



Should psychologists be doing more to help men and boys?

Tavern Bar, Plymouth 16/3/17

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Home The Network Male Psychology Conference Events



<http://www.malepsychology.org.uk/>

Overview

- Background
- Masculinity as a problem
- What helps men's mental health?
- Male gender blindness
- Masculinity revisited

Why male psychology?

- BA Social Psychology
 - Clinical module: explanation of suicide?
- Practiced clinical hypnosis 10 years in London
- MSc Health Psychology dissertation: women's health
- PhD: women's health
- Research at UCL (Women's Health)
- Explanation of suicide? Who is working on this?

The *New Psychology of Men* (NPM)

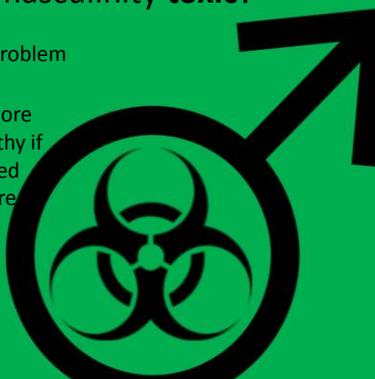
- Levant and Pollack (1995)
- Questioned traditional norms for the male role
 - competition, status, toughness, stoicism
- Predictable results of the male socialization process are aggression, violence, homophobia, misogyny, detached fathering, and neglect of health

Achievements of NPM

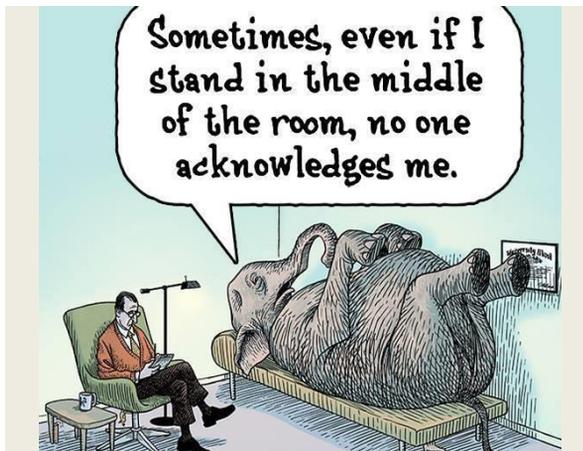
- Raised awareness about
 - the harsh male socialization process
 - the “dark side of masculinity”
 - harmful effects of men’s sexism and homophobia
 - gender role conflict
 - potential solutions & therapies suggested
- **Deficit** models of male development
- Therapy to heal damaging effects of masculinity on self & others

So is masculinity **toxic**?

- Is masculinity a problem to be cured?
- Would men be more emotionally healthy if they just expressed their feelings more
 - This works for women after all



... explanation of suicide???



Turning point

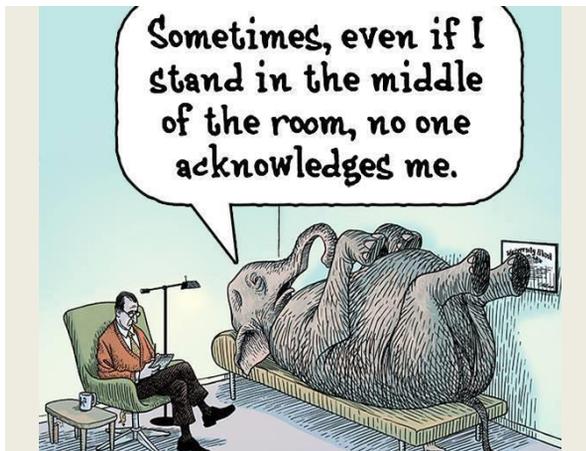
- Letter by Martin Seager in the magazine of the British Psychological Society (BPS), *The Psychologist* (Dec 2010)
- Study of issues that
 - predominantly impact men and boys
 - Suicide, substance abuse, education
 - Impact men & women similarly, but understudied in men
 - Domestic violence
 - Includes study of women and girls

Key question:

- Although three quarters of suicides are by men (ONS, 2015), suicidal men are less likely to seek professional help than are suicidal women (Kung et al, 2003): **why?**
 - The type of therapy on offer less appealing to men?
 - Something about the way therapy is presented?
 - Do talking therapies work less well for men?
 - Long term benefits can be less for men (Wright & McLeod, 2016)
 - Reporting often gender blind (Parker et al, 2011)

Do therapists say men and women have different needs from therapy?

