



Positive Masculinity: Including Masculinity as a Valued Aspect of Humanity

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Negative Models of Masculinity—Why Has a Social Deconstructionist Position Become Mainstream?

The study of gender in Western academia has inevitably been influenced by feminist and post-feminist thinking, so predominantly takes a sociological, socio-political, social psychological and sometimes anthropological stance towards masculinity. For this reason, perhaps it is inevitable that our current gender narrative emphasises the influence of social and cultural factors on masculinity. Because of the absence of sound integrated biological and evolutionary data (e.g. Schmitt 2015), discussions about the forces that shape masculinity have been simplified and narrowed into the language of social determinism, viewing masculinity almost as a collection of outdated stereotypes that can be changed and reconstructed through education. There is in truth no equivalent body of authorship in the field of gender studies that has dared to claim unilaterally that gender is biologically programmed without cultural influences. In essence, the field of gender studies has therefore

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become skewed by default towards social determinism, to the extent that those few authors who do draw attention to the contribution of biology and evolutionary processes to gendered behaviour are at risk of being falsely perceived as biological determinists.

Clearly, both social determinism (nurture over nature) and biological determinism (nature over nurture) are extreme theoretical positions that do not fit the evidence on gender or indeed any other aspect of humanity. It is clear that human beings are subject to interacting biological, psychological and social influences. And it would be strange indeed if human beings were the only mammalian species that had no behavioural instincts, drives or motivational heritage relating to evolved biological sex differences. However, current mainstream thinking on gender has lurched relatively unchallenged towards a social constructionist position that in effect splits mind from body. Value-laden concepts such as “traditional” masculinity, “toxic” masculinity and “hegemonic” masculinity have gradually come to dominate the narrative, making it difficult to conduct balanced research on the biology of gender, on positive aspects of gender difference or on positive approaches to masculinity.

Hegemonic Masculinity

“Hegemonic” masculinity (Connell 1987), even though rooted in Marxist and sociological thinking, has become perhaps the most fashionable all-round definition of masculinity in the West or English speaking world and has received widespread acceptance, despite not being properly tested as a hypothesis. A description of this concept and a critical analysis is outlined in more detail elsewhere in this volume (Brown 2019). The sociopolitical thinking behind the theory of hegemonic masculinity is that males are socialised to compete for power, and to assert their dominance over females, over other males and over their social group. This hierarchical and power-based conception of male behaviour is also linked to similar notions of “male privilege” and “patriarchy”. The concept of hegemony has been deployed as a general explanatory framework in which to understand male patterns of violence and aggression, on the assumption that achieving power and domination by definition entails the use of force.

Such a broad hypothesis, however, does not meet standards of empirical science and can be refuted not only with international empirical research (e.g. Stoet and Geary 2019), but with a substantial body of other evidence, much of which is already common knowledge, for example:

1. The existence of poverty, powerlessness, ill health, hardship and high mortality amongst large populations of working-class men cross-culturally

throughout the ages. Even today in the UK, working-class males undertake the vast majority of dangerous, dirty and heavy manual jobs and account for 96% of work-related fatalities (HSE 2018). And even ignoring class differences, men collectively still have a significantly lower average life expectancy (averaging between 5 and 6 years less) across the globe according to all available sources.

