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NEW MALE STUDIES – AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

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INTRODUCTION

Gary Misan



WELCOME

Welcome to New Male Studies, Volume 6, Issue 1, the first issue for 2017. This issue sees the Journal live up to its name as an International Journal by offering challenging and thought provoking submissions from the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, Denmark and Germany. As is the Journals reputation, the pieces challenge currently accepted ‘wisdom’ and traditional schools of thought regarding gender, relationships, sexuality, education, men’s health and related issues. And as always, the authors present their positions based on well-reasoned argument underpinned by considered thought and sound evidence.

Volume 6.1 opens with a brief article by *Gerhard Amendt*, Emeritus Professor from the University of Bremen, which argues that gender ideologies based on assumptions that relations between men and women are based on male oppression and female victimhood, in fact belittle female contributions to society and culture and underscore the absence of pride from some quarters, in women's own natural abilities and cultural contributions. *Jim Shelly*, the Director of the Men’s Resource Center at Lakeland Community College, in Kirtland, Ohio examines possible reasons for the gender gap in college enrolment rates together with the lagging in academic persistence and performance of males in US colleges today. *Tim Patten*, a leading author on the topic of male empowerment offers a discussion of heroism and how men and women react differently and the double standards that exist for men and women in society.

Gerhard Amendt returns with a refreshing examination of the complex implications of employment policies that are falsely portrayed as enhancing equality of the sexes and their consequent impact on gender relations and the sexes' lifestyles. Visiting Professor *Gary Senecal* from The College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, *USA*, enriches our understanding of the social and theoretical psychology of violence and its implications for career transitions for contact sport athletes who have retired from careers that exposed them to regular violent endeavors in the sporting arena.

Paul Hopkins, Visiting Fellow at the University of Gloucestershire in the UK, presents an overview of *Mengage*, an initiative of several male health practitioners that offers an evidence based, salutogenic approach to male health by providing workshops for teachers on improving boys' education, in addition to generic training on male health to a range of sectors including sporting organisations. Paul then partners with *Gary Misan* (yours truly) in proposing a theoretical foundation for the success of men's sheds — a growing, volunteer led, grass-roots movement that aims to improve *mens'* social and emotional wellbeing by providing a communal space for older men to meet, socialise, learn new skills and voluntarily take part in meaningful activities — in Australia and the UK, based on the core components of the social marketing framework now being used extensively for health promotion in the public health space in the UK and elsewhere.

Professor *Miles Groth*, from Wagner College in the US and Editor in Chief of *the Journal*, offers a thought provoking, *phenomenological* based discourse that reconceptualises the understanding of male homosexuality and posits a modification of the psychoanalytic theory of male-male intimate experience and behavior that some readers may find challenging or even, as he puts it, uncongenial. The penultimate offering is from Professor *Douglas Gosse* from the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University, Canada, who using the example of box-office hit, *The Heat*, starring Sandra Bullock and Melissa McCarthy, amusingly pinpoints the movie's superficial appropriation of feminism that upholds a professional womanhood as heroic, while the female characters paradoxically embrace the very traits of hegemonic, *bawdy*, uncivilized and narcissistic masculine behaviours that feminism so vehemently decries.



Last but not least, is a photographic excerpt from *De Profundis Hominum – From the depths of man*. This inspiring photo collection is from renowned photographer and visual artist Jan H Andersen from Denmark, which explores in a series of beautiful images, man's belief in something greater than himself.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

Comments are welcome and submissions for future issues, even more so.

Best wishes,

Gary Misan PhD
Production Editor
New Males Studies – An International Journal

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ENVY AND MALEVOLENCE THE SHAKY FOUNDATION OF GENDER STUDIES

Gerhard Amendt



ABSTRACT

Most versions of gender ideologies are founded on the implicit or explicit assumption that all relations between men and women are based on male oppression and female victimhood throughout the entire history of mankind.

Gender theories do not promote female autonomy but rather foster a mentality of complaint and the demand for third-party-support, such as from state institutions in welfare states, or even redemption, whereby benevolent men act as bearers of a resurrected chivalry. Gender theories belittle female contributions to society and culture, for example, by socializing children for the functioning of society, aiding demographic reproduction as well as shaping the culture of food and living.

There is no evidence-based research that shows women are as passive and disabled as portrayed in gender studies. The glorification of female victimhood is instead based on a deeply embedded psychological condition of gender activists in academic institutions and administrations. The driving force is their envy, be it subconsciously or openly expressed. The cause of their envy is simply the difference between the sexes and the absence of pride in women's own natural abilities and cultural contributions.

Keywords: Envy, malevolence, gender struggle, totalitarianism, conflict solution, misogyny, conflict avoidance.

INTRODUCTION

Which is less pleasant: being envied or envying yourself? Envy is an intense feeling, it can consume one's soul and destroy the envied person's enjoyment of the object in question. However, envy is also part of life, and it is worth to not only point it out but to furthermore investigate which significance it can obtain in societies. That is in its positive sense as well, as to allow envy to become a progressive force. In this essay, I want to show one example in which way envy can be dynamic by turning it into ambition, fantasy and persistence. Through the example of *gender studies*, on the other hand, we are going to explore the paralysing potential of envy. It can befall individual people or entire groups and then pushes them into an isolated envious fixation. In this case, nagging envy leads to a hostile self-centredness, which alienates the individual and the collective alike from society.

