and often prematurely silence discussions of intimacy and erotics in schooling.

We weave our lives from and through experiences that reveal their significance and beauty in moments of quiet intimacy. By weaving our sons' lives *in Love* into our own, we bestow upon them opportunities to father finer futures.

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