

Unmasking Masculinity

Helping Boys Become Connected Men



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Some [Male] Issues in Society

- Boys (compared to girls)
 - Higher rates of school suspension and expulsion
 - Twice as many 18- to 29-year-old males abuse alcohol
 - 5 times as many 15- to 24-year-old boys complete suicide
- College men
 - Enroll in college at lower levels
 - Complete degrees more slowly
- ~ 500 school shootings since 1764; over 135 since Sandy Hook in 2012
 - All but 3 committed by boys or men
- Adult men
 - 4-12 times more likely to complete suicide
 - 25% less likely to have visited doctor in past year
 - 40% more likely to skip recommended cholesterol screenings
 - Die, on average, 5 years earlier than women (up to 12 in Russia)

Why the differences?

- Biogenic explanations (20%)
 - Genetic, hormonal, or other biological differences
- Psychogenic explanations (80%)
 - Self-destructive behaviors
 - Neglectful behaviors
 - Behaviors involving physical risk of illness, injury, or death
 - Psychological processes that have adverse effects on the body

Enter Social Constructionism

- Ways a society builds or creates reality through social interactions
 - Hidden or expressed rules about what we accept as truths in society
- Rooted in use of language to make meaning
 - e.g., masculinity exists because a particular group of people agree that it has specific meaning and significance
- Meanings can and often do change over time to reflect different historical, social and cultural influences
 - e.g., boys = blue, girls = pink only since 1940s





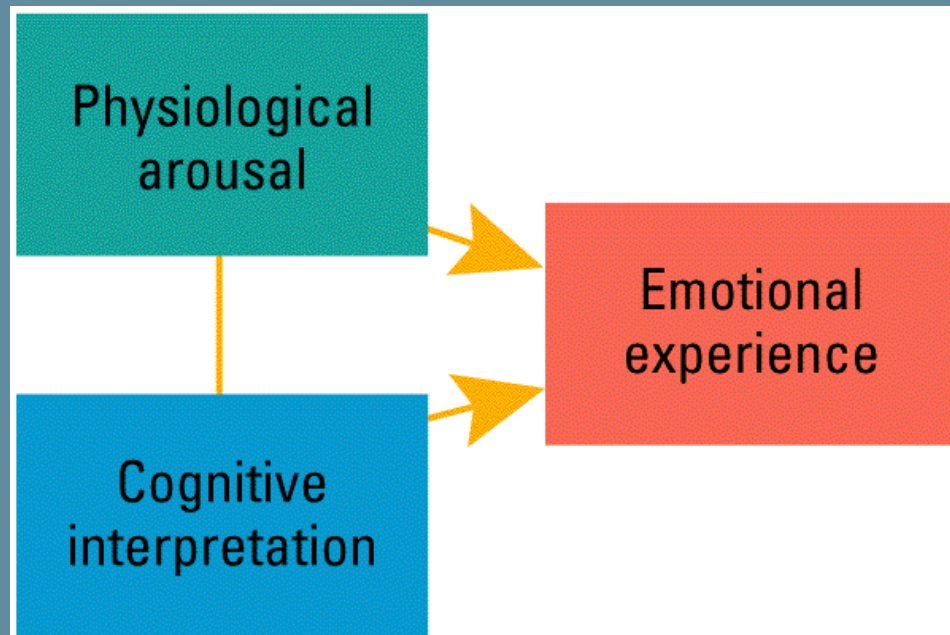
Barrier #1: Emotional Restriction

Emotion Never Lies...or Lies Still

- Emotions central to human experience
 - Primary motivator *towards* and *away from*
- Experience vs. expression
 - Must take great forces to suppress emotional expressions
 - Found in masculine gender socialization, masculine ideologies, and situational expectations
- *Men often* socialized to avoid expression of vulnerable feelings