2. The denial of suffrage in the UK to 44% of the male population (again the working class) until 1918 following the slaughter of a significant cross-section (men of all classes) of the male population in World War One (1914–1918). The sacrifice of men of fighting age in many other wars and conflicts involving many countries across the globe, most notably during the Second World War (1939–1945).
3. The domestic power of women within households, families and in relation to children (see the chapter in this volume by Brown).
4. The sacrificial, risk-taking and protective behaviour of men towards women and children not just in wars but also during peacetime in life-threatening situations. This is illustrated most powerfully by the Titanic disaster in 1912 where the overall survival rate for females was 73% but for males only 21%. It is clear from these stark figures that the men were trying to protect the women and children. This age-old picture of men risking their lives to save women and children at times of great danger does not fit a theory of masculinity based simply upon power, dominance and aggression towards women. This along with numerous other examples of male heroism, rescuing and protective behaviour, points more towards an archetypal instinct to protect the social group than a socially learned desire to dominate it (see also chapter by Seager). In keeping with this, the male gender is the one group discovered by social psychology research that does not show an in-group bias. Whilst women do identify with and show an in-group bias towards other women, men do not show this bias (e.g. Rudman and Goodwin 2004; see also the chapter by Hook in this volume). In the same way, when men celebrate achievement with other men, for example in sporting or military situations, the focus of this celebration is not their shared *gender* identity but their *team* identity or affiliation.
5. The fact that most young boys are socialised and educated primarily by adult females (Hofferth and Sandberg 2001; Parker and Wang 2013). According to evidence researched by *The Guardian* (2017b), Finland is the *only country in the developed world* where school-aged children spend more time (8 minutes a day) with fathers than mothers. According to Department of Education figures in the UK for 2016, only 15% of primary school teachers were male.

6. The high level of female online emotional abuse (cyber-bullying) (e.g. Marcum et al. 2012) and female physical violence in intimate partner relationships (e.g. Archer 2000; Fiebert 2010).
7. Higher male suicide rates, higher male levels of rough sleeping, higher male rates of addiction, higher male rates of imprisonment and more punitive sentences for the same crime for men compared with women (e.g. Starr 2012).
8. In OECD countries young women collectively receive more schooling hours than young men (OECD 2017). According to figures supplied by *The Guardian* (2017a) women in the UK have now become a third more likely than men to attend university.
9. Widespread evidence suggesting biologically influenced sex differences in human motivation and behaviour (e.g. Baron-Cohen 2002; Brizendine 2010; Todd et al. 2018).
10. The protective role of male risk-taking, emotional detachment and aggression in both military and civilian contexts that involve danger and threat to life.

Taken together, these facts and figures are inconsistent with a hegemonic model of masculinity.

Toxic Masculinity

The term “toxic masculinity” (e.g. Haider 2016) has also now become widespread at least in the West and has gained equally uncritical acceptance as a genuine phenomenon alongside “hegemonic” masculinity with which it is often paired. The evidence-base for this concept is typically anecdotal, focussing on selected statistics relating to incidents of male violence, misogyny, homophobia, male sexual crime, extremism and other criminal acts, e.g. by drunken frat house partygoers (Barry 2016). It should be observed that the term “toxic” is not applied in social science to any other general category of human beings, and would most probably be rightly viewed as discriminatory if applied to women, children, the elderly, LGBTQ people, the disabled or any ethnic or religious group. The fact that the use of this term in relation to the masculine gender is tolerated at all in society, and is even regarded as a viable theory within the formal academic literature, speaks volumes about our less empathic attitudes towards men and is indicative of a gender bias (see chapter on ‘gamma bias’ by Seager and Barry). It could be argued that it is in these attitudes that any true toxicity lies.

There are two possible levels of interpretation of the concept of toxic masculinity. The stronger interpretation implies that masculinity has become globally toxic for all, including men themselves collectively, and requires a complete overhaul, primarily through better socialisation and education of young males. The weaker interpretation implies that it is only extreme, “macho” or “hyper-” masculine behaviour that becomes toxic, so that only one end of the masculine spectrum requires remediation. However, even the weaker interpretation carries the sinister implication that the more masculine an individual is, the more toxic he will become, purely as the result of gender alone and without any other causative factor being involved.

A test of public (student) opinion on this issue came in the UK in May 2016 when the Cambridge Union (2016) for the first time in its history debated the question of masculinity. Whilst the attention being given to male gender issues was itself welcome, the title of the motion in itself suggested pre-existing prejudices: “This House believes masculinity is *harmful to everyone*”. The motion was carried by a significant majority indicating a very negative view of masculinity. A year later at University College London in 2017, however, a similar debate was conducted with a more balanced and humorous title: “Is masculinity toxic or a tonic?” The verdict was much closer this time and those who attended actually voted marginally against the proposition that masculinity is toxic. This result appeared to show an encouraging possibility of attitude change towards masculinity as the result of proper debate and a balanced presentation of evidence.