- Semi-structured interviews
- 20 life coaches (Russ et al, 2015)
 - 90% reported sex difference in client needs
 - 65% of coaches demonstrated ambivalence to making generalisations about gender
- 6 hypnotherapists (Lemkey et al, 2016)
 - 100% reported sex differences in client needs
- 20 clinical psychologists, counsellors & psychotherapists (Holloway et al, in review)
 - 100% reported sex difference in client needs
 - 80% demonstrated ambivalence to making generalisations about gender
 - Women want to discuss their feelings, men want a quick solution



Male gender blindness

- Theme in Russ et al (2015) & Holloway et al (in review)
 - “I hate generalising, but men prefer X & women prefer Y”
 - Cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962)
- Beta-bias (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988)
- Gender similarity hypothesis (Hyde, 2005)
 - ‘More similarities than differences’
- Narrative possibly leads to *male gender blindness* (Seager et al, 2014) and the *gender empathy gap* (Bradford, 2015; Barry, 2016)



Male Gender Blindness → Gender Empathy Gap

- Seen in “...situations where we feel less empathy for men that we would for women in a similar situation” (Barry 2016).
 - Suicide (ONS, 2015)
 - Domestic violence (Straus, 2010)
 - Prostate cancer (CRUK, 2016)
 - Workplace deaths (InsideMan, 2015)
 - Circumcision (Goldman, 1997)

Possible causes of gender empathy gap

- 'Women are wonderful' effect (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994)
 - 'halo effect' where women are seen as warm and nurturing
 - Contrast with stereotype of men as violent
- It's normal for men and women to care more about women than men (Rudman & Goodwin, 2004)
 - Contra to *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel and Turner, 1979)
- Male disposability (Farrell, 1993)
 - Men are more expendable because numbers of women are more important to birth rates than numbers of men
 - Evolutionary forces shape culture to ensure survival

Bridging the gender empathy gap?

- Cassie Jaye's film *The Red Pill* demonstrates that empathy can be developed, but not without difficulty



If men don't go to therapy, what do they do to relieve stress?

- Should we be looking at other activities, even everyday activities, as sources of mental health support?
 - Pub (Emslie et al, 2013)
 - *Men's Sheds*
 - Chatting with barber (Roper & Barry, 2016)

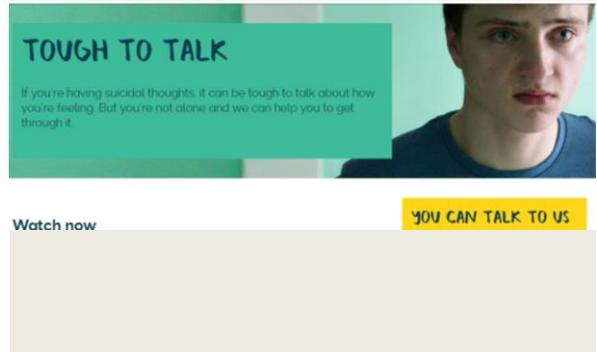
Should we do therapy differently for men?

- Or should we keep doing things like this...

NSPCC

- “Boys are 6 times less likely than girls to talk to Childline counsellors about suicidal thoughts.
- Our new Tough To Talk campaign urges boys to speak out about their problems and reassures them they're not alone.
- 1,934 Childline counselling sessions were delivered with boys in 2015/16 compared to 11,463 with girls” <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/fighting-for-childhood/news-opinion/childline-urges-boys-speak-out-suicidal-feelings/>

Childline's *Tough to Talk* campaign



TOUGH TO TALK

If you're having suicidal thoughts, it can be tough to talk about how you're feeling. But you're not alone and we can help you to get through it.