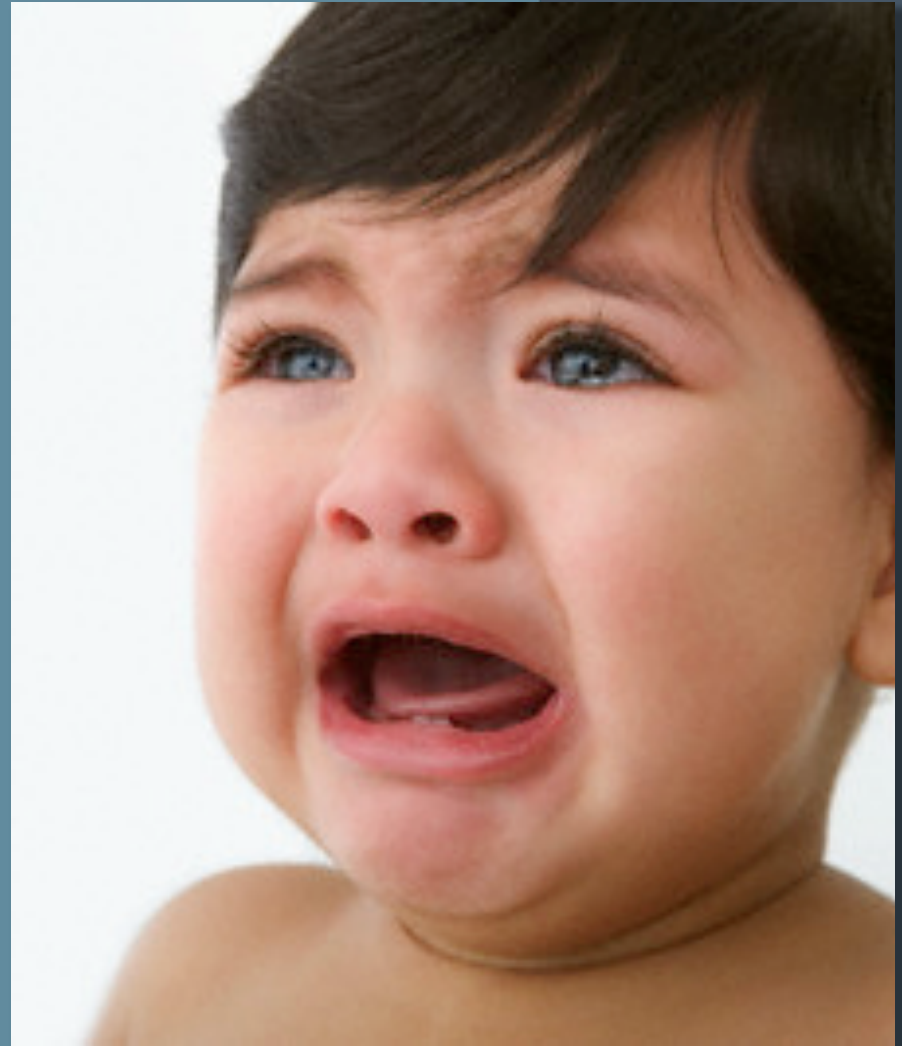
Two-factor Theory of Emotion



- Physiological arousal
 - Sweaty palms
 - Increased heart rate
 - Rapid breathing
- Cognitive Label
 - Attribute source of arousal to a cause
- To have an emotion, both factors are required

Research Findings

- Infant males slightly more emotionally expressive...but
- After early childhood, **display** most feelings less frequently than females
 - Differences emerge by age 6 and become well established by middle adolescence
- Expression of anger, pride, and loneliness more frequent in males



Socialization of Emotion

- Modeling
 - Sons whose fathers are highly involved are more emotionally expressive than other boys
 - Sons with emotionally expressive fathers tend to display emotions similarly to girls
 - Boys with two emotionally expressive parents are more likely to be expressive
- Differences in reactions
 - Mothers tend to talk *directly* about feelings with daughters and *cause and consequence* with sons
 - Former encourages expression; latter encourages control

Socialization cont.

- “Unmasculine” behaviors (crying) often disapproved by caregivers, so boys more likely to be punished for expressing emotion
 - Male peer groups often especially brutal in enforcing restrictive emotionality
 - Extremes found in gang and fraternity initiations
- Cultural influence
 - Mead’s study of tribal societies
 - Arapesh – both males and females taught to be expressive
 - Chambri (previously Tchambuli) – from Western standards, males more feminine, females more masculine

Experience vs. Expression

- *Experience vs. expression of emotion*
 - A person can experience but not express a feeling
 - Many believe that women are “more emotional” than men
 - Little evidence to show that men experience *less* emotion than women
- Clip: Hank Hill on controlling expression



Pact with the Devil

- Correlation b/w reported experience of positive feelings and experience of negative feelings
 - *High emotionality*: fully experience positive emotions/vulnerable to intense negative feelings
 - *Low emotionality*: allows one to escape from negative feelings, but at the cost of experiencing positive emotional experiences



Focus on Gender...not Sex

- Expression more about gender than biological sex
 - Males who believe that men are “naturally” unemotional are more likely to report stereotypically low emotionality
 - Men’s adherence to masculine ideologies are associated with low expressiveness
 - Social context very important for **prohibition** or **permission** to express emotion
 - e.g., funerals, bar time, losing championship



Consequences of Avoiding “V”