Again, there are demonstrable flaws with the concept of toxic masculinity as a serious scientific hypothesis given the full spectrum of available evidence. There is inevitably a great deal of overlap with the evidence against the “hegemonic” model of masculinity (above):

1. Most young males are socialised primarily by adult females (see above) and so the theory would have to explain why supposedly non-toxic attitudes in one gender would lead to the transmission of toxic attitudes to the other. The evidence is also clear that father absence has a *negative* impact on the development and mental health of children (see the chapter by Briggs in this volume, and Farrell and Gray (2018)).
2. Most males behave in risk-taking and protective ways rather than destructive ways in regard to women and children (see above). The role of protector is more naturally adapted to men, as evidenced also by many physiological differences indicating that men are more adapted to combat than are women (Sell et al. 2012).
3. Abusive and toxic behaviour by criminal males constitutes an extreme and atypical sample that cannot be considered scientifically or

statistically representative of the average male or the total male population. It is bad science to generalise from the extreme to the norm and it therefore makes better scientific sense not to attribute the toxic and harmful behaviour of such men to their gender alone.

4. Masculinity as a concept or entity, whether biological, social or psychological, cannot be separated from the reciprocal concept of femininity—if one is toxic then so must be the other.
5. Females equally exhibit substantial levels of violence and aggression in personal and domestic relationships, as described for example by Fiebert (2010), Archer (2000) and also the chapter in this book by Powney and Graham-Kevan. It would be hard to argue from this evidence therefore that toxicity, as measured by violent behaviour, applies particularly to masculinity and not also to femininity.
6. Masculinity cannot be both *toxic* to all (including men themselves) and at the same time *privileging* for men—this is clearly a complete self-contradiction.
7. Male perpetrators of sexual and physical violence or abuse tend to have a history of abuse, trauma or neglect in their own early histories and can be clearly distinguished from the general population of males who have no such histories and are not abusive (Levenson et al. 2016). This implies that the toxicity is in the history of individual men rather than collectively in their gender.
8. Males who perpetrate sexual and physical violence against women in particular can often be shown collectively to have personality disorders relating to a significant history of early childhood abuse and neglect in relation to their early maternal attachments. In one recent study, 52% of men in a sample of high-security prisoners who had committed serious offences against women had been sexually abused in childhood by *female abusers acting independently of men* (Murphy 2018).
9. Whilst theorists such as Kimmell (2018) have attempted to link extreme terrorism with hypothesised toxic attributes of the masculine gender, hard evidence provided by Hudson (2005) shows that females have always played a major role in terrorist activities, accounting for anything between a third and a half of the membership of terrorist groups across the globe.
10. The concept of toxicity uses a powerful biological metaphor involving the notion of a substance that is poisonous and harmful to the health of an organism. Given that masculinity is an attribute found within at least half of the human population, this theory in effect predicts pathology as norm, involving pervasive levels of toxicity, ill health and damage in human societies. However, these predictions do not fit with actual

observations of human relationships, family life and community life in which men, women and children across many societies are frequently capable of shared health and happiness. Toxic behaviour, where it does occur, is the exception rather than the rule. The theory cannot predict therefore why good gender and family relations should be possible and why any human relationships involving masculinity should function well or why intimate partner satisfaction is as common as it is.

Given the evidence above, it is better science therefore to conclude that it is not masculinity per se that is toxic but that emotional damage, neglect, alienation and abuse of some boys and teenagers in their developmental years will contribute to masculine types of toxic behaviour later in life. It is highly probable that gender interacts with emotional damage and this would explain why damaged men behave in different ways from damaged women, although there are more similarities between men and women in terms of intimate partner violence (Fiebert 2010; Archer 2000), abuse of children (Murphy 2018) and even in terms of participation in terrorism (Hudson 2005) than was previously supposed.