Watch now

YOU CAN TALK TO US

You can take the horse to water...

- ...but you can't make him talk
- Not client centred
- Double bind: talk to us / ...you can't say that!
- If they don't turn up when you offer X, maybe offer them Y, or ask them what they want
 - e.g. survey by Liddon et al (in review)
- Do we need a different approach for men
 - Indirect, action orientation etc?
 - Port of entry / gradual approach

Radical idea:

- What if male typical characteristics aren't bad? What if they are just traits?
- What if we can harness these characteristics to make therapy work better for men?
 - E.g. improve empathy / rapport
- **Positive psychology/positive masculinity (PPPM) model** (Kiselica, Englar-Carlson & Fisher, 2006)
- Evidence suggests it is a successful therapeutic approach (Kiselica, 2008).

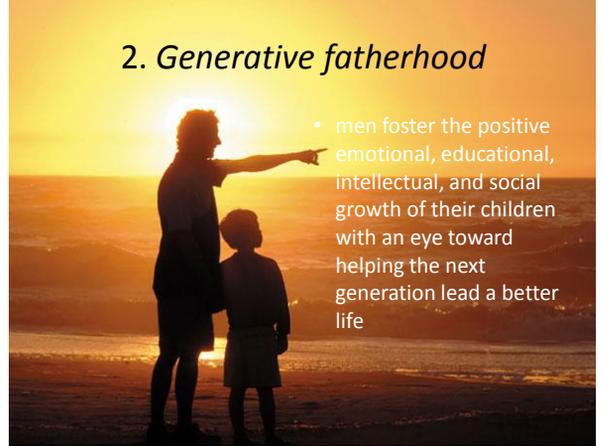
1. Male relational styles

- Boys and men tend to have fun and develop friendships and intimacy with each other through shared activities
 - Sheds
 - Sports
 - Pub with Friends



2. Generative fatherhood

- men foster the positive emotional, educational, intellectual, and social growth of their children with an eye toward helping the next generation lead a better life



3. Male courage and risk-taking

- Prosocial e.g. emergency services
- Good judgment means to distinguishing between sensible risks versus foolhardiness
- Empathise when risk taking leads to problems



4. Group orientation

- Males are oriented toward banding together to achieve a common goal
- Males spend more time in group activity, and females engage in dyadic interaction



5. Men's use of humour

- Males use humour for various reasons e.g. to attain intimacy, have fun, build friendships, reduce tension, manage conflicts, cope with stress
- Banter & ribbing is often affectionate



6. Male heroism

- Overcoming great obstacles and making great contributions to others through extraordinary effort



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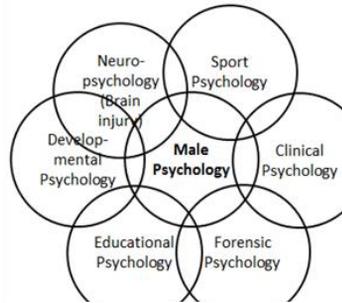
Male Psychology Network



- Voluntary organisation, began 2011
 - ~50 members, ~30% women
 - Psychologists, therapists, psychology students, charity workers
- Forthcoming *Handbook of Male Psychology*
- ~20 publications since 2014
<http://www.malepsychology.org.uk/research-library/>
- Annual conference at UCL (23-24 June, 2017)
- Campaigning for a Male Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society (ballot in April).
- Are we just another silo in psychology?

We are all connected

- Many fields where some issues are mainly male, or understudied in men
- Women are researchers and participants
- Break down the silos – what can we learn from each other?
- Increase connectivity
- Expand the frontiers of psychology
- Improve society



**Thank you for coming
to The Treasury tonight!**



- Further info
<http://www.malepsychology.org.uk>
- Annual conference at UCL (23-24 June, 2017)
- Vote for a Male Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society
–ballot paper in April's *The Psychologist*
- Email john@malepsychology.org.uk