1. Decreased sensitivity to own feelings
2. Decreased sensitivity to feelings of others
3. Intolerance or confusion by others' expression of feelings
4. Rational becomes too highly valued
5. Feelings are disguised
6. Avoidance of intimate, committed relationships
7. Use of addictive substances to avoid unpleasant feelings
8. Emotional restrictiveness contributes to stress-related disorders (Pasick, Gordon, & Meth, 1990)

“Male Emotional Funnel System”

- Vulnerable emotions rechanneled as anger and aggression (Long, 1987)



Anger: The Toxic Emotion

- Chronic expression of anger is risky from a health perspective
 - Unrestrained expression of anger tends to make a person angrier, and damages relationships
 - Chronic anger contributes to hypertension, heart attack, and stroke
 - e.g., increases deposits of calcium in arteries and contributes to arteriosclerosis

Primary Risk Factors for CV Disease

	Relative Risk (RR)	Prevalence
Inactivity	1.9	59%
Hypertension	2.1	10%
Cholesterol	2.4	10%
Smoking	2.5	18%
Social Isolation	2.8	???



Barrier #2: Myths about Friendship & Relationships

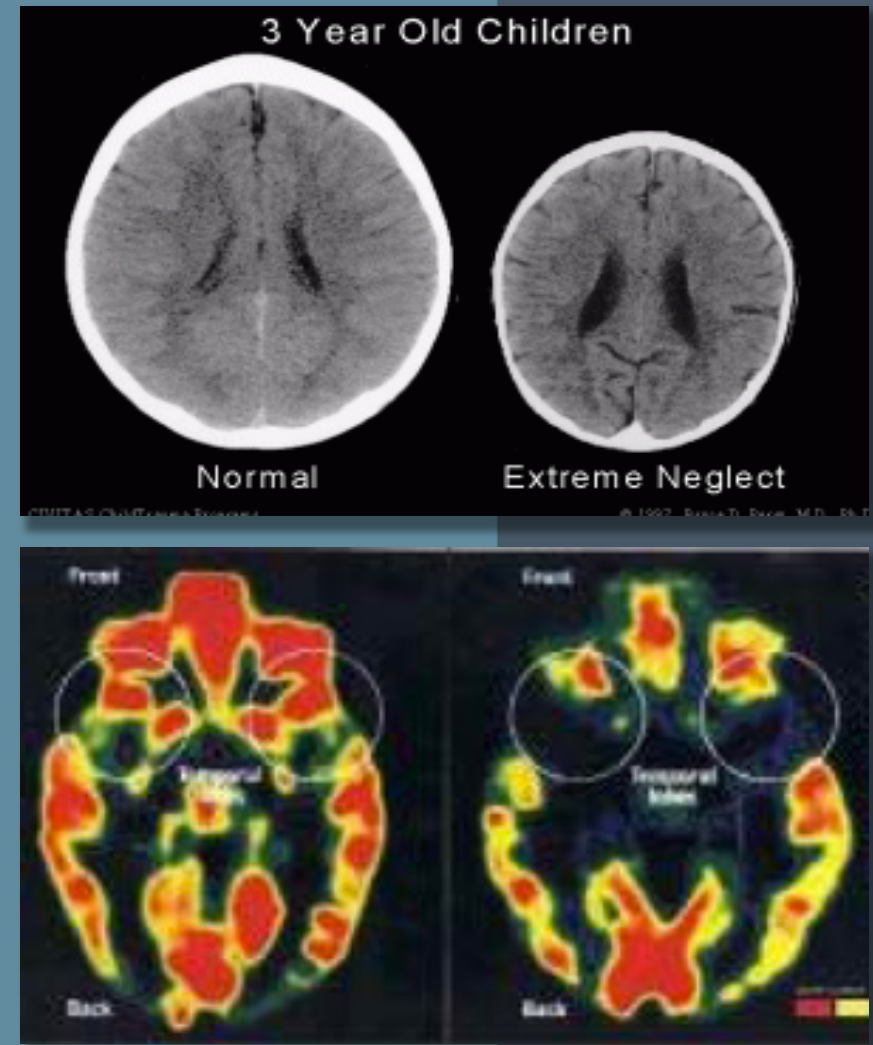
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One of the Boys: M-M Friendships

- Males tend to have more friends than females
 - Focus on activities rather than intimacy
 - Report warmth during shared activities
- Different styles of communicating
 - Shoulder-to-shoulder vs. face-to-face
- Pluralistic ignorance
 - Belief you are in minority when in majority
 - e.g., boys/men overestimate degree to which other men expect gender-stereotypical behavior
 - Suppress own attitudes incorrectly assumed are in minority
 - e.g., boys/men and body image concerns