Most obviously, there are clear gender differences in sexual behaviour. Because most males, unlike females, are primarily attached in infancy to the same sex that they will subsequently bond with sexually, it can be predicted that those males whose early emotional attachments to female caregivers have been damaging will resort subsequently to greater levels of sexual violence (including rape) against women than vice versa. In the domain of rape and sexual violence this difference is clearly shown by global statistics. However, the vast majority (perhaps 99.4%, see below) of males cannot reasonably be classified as sexually violent, a fact which strongly supports the conclusion that sexual violence does indeed arise only in a significant minority of men whose relationships to women have already been seriously damaged. Moreover, rates of sexual victimisation perpetrated by women on men and on other women are significantly higher than previously believed (Stemple et al. 2017; Murphy 2018).

“Hyper”—Masculinity

“Hyper-masculinity” or “machismo” (e.g. Mosher and Serkin 1984) was the term used for problematic male behaviour (including sexual aggression, extreme risk-taking and sexist attitudes towards females) before “toxic masculinity” became fashionable. This term is less problematic than

“toxic masculinity” because it does not automatically confer stigma upon the whole masculine gender. Instead, the term implies that such behaviour is more exceptional, an extreme version of masculinity and not inherent to masculinity as a whole. We know that extremes of anything can potentially become harmful. Even Buddhism, for example, can be taken to extremes, as demonstrated by the sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo underground by the “Aum Shinrikyo” Buddhist cult in 1995. Thus it is important that terminology has some sense of boundary that reflects reality, and is not just a blanket generalisation.

Another term which appears to be problematically lacking in boundaries is the concept of “rape culture” that emerged from the 1970s in the US “second wave” feminist movement. The hypotheses behind the concept of “rape culture” (excluding male rape victims and female perpetrators for the purposes of argument) are that (1) the rape of women has been “normalised” and “made acceptable” in many social settings (2) rape is not a rare event and (3) rape reflects the dangers of masculinity generally and not the actions of a damaged minority of men. When compared to the actual statistics, however, these claims are demonstrably inaccurate. In 2012, out of a population of approximately 119 million adult males (aged over 15 years) in the USA, there were 747,748 registered sex offenders (including rapists). Of course, even one sex offender is one too many. However, even assuming all offenders on this list were male, this equates to a prevalence of approximately 0.6% which means that over 99.4% of adult American males in 2012 were not in the sex offender category. Even allowing for some under-representation, sex offending is statistically a rare behaviour amongst the general population of adult males, so any theory postulating a causal link between the normative culture of masculinity and sexual violence would have to explain why the prevalence of sex offending is not greater than it is. It makes much better sense scientifically to hypothesise that sexual offending by males is an interaction between gender and other non-gender-related vulnerability factors. Murphy (2018) reported on findings from her clinical work and research in a high-security prison with men with a history of serious offences involving violence, particularly sexual violence. These were men who would typically attract the labels “personality disorder” and “psychopath”. She found clear links between their adult offending behaviours and extremely damaging childhood histories, including severe “parental antipathy”, rejection, abuse (physical, sexual and emotional), trauma and neglect. Most significantly, in relation to the fact that these men had often offended against women, she found that: “... of those who had been sexually abused during childhood, 52% had been abused on at least one occasion

by a woman (acting independently of any men)” (Murphy 2018). Murphy reported high levels of prejudice initially, even amongst professional prison staff, that men could really be victims in this way. There were also high levels of scepticism that therapeutic change could or should be achieved with such a population. However, she found that by offering personalised approaches, building trust over time and treating these men as deeply damaged people who had built up extreme emotional defences against their vulnerability, she and colleagues were able to achieve significant therapeutic change in many cases. These findings make sense in terms of psychodynamic theories of attachment, infant development and personality development. Unlike for most females, the first love attachment for most male infants is with the gender that they will subsequently bond with sexually in adulthood. This means that for males their initial dependency on a female adult, if it goes wrong, contaminates their subsequent adult sexual behaviour and relationships.