PROGRESSIVE ENVY

My personal example of a productive envy is dating back to the 1950s. We were several boys in our neighbourhood and ten years old. We were each faced with a major decision: either to continue at our single-sex class at the local elementary school or to transfer to a secondary school.¹ In a Frankfurt suburb with quite a few illiterates, such a transfer in itself would already have constituted a parting with their milieu. Thus, most boys stayed at their elementary school while only a few moved up to the secondary school. We boys, many of whom had lost their fathers during the war, envied one boy in particular in our neighbourhood. Not only did he have a father (who was a teacher), but he also attended a grammar school in town. For many years we both envied and admired him. However, none of us could really say with any clarity what we envied him for. We did not know what one *actually* learned at a grammar school. Perhaps it was Latin, which appeared to us both intellectually challenging and mysterious. In any case, Latin was emblematic of thinking and knowledge, which we hoped that, one day, would also enable us to understand our provenance and allow us to change our world for the better. Our envy thus became the motor for further educational achievement. Later on, our employers considered this as detrimental to the work climate as too much striving would cause unrest. That did not discourage us. None of us gave up our dreams of, against highly improbable odds, going to university one day. When the opening-up of educational reserves started in the early 1960s, it was very much in line with our thirst for knowledge. Many young

men and women from an uneducated milieu, with a similar drive, for the very first time had a route to attain A-levels (high school diploma). The 'second chance education' (similar to G.E.D. in the US) became the vehicle that extinguished our envy of a privileged education by allowing 'those at the bottom'—us—the advancement all the way into the universities. We owed that to Social Democracy, which at the time still made policies for the underprivileged. This is an example of state intervention that—in tandem with the high motivation of the individual—allowed for societal change.

ENVY AS A SOURCE OF CONFLICT

Not so the proponents of gender studies. While they have a variety of differing approaches, they share one particular tenet: They do not believe that upward-mobility through individual effort is possible for women. Therefore, they argue, it is now the women's turn, no matter what. As if men had hitherto achieved anything without effort and at the cost of women, picking up the ripe fruit lying at the roadside. Followers of gender studies are looking for activities from which they assume that women are maliciously excluded and that they are not deliberately staying away. They always find what they are looking for. And even if they overwhelmingly do not find anything, as they only encounter successful women, then they are not even capable of being pleased about it. Pleasure would require giving up envy as one's elixir of life and, instead, working ambitiously for one's own success, like everybody else—a renunciation of the very basis of gender studies.

Given that gender ideologues do not want to act themselves, concentrating on voicing complaints instead, they require others to lead them to the lofty heights of their utopia. Gender studies did not develop concepts comparable with those of social movements, allowing for the individuals or groups to free themselves. Nor are they contributing to any kind of professionalism. A certain adherence to unhappiness is not alien to them as is the traditional quest for knightly men, keen on liberating women from imaginary distress. I have described this mentality many years ago as *Opferverliebtheit* or "the state of being enamoured with victimhood."² From the viewpoint of psychology, we can spot symptoms of masochism here, which are characterised by the enjoyment of suffering and punishment. Politically, the proponents are against rough violence, yet they are quite open to a more refined version in their personal daily lives.

Followers of gender studies relentlessly seek in the most secret corners of society indicators of the victim-status of women, in order to portray a rounded image of the suffering collective of women. This is practiced with such passion, it resembles religious belief whereby faith is replaced by a devout victimhood. The enemy man, in contrast, is stylised as having a godlike superiority.

Even though it is always a personal choice to adapt such a mentality of victimhood, left variants of the welfare state do strengthen this trend as it is thought that every individual needs to be increasingly spared from the efforts of having to autonomously shape one's life. This trend is enlivened by the sponsorship of victim studies at colleges and universities or the search for victims within the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Evangelical Church in Germany). Who then can be surprised that victimhood is fashionable? No one ought to be ashamed or enraged about his or her own failures, no one ought to feel pressured into accounting for their own life. With the feeling of victimhood, the guilty party is delivered for free. Every victim is confronted with a recognisable culprit. And, just like that, a slow reversal of lifestyles begins. Personal responsibility is replaced by benevolent directives from the outside, that is, the internal is replaced by the external. Consequences are far-reaching, because we are increasingly pushed by external institutions toward a new normality.³ We have known for over three decades about the aims of gender studies and political correctness. And in more extreme form from totalitarian systems, as it is envisaged in literary form in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, for instance, or from the practices of former socialist states.

