Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

Apart from proper exercise in childhood, it is equally important to learn how to relax properly for health reasons. Boys and girls alike frequently experience stressful situations in their daily lives, e.g. pressure in the parental home or at school to do well, a high level of media consumption, noise, enormous time pressure, unstable family circumstances, poverty, migration experiences, mobbing and violence, lack of a sense of belonging to a group, not accepted as manly, and health/somatic conditions. According to the 1st World Vision Children's Study (2007) conducted in Germany, boys were more critical than girls in their response to questions about their general well-being.

Stress and tension are not factors that induce illness per se, but if they occur frequently and incessantly, this process leaves an unhealthy mark on the body and mind. The consequences of negative stress are learning handicaps, limited contact to other people, withdrawal, detrimental physical effects, violence and fear.

Boys who grow up with a hegemonic model of masculinity (Connell 1999) are especially likely to possess limited problem-solving skills as a result of their one-dimensional gender role models. According to Connell, "hegemonic masculinity" is understood as a culturally dominant (albeit versatile and changing) form of masculinity in a given social setting. Boys can only escape this influence and definition of power with great difficulty. The gender homogeneous setting also serves its members as a (re)production model for these masculine structures as well as a social centre and area of mutual reinforcement.

The hegemonic principle of masculinity "functions" according to a black and white model", there is only "right" or "wrong", not "as well as". The "real" boys/young men exist in this mindset and the "others" who are unable or do not wish to adopt this form of masculinity are consequently threatened with or suffer isolation, mobbing, humiliation, degradation, contempt and violence at the hands of boys and men who act according to the hegemonic principle. Boys and young men are generally aware of this situation. The preferred forms of this masculine model of socialisation include activity, dominance, using the body as an instrument and perceiving emotionality as a risk. These are the traits to which this hegemonic model attaches great importance, and it does not permit boys to develop any other social skills. They are usually denigrated and frequently stigmatised as "feminine" (= unmanly). The fact that the behavioural repertoire is very one dimensional may also have consequences for the health of the individual. The holistic balance is threatened. To strengthen, encourage and assist boys in this respect, it appears necessary to offer them an area of experience where they can firstly escape from the behavioural pressure ("that's the real *manly* way!") and secondly, gain the personal experience that will really help them individually. It is primarily about boosting emotional and social skills.

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