Summing Up: What if Masculinity Is Neither Toxic nor a Social Construct? The Dangers of a Falsely Negative Construction of Masculinity

It has been demonstrated here and elsewhere (e.g. the chapter by Barry and Owens) that a social constructionist model of the male gender, as exemplified by popular notions of “hegemonic” and “toxic” masculinity, does not fit a large body of evidence and cannot be considered to meet standards of empirical science. It is never good science or philosophy to split mind from body. Without sex there could be no gender. Given that human beings are a mammalian species, it should not be surprising that biological sex differences make a significant contribution to masculine identity and male psychology. If this were not the case, it would be impossible to explain why transgender people, who have been socialised from early childhood congruently with their outward physical appearance, still come to feel an overpowering gender dysphoria, an *essential* internal sense of being in the wrong body. Clearly, this proves that a person’s gender is not entirely the result of learning and acculturation. The dysphoria of transgender people is therefore better explained by sex differences in their brain development than by social factors.

However, this equally does *not* mean that gender is determined solely by nature. Scientific evidence indicates that social factors shape the *expression* of gender identity rather than creating gender itself. But although the social expression of masculinity may in part be learned and adapted, masculinity

is clearly neither a set of stereotypical roles that humans play (as hinted at in another fashionable term, “masculinities”) nor is it something that can be chosen. Masculinity, just like femininity, is an embodied and evolved part of our species.

Although we celebrate many other identities (e.g. LGBTQ, women, disabled, ethnicity and religious faiths) we do not currently celebrate or even value men and masculinity. By only seeing negative aspects of men and masculinity and by continuing to address the problems of men and boys as if these reflect mere stereotypes, there are three serious ongoing risks to society:

1. *Stigma*—if the underlying assumption in public messages about masculinity in our culture, politics and media is that masculinity is toxic, this will inevitably have a corrosive and stigmatising impact on the self-image and self-esteem of boys. The danger of boys internalising this stigma is a classic “unintended consequence,” and research into self-fulfilling prophecy suggests that “giving a dog a bad name” tends to make behaviour worse (Sharma and Sharma 2015).
2. *Prejudice and bias*—in an age of intense focus on gender equality, the failure to recognise areas of male victimhood and disadvantage constitutes a double standard that breaches standards of ethics, science and humanity, and is not good for the health of society as a whole.
3. *Misguided and Damaging Social Engineering*—without empathic, gender-specific and male-friendly services, based on research and understanding of the male experience (see chapter by Liddon et al.), the continued provision of gender-blind, feminised (Morison et al. 2014) social constructionist (or, more aptly, “social destructionist”) services to men can only fail to address—or even further undermine—the health of men, their families and their communities. Only therapeutic failure can result from blaming men for their differences in help-seeking behaviour (e.g. Yousaf et al. 2015) rather than honouring and respecting those differences. Taken to extremes, the thinking behind the concepts of hegemonic and toxic masculinity has resulted in approaches to therapy for men that have the aim of reconstructing or detoxifying their masculine characteristics; these amount, in effect, to social engineering. Various forms of feminist therapies exist that are said to be applicable to male clients, for example “Feminist multicultural therapy” (FMCT) (Wolf et al. 2018) and the “Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project” (DAIP) (Pence and Paymar 1993). Perhaps not surprisingly, the empirical evidence for the effectiveness of these approaches is underwhelming (e.g. see chapter by Powney and Graham-Kevan). Even for very widespread interventions such as Duluth, it seems unlikely that such approaches meet professional

standards of ethics in terms of being judgmental, unempathic and non-collaborative when it comes to male clients (see Corvo et al. 2009). It might be thought that a reassessment is needed, but the chronic issues with interventions based on this negative approach to masculinity don't appear to have been noticed in mainstream psychology. Indeed a recent initiative within the UK Division of Clinical Psychology called the "Power Threat Meaning Framework" (Johnstone et al. 2018) suggests that power imbalances, such as "patriarchy and masculinity" contribute to the creation of mental health problems (see pp. 124–8 of the long version), especially in women. The PTM Framework has subsequently been criticised as "a hybrid social constructionist, anti-psychiatry, anti-science and political agenda... more manifesto than scholarly document" (Salkovskis and Sutcliffe 2018). The blindness to this crusade to reform masculine identity is very ironic, however, at a time when the British Psychological Society has worked so hard to outlaw "conversion therapy" for homosexuality (BPS 2017).

