Engaging Men in Psychotherapy

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Making Your Personal Reactions and Assumptions More Visible

When you find out your client is male what are the subtle and not so subtle reactions you experience?
• Cognitively
• Physiologically
• Attitudinally
• Behaviorally

What Does It Mean to be a Man?
• All cultures have defining “rules of masculinity”
• Not a masculinity but masculinities
• Socially & culturally constructed variations of masculinity
• Importance of reference group in formation of masculine identity
• Most men have some relationship with traditional masculine norms
• Are there masculinity stereotypes?
Talking about Masculinity
Images of Masculinity

Who are the Guys that Come In for Counseling at Your Center?

Here are some pictures
What do you see?

What kind of “masculinity training” can these boys expect to receive before they ever enter counseling?
Emotional Expression

Rules of Masculinity

- No Sissy Stuff
- Sturdy Oak
- Big Wheel
- “Give em Hell”

David and Brannon (1976)

Influence of Masculine Socialization on Well-Being

- Men tend to externalize
- Men may more often self-medicate
- Anger is often the “funnel” emotion
- Stress “can’t” be relieved through expressing “vulnerable” emotions
- Intimacy needs are often silenced
- Avoidance of physical health care
- Avoidance of mental health care
Wait….  
There is More to the Story of Masculine Socialization

What Lens are Looking Through ?

Fuller Picture Model    Deficit Model
§ To protect……………… Chauvinistic
§ To be loyal to friends……. Good old boys
§ To problem solve……… Don’t Listen well
§ To be heroic…………….. Enjoy danger
§ To withstand pressure…. Unfeeling
§ To provide……………… Entitled-Male Privilege
§ To take physical risks….. Show off
§ To take charge …………. Need to Control
§ To absorb pain…………. Fear of vulnerability
§ To succeed ……………. Are Competitive

Acknowledging His Strengths
Recognizing the Benefits to His Approach to Life

§ Responsible— Can be relied on
§ Clear thinking— Solutions under pressure
§ Conscientious— Gets work done
§ Strong— Others may lean on him
§ Self-Sacrificing— Lessens danger for others
§ Courageous— Is rewarded by others
§ Physical Caring— Provides security
§ Practical— Time efficient
§ Dedicated— Stays with difficulty
§ Wanting to succeed— Produces results
The Recognition there are also **Costs** Associated to His Approach to Life

- Stuffing Feelings——-- Physical Health Problems
- Problem Solving Mode——— Disconnection from Others
- Driven to Succeed--------- Loss of Perspective
- Not Admitting Weakness——— Limits Self-Learning/Awareness
- Avoidance of Fear--------- Reduced Emotional Risk Taking
- “Male Pride”-------------- Unnecessary Violence
- Staying Strong------------ Missed Opportunities to Grieve

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How Might This Information Help US As Counselors?

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Therapy with Men: Basic Assumptions

- It is extremely embarrassing and shameful to go to counseling
- Going to counseling is a sign of weakness
- Counseling may be viewed and felt as a punishment
- Counseling is usually last resort or viewed as forced choice
- Men are worried they will be devalued and misunderstood by the counselor
- Being vulnerable in counseling is difficult
- Men prefer to focus on solutions rather than process
- Men have a difficult time accessing “inner world” experiences
Skills to Engage Men in Counseling

1. Acknowledge, address, and normalize ambivalence about counseling. Use his language.
2. Developing the Working Alliance with men: Focus on the goals, tasks, and bonds of counseling.
3. Assessing masculinity, and understanding the client’s identity as a man. Navigating his form of masculinity.
4. Building the relationship: Share his story, validate his experience, and work on deepening into affect.

Skills to Engage Men in Counseling

5. Help the client save “masculine face” in the counseling setting.
6. Be patient.
7. Conceptualize presenting concerns through a masculinity lens.
8. Moving into affect: Begin to experience it in session, and educate about expressing it.

Skills to Engage Men in Counseling

9. Helping the client get his story out.
10. Identifying and building male strengths.
11. Listening to male clients, not forcing them to do what they don’t want to do, and honoring want they want.
Let us Watch

Doing Therapy with Men: He May Discover......

- The dreams, desires and fears of his “little boy” which has been silenced by the rules of masculinity.
- Asking for help will not kill nor weaken him
- How his history has impacted his current life situations.
- How to open up with others and not give up his power.
- To better value the importance of relationships
- Vulnerability as a form of strength.
- How to get to know himself.