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THE BOYOSPHERE, THE BOY CAVE AND THE BOY BOX

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ABSTRACT

Society often uses three terms, manosphere, man cave and man box, to explain the behaviour of men. Three hidden and smaller versions of these terms describe how boys connect with other boys, how boys are socialized, how boys learn to survive and eventually emerge into manhood: boyosphere, boy cave and boy box. Within the boy box, there is a war against boys, and unless there is more constructive intervention to save our boys, then the world will continue to blame boys for social problems.

Keywords: boy, boyosphere, manosphere, masculinity, men

In January 2023, I was shocked to learn that a six-year-old boy shot his school teacher in the USA. The family said their son had an ‘acute disability’ (Santucci). This incident provided some proof that boys were neglected and also reared in a chaotic environment. This tragedy is not confined to the USA, but it affects boys across the world. For instance, during the past two decades, in the African nation of Nigeria, thousands of boys accused of witchcraft were murdered or mutilated (“Nigerian Children Deemed Witches Tortured”).

Many of us are familiar with one or all of the three terms *manosphere*, *man cave*, and *man box*, which society often uses to explain the behaviour of men. There have been various interpretations of the role of the manosphere (Valkenburgh). The man cave plays an important role in shaping masculinity (Moisio, Beruchashvili). Researchers have also documented the problems created by the man box among men in different countries (Alsawalqa, Alrawashdeh, Hasan; Levto, Telson).

Society has not realized that there are also hidden and smaller versions of the manosphere, the man cave (or mancave), and the man box. These spheres could be dubbed the *boysphere* the *boy cave* and the *boy box*, in which boys connect with other boys, are socialized, learn to survive and eventually emerge into manhood.

The *boysphere* could be defined as the social media (*Facebook*, *Twitter*, blogs etc.) that are focused on the interests of boys and their rights. Their interests and rights would incorporate a wide range of topics including sexuality, choice of partners or girlfriends, gender discrimination, movies and online games. The *boy cave* or boy space would be that designated space in a house or home for leisure and hobbies. However, not all boys have this privilege as some boys are homeless. Likewise, the boy in a refugee camp or crowded apartment would not have the luxury of boasting of a boy cave.

Some might believe it is easy to define the boysphere, boy cave or boy box. The reality is that this is not applicable to all boys. For instance, a boy from a rural Thailand or Indonesia might not have access to the internet to be part of the boysphere. And, within the various boy boxes there would be societal rules seeking to restrict the freedom of expression of young males. Unfortunately, many boys do not survive the boy box, these include child soldiers who

die on the battlefield and others afflicted with terminal illnesses as cancer.

Within the *boy box*, there is a war against boys, and unless there is more constructive intervention to save our boys, then the world will continue to blame boys for social problems. All countries need to have guidance counsellors in every school. Some countries boast of schools with technology and smart boards and laptops but they do not have trained counsellors to help the boys in their transition into teenagers and coping with problems as bullying, rejection and peer pressure.

Many countries need therapists and peer counsellors for young males. If not, then young males will retreat further into their boy caves and emerge hurt and angry from their boy box. The boy box scenario is even more depressing when one considers boys in orphanages and those who are homeless and living on the streets. Teachers often do not have the time to counsel children who are being bullied. One of the problems within the boy box is that young males are underachieving (Holland). It seems many of our boys do not want to appear to be studious because they will be bullied.

Within the boy box there are some troubling issues. The cyberbullying, teasing within the home, and fights with peers at school all contribute to the trauma of the boy. This unresolved childhood trauma reinforces and contributes to negative behaviour. The extent of the trauma determines the level of negative behaviour that the boys will exhibit. And, the reality is that all men experience some form of childhood trauma and the perfect childhood is a myth. However, if all men experience this childhood trauma and we do not see all the world's men exhibiting criminal behaviour, then we have to do some rethinking!

Whenever someone says or writes that masculinity among boys is a problem, there is often a backlash from those who disagree. There is the perception that within the boy box, masculinity among boys and teenagers is broken or incomplete. This is partly due to both nature and nurturing that occurs within the boy box and boysphere. Others in society tend to judge some masculinities as broken. Identifying the brokenness of masculinity is not meant to marginalize boys but to help them. For instance, self-destructive behaviour of boys is one form of broken masculinity that needs intervention.

Within the boyosphere there is the controversy of what is the best form of masculinity. The reality is that there is no ideal or perfect masculinity for boys. There are instances when masculinity among boys can be deemed biologically broken. For instance, one aspect of biological masculinity deals with testosterone and a baby born with hypogonadism would affect the development of masculinity later in life. Secondly, there is a rare condition (anorchia) in which babies are born without testicles and designated as male.

Thirdly, a baby is born with androgen insensitivity syndrome. This affects sexual development from birth to puberty. It would obviously result in a confused adult who does not fully grasp his biological broken masculinity is linked to the psychological drama that he cannot understand. Could you imagine if these three conditions occur in boys in developing countries as Iraq or Afghanistan? Obviously, these would be undetected and the public would not understand the connection between biology and masculinity. All three instances, are examples of 'biologically broken masculinity' that can also contribute to gender dysmorphia as the young or mature person experiences gender identity disorder (transgenderism or gender incongruence).

A few persons would be wondering why is more focus needed on the boy box or feelings expressed in the boyosphere. One of the major reasons is that the problems facing adult males are often linked to childhood and teenaged years. For instance, psychologists tend to locate problems with men's behaviour such as repeated criminality in things like traumatic childhood experiences rather than masculinity. By locating the brokenness of boys' behaviour in masculinity rather than in their individual psychology, there is a risk that some people will interpret masculinity as a problem. Of course, the idea that masculinity is a problem is adverse for a boy's mental health. The message that masculinity is broken would very much appeal to some persons—especially feminists.

I am not trained in psychotherapy and do not want to attack the judgments of trained professionals or the validity of their theories that link men's anti-social behaviour (as criminality and violence) to childhood trauma. However, can the spanking of a two-year-old boy remain in the mind or consciousness through adolescence and adulthood and result, 45

years later, in the stealing of a car, rape or murder? Is there a long-term impact that be proven to be 100% correct? These are the questions that need to be explored within the boyosphere.

It is very plausible to say that the brokenness is in both masculinity and in individual psychology. Both are inseparable and inextricably linked. If we accept this, then we might be closer to helping save more boys. We would also be better equipped to understand the complexity of masculinities developing within the boyosphere and boy cave and also the restraints within the boy box. Our understanding of psychological and emotional challenges within the boy cave would possibly allow for a smoother transition into adulthood and fewer antisocial activities.

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AUTHOR PROFILE



Jerome Teelucksingh is an activist from Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean. He initiated the inaugural observances of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Men and Boys (31 January) and World Day of the Boy Child (16 May). He has published and spoken on masculinity, the men's movement and challenges facing boys.

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