Towards Positive Models of Masculinity

From Stereotypical to Archetypal Masculinity

Given age-old universal and cross-cultural patterns of male behaviour, particularly in relation to play, fighting, protecting, risk-taking, help-seeking and even suicide, it perhaps constitutes better science to conclude that masculinity is closer to an archetypal (embodied) phenomenon than a stereotypical (learned) phenomenon. This means that gender is intimately connected with biological sex and with our human evolution as a mammalian species, and that whilst the expression of gender can and does adapt to social and cultural changes, gender itself is an instinctive and natural part of the human condition.

The idea of masculinity as archetypal rather than stereotypical offers a much more positive, clear and hopeful approach than the one popularised today, yet it is certainly not a new idea. In ancient China, Taoist philosophy conceptualised the duality of femininity and masculinity as reciprocal and universal aspects of life, being aspects of "Yin" and "Yang", respectively. Carl Jung took a similar view that masculinity and femininity were universal and archetypal aspects of human nature that, whilst they could be expressed differently within individual personalities, transcended the individual and were embedded at a deeper level in what he called the *collective unconscious*. For Jung, this also meant that all men contained a universal feminine element

which he called “anima” and all women contained a corresponding masculine element called “animus”. The implication of this is that there are universal and archetypal scripts for gender difference that we all recognise implicitly as human beings, regardless of our own personal place as an individual within the gender spectrum.

More recently, the idea of archetypal gender scripts has been further explored as a way of trying to explain major gender differences in suicidal behaviour. Our own research team has hypothesised that men on average have a greater archetypal drive or instinct to:

1. “Fight/win”
2. “Provide/protect”
3. “Retain self-mastery/control of emotions”.

In a survey (Seager et al. 2014) of 518 men and women, higher scores on the Fight/win scale were predictive of higher suicidality scores, suggesting that reworking *overly-rigid* interpretations of these embedded ideals could be a way forward (see Seager 2019 in this volume for further details). Whilst further research is required, the initial findings support the theory that whilst such archetypal gender scripts do not define or constrain individual men and women, they do begin to explain *average* gender differences in drives, motivations and life choices. These findings also take us closer to developing more positive and gender-specific ways of reaching and helping potentially suicidal men collectively. For example, the use of male-friendly language that *honours* and goes *with the grain* of the male archetype (e.g. “if you seek help you’re taking action and taking control”) is much more likely to encourage men to seek help in the real world than language that violates the archetype (e.g. “don’t be so macho—go ahead and show your feelings!”) (see chapter by Seager).

The Positive Impact of Fathering

Elsewhere in this volume Briggs (2019) details the seriously negative impact of father absence in three cases that presented to him in his work as a consultant child psychotherapist in the UK. This experience is echoed in a recent book by Farrell and Gray (2018), illustrating the very different outcomes for “dad-deprived” versus “dad-enriched” boys. These authors point out the evidence that “dad deprived” boys are much more likely to go on to fill the “dad void” in negative ways, often involving a cycle of criminal behaviour and further deprivation. Similarly, Hill et al. (2016) point out the

value of fathers for daughters too, providing evidence within an evolutionary-based framework that shows that the regulation of sexual development and the quality of subsequent reproductive decision-making in girls without good fathering is, on average, significantly less healthy than in those with good fathering. Again, this kind of evidence about the value of masculine parenting can get lost because of the inevitable publicity that surrounds the minority of fathers and other male adults who are abusive.

If the evidence is clear that children without fathering are likely to have poorer health and social outcomes, then it makes sense to suggest that the masculinity inherent in fathering is positive. Farrell and Gray (2018) count several ways in which dads are important to their children of both sexes and illustrate numerous key domains of life where father absence is detrimental, for example: education, employment, suicide, drugs, homelessness, bullying, poverty, social mobility, crime (including rape), trust and empathy. These authors also list numerous positive things that dads on average do differently that are vital to the healthy development of children including: boundary enforcement, exploring nature, taking risks, roughhousing, hangout time, teasing and humour.

