

What Every Young Man Needs to Know

In [this Art of Manliness Podcast](#), Brett McKay interviews Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, who gives his theory on why he is so popular with young men:

...the problem with the narrative that grips our culture at the moment is that we fail to make a distinction between power and competence. Power is just that I can hurt you and, therefore, I dominate. Competence is that I have status because I'm offering to myself and to other people something that they voluntarily regard as with value, of value.

*My invitation to young men is to become competent, to forgo power. **Power is the tactic used by the incompetent to gain status. Competence is the tool used by the morally oriented to accrue authority and do good things in the world.** Well, that's a noble call, and the only way out of the tragedy of existence is to follow the noble call, and young men, they need to hear that ... We already went through the 20th century. We know where the ideologies end, lead. We know where nihilism goes... Nihilism is terrible. It's a disease of the soul...*

Nihilism is often at the heart of the two extremes of negative male behavior: violent acting out and failure to launch. In their book [The Boy Crisis](#), Drs. Warren Farrell and John Gray, experts in male psychology, seem to be saying something similar: "Boys who hurt, hurt us." Males are more prone to externalize their pain in aggressiveness and physical violence. [Fatherlessness](#) seems to be at heart of most crime statistics. The violence that men commit should not be excused but the pain young men feel that precipitates their violence is futile to ignore.

At the other end of the spectrum of male misbehavior is failure to launch: "If your son sees being an oppressor as his future, being a failure to launch might look like progress." It seems focusing too much on the evil men are capable of to the exclusion of the good men can do (not to mention the evil women and girls are capable of) is discouraging men and boys and can exacerbate the problems at both ends.

The authors cite a growing body of data that suggests boys are falling far behind girls in nearly every measurement of success (including length of life). Unfortunately, this news is met with a "cultural shrug" from society. This response is discouraging, for we will never improve the circumstances of girls and women by indifference to the struggles of boys and men. These young men, if not our sons and grandsons, are our future sons-in-law, employees, and citizenry. Their failure is everyone's loss.

The authors suggest that this "sympathy gap" between how we view boys and girls is because "sensitivity to the death and suffering of boys and men is in competition with our survival instinct." Society requires boys and men to devalue their own safety for the greater good: military service, dangerous jobs, and the expectation that they will always put their own safety last.

Peterson and McKay agree that most young men have not heard positive encouragement. Fathers should "encourage their sons, not empower, that pathological word" and tell them: "'The world is a terrible place, but you are enough to master it.' That's what every young man needs to know."

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