The role of non-sexual touch

- Western boys receive far less affectionate touch from birth than girls (Juni & Brannon, 1981)
 - Can result in neurological impairment (Prescott, 1975)
 - Links b/w lack of touch and adult abusers
- A culture's affection with infants and children predicts degree of violence in a society with 70% accuracy (Prescott, 1975)
 - Follow-up study on 49 cultures supported strong relationship (Prescott, 1990)



Barriers in Romantic Relationships

- The disclosure problem
 - Men more likely to disclose to women (burdensome if extreme)
 - Married men less likely than single men to disclose to other men
- The scripting problem
 - Sexual scripts (e.g., initiating vs. withholding)
 - Persistence of gender stereotypes in dating scripts (Eaton & Rose, 2011)

Evolution of homophobia

- Male friendships intimate due to emotional freedom during Enlightenment in Europe (Crain, 2001)
- Changed during 19th century Victorian England to more restrictive gender roles (Garfield, 2010)
- Prevalent in Anglo-Celtic cultures, but not necessarily others (Cronan, 2007)

Consequences (Weinberg, 1971)

- Boys and men rarely embrace each other
- Do not express fondness for each other, or longing for each other's company
 - Stats from gender differences in adolescent friendships
- Fathers may slowly withdraw from physical affection as child[ren] age

Intimacy and vulnerability

- Unless a boy/man can be open (vulnerable) in relationships, intimacy will not be achieved, or it will be very limited (Cronan, 2007; Fehr, 2004)
 - Fear of self-disclosure includes fear of disapproval, vulnerability, hurt of rejection, loss of control (Clark & McNeir, 1993)
 - Boys and men learn only to focus on the COSTS and not the BENEFITS



Barrier #3: Myths about Fatherhood

Sons and Fathers

- Old gender norms emphasize that father = provider/protector and works outside home
- Fathers' levels of involvement with children historically lower than mothers'
 - Traditionally gendered men may refer to child care as “babysitting” and/or domestic work as “helping out”

The Essentialist Position

- Men lack instinctual drive due to lack of pregnancy and lactation
- Marriage prevents men's "natural" urge to impregnate many females
- Men provide unique, masculine contributions to children (esp. sons)

But...Many Exceptions

- Bioecological context exerts pressures
 - e.g., pigmy marmosets
- Human exceptions
 - e.g., single fathers, at-home fathers, gay fathers
- Rigid division of labor doesn't hold water
 - e.g., in h-g cultures, women provide 60-80% of calories
- Parenting doesn't come naturally
 - e.g., infant caregiving skills do not differ (Lamb, 1997)



Debunking Myths

- Lowest father involvement at BOTH ends of socio-economic spectrum
 - Highest in dual-career, working/middle-class families
- “Father (or mother) absence” not supported in divorce data
 - 75% of children don’t experience problems
 - Problems existed before split; disruption more detrimental than anything

Clarifying the “Absent Father”

- 24% of children live in single-mother households (U.S. Census, 2010)
 - 16% Euro-American
 - 24% Latino
 - 52% African-American
- But...
 - When controlling for poverty, employment, and incarceration, no difference

Recipe for Strong Parenting

1. One responsible, caretaking adult
2. Positive emotional connection
3. Consistent relationship
 - Werner & Smith's (1989) *Vulnerable but Invincible*

BONUS: Extra adult(s) can only help by reducing stress



Shifting directions

WHAT CAN I/YOU/WE DO?

Reframing Masculinity

- Swiss Army Knife metaphor of masculinity
 - Think **both-and** instead of **either-or**
- All of these examples are SKILLS that can be LEARNED



Addressing Barriers

- General
 - Consider opportunities for “shoulder-to-shoulder” communication
 - Pay attention to how you support/model masculinity
 - Remember universal need for contact
- Emotions
 - Expect more from your sons, brothers, friends, etc.
 - But...engage out of compassion for barriers
 - Model what you want to see (even if clumsy at it)
 - Start w/ physical sensations → teach to express verbally

Addressing Barriers cont.

- Friendships
 - Check your own friendships—find “low hanging fruit” and take a small risk of disclosure
 - Beware the myth of social media and connectedness
 - e.g., creative study on stress and texting vs. calling
- Relationships
 - Challenge (or opt out of) hurtful stereotypes/humor
 - e.g., “I don’t get it. Can you explain?”
 - Talk with boys (and girls) about RELATIONSHIPS—not just biology
- Parenting
 - Keep making contact and reaching out

Contact Info

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