The Positive Psychology/Positive Masculinity Framework for Psychotherapy with Boys and Men

The question of male-friendly therapy will be dealt with in more detail in another chapter in this volume (by Liddon et al.). However, it is worth noting in general that new therapy approaches that take a positive view of masculinity are at last beginning to emerge. One notable example is the “Positive Psychology/Positive Masculinity Framework” (PP/PM) developed in the USA by Kiselica and Englar-Carlson. These authors have in essence taken the ethos of “positive psychology”—a humanistic term coined originally by Maslow and expanded by Seligman (2002) into a comprehensive approach—and applied it inclusively to psychotherapy with men and boys. In practice this has meant recognising that “traditional” masculinity has many positive features and strengths and that building on these is a much better way of connecting with individual men and boys than focussing on their deficiencies. Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) outline ten domains of positive masculinity where such therapeutic connections can be made with men and boys either individually or in groups:

1. Male relational styles
2. Male ways of caring

3. Generative fatherhood
4. Male self-reliance
5. The worker/provider tradition of men
6. Male courage, daring and risk-taking
7. The group orientation of boys and men
8. The humanitarian service of fraternal organisations
9. Men's use of humour
10. Male heroism.

They richly illustrate their approach with a moving case study of a man ('Clifford') who had experienced previous therapy as overly critical and undermining, but who was able to turn his life around through experiencing this new PP/PM approach. The authors conclude that "positive masculinity should be the central focus, rather than an afterthought, of clinical practice and psychological research pertaining to boys and men. Much more attention should be focused on studying those aspects of masculinity that are worthy of emulation ..." (Kiselica and Englar-Carlson 2010, p. 283).

"Traditional" Masculinity Can Have a Positive Side

Along very similar lines, a meta-analysis and meta-synthesis of 34 studies concluded that traditional masculine virtues can in fact become healthy resources for men coping with depression (Krumm et al. 2017). These resources were, in brief: taking control through information gathered and relying on one's own resources; beating depression and regaining control by becoming independent from medication; physical activities such as chopping wood, playing in a rock band, and motor biking; reframing depression as a heroic struggle from which they emerged a stronger person; reframing help-seeking as active, rational, responsible and independent action. We should not be surprised that masculinity has a positive side—there is a sound evidence base that testosterone itself has many psychological and health benefits (see chapter by Barry and Owens).

Conclusion

It has been shown that contemporary mainstream approaches to masculinity have tended to be rooted in social constructionist assumptions and, although perhaps with good intentions, have taken a judgmental stance towards the male gender. Evidence has been presented in this chapter

showing that such an approach to gender leaves room for improvement in terms of ethical and scientific standards. Generalisations about masculinity as a whole appear to have been made on the basis of small, unrepresentative and extreme samples of damaged men. Ideas such as “hegemonic” and “toxic” masculinity have grown in acceptance without being subjected to proper debate or empirical testing.

It has been argued that whilst masculinity, as a natural part of the human spectrum, cannot be toxic, social attitudes to the male gender as exemplified by the concept of “toxic masculinity” *have* become toxic. Masculinity is better understood as an archetypal part of the human condition rather than as a collection of stereotypes that can be altered through treatment or education. Whilst gender itself is not alterable through therapy, individual men and boys with problems can be helped to change their feelings, attitudes and behaviours if male-friendly and gender-specific approaches are adopted. It has been shown that when a positive, inclusive, empathic and respectful approach to men and boys is offered, much better results can be obtained, as would be expected with any other category of human beings.

It is not so much masculinity therefore that needs to change as our collective social attitudes towards it. If masculinity is afforded equal respect as a natural part of human diversity along with other identities, a great deal of progress can be achieved in making society better for all of us.

Aspects of the male archetype itself, particularly the drive to take risks, to protect others and not to seek help, combined with the absence of an “in-group” bias, have also contributed to the relative invisibility of male victimhood and a resultant “empathy gap” (e.g. Seager et al. 2016) towards men and boys. It is hoped that this chapter, along with the other chapters in this collection, will serve to raise awareness of the issues and problems facing the male gender, and encourage others to find effective ways to address them.

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