ENVY AS AN ELIXIR OF LIFE

If we do not have to work ourselves for that which others already own, then we do not only let our envy loose unscrupulously, but eventually we surrender to the horrid feeling of malevolence. Both envy and malevolence become socially acceptable, because it is always others who are responsible for them. The maxim is: "If you are good people, procure me what I envy in order to rectify a wrong! Otherwise I will become aggressive and malevolent. I am already an approved victim!" Anyone who counts on that will solidify through immobility and thus envy turns into entitlement. Redress is only possible through the welfare state's intervention in order to pacify all enviers. To invent a credible rationale for such action is essentially the objective of gender studies at universities and colleges. This search is mostly financed by

Federal Ministries and not, as one might think, through a laborious research funding process, overseen by experts. Gender studies shall provide the foundation to thoroughly vilify men, in order to maintain malevolent envy as the power engine for the discipline. It is for this reason that gender studies can exist as debris on the fringes of our educational system. State financing does not only enable the gender studies' subcultural encapsulation from science and humanities, it furthermore protects them from verifying its societal usefulness by means of the usual methods of scientific evaluation. "Gender-political progress" aggravates the envy of men. Along the way it propagates a mentality according to which women should present themselves as being disenfranchised and lamentation is a legitimate principle for women to make demands.

BEYOND POLITICS—THE SHAKY FOUNDATION

We cannot justify the dynamics of envy and malevolence with reference to the injustices experienced by women. All claims of systematic discrimination have been refuted by and large. Those differences that still exist are expressions of agreements within society or personal partnerships about the division of labour between the sexes. Therefore, we have to look into another, unusual direction in order to understand why envy and malevolence as a foundation are sustained. Only, what is this foundation now? It is evidently not about the advantages any longer that men have surreptitiously obtained at the expense of women. For the mostly female followers of gender ideology, this is rather about inner sensitivities, which can be captured as a psychological conflict. This is nothing new, it is merely overlooked too often. Among genderists, this conflict leads to an essential division between men and women, which is considered to be immutable. They basically break down the men and women's world into opposites. Not in order to reconcile opposites, which alone would make sense, but to intensify them and to conjure women up as the saviours of history and humanity out of the magician's hat. For them to be able to rise like Phoenix from the ashes of a wicked male history, men have to be vilified thoroughly. Let us single out the principal point from the bandwidth of such lines of arguments: violence is male. Men are violent, women, in contrast, are not. Yet, no evidence for this mythical-male violent being can be provided. In day-to-day life, countless anecdotes of wives standing with an iron frying pan behind the door are in opposition to this myth, and not to mention the findings of researchers. The consequences of ignoring this reality is a poisoning of men and women's relationship and leads to an atmosphere of threatening hostility. It is

claimed that male violence was part of an unchangeable nature as much as amicability⁴ was of women's. This is all the more astounding as gender ideology has declared the influence of nature, such as biology or genetics, on human behaviour to be insignificant or, at best, marginal. The escape into an essentialist allocation of negative or positive features is due to one fact: the world is not polarised in a simplified manner, yet it ought to be declared as such. The ideology of mighty men and powerless women is meant to do the trick so that political leverage persists to take state-financed gender-political action against evil men. Gender ideologues' practices of daily life are not disturbed by this inconsistency, although they are in stark contrast with their more subtly arguing precursors and representatives such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and more generally with social constructivism. These make the assumption that woman is not born as woman, but made into one. Logically, this principle of socialisation should equally hold true for the man. If the male and female in its particular form are created socially indeed, then envy of men also has to be considered as a social construct and as ephemeral. This logical corollary is not pursued, because the second target would be missed: namely, to maintain the emotional certainty of envy and malevolence being justified.

In the hostile tradition of certain branches of feminism, emotional needs and fantasies are being forged into one ideology. In the end, this resonates with the notion that masculinity and femininity are not only essentially distinct, but on top of that, unequal in worth. One gender is therefore worth more, the other rather less, that is inferior. From the point of view of gender ideology, masculinity is considered as enviable and femininity is not. Therefore, women have every reason to envy men on the basis of their anatomy and to endow them fancifully with characteristics such as magnificence and omnipotence; and they cover themselves with a veil of defectiveness and powerlessness. Although genderists do not phrase it like this explicitly. They do so indirectly by portraying their own fate as the opposite of magnificence, thereby attaining yet again more reasons to establish envy and malevolence as a political strategy. As if there was no other way to achieve what is missing and desired. Men have indeed, such as the neurologist and electrotherapist J. P. Möbius about one hundred years ago, attributed to women a lesser worth—namely, an anatomically conditioned *mental deficiency*. They have done so with the intent of protecting the gender arrangement from a modernising dynamic. Men feared for the pillars of their own self-certitude. Now, there are a few indicators that gender ideology is far closer to the conservative Möbius than its proponents are aware of. While

the women's movement of the last hundred years, trusting its own strength, has moved on from the debate of inferiority, the allegedly subversive gender ideology is reawakening this debate anew. It is doing it differently than Möbius, but with the same result. Women are shown as weak and dependent on benevolent redeemers and providers.

THE STATE OF BEING ENAMOURED WITH VICTIMHOOD—THE BIPOLAR WORLD-VIEW

What is the driving force, which allows the genderists to cling onto the fiction of a woman's fate full of deprivation? Why are they ignoring the successes that women have achieved in competition and in society? Why are they valuing a woman's right to self-determination so little? Such successes and merits have neither been given to women by men nor the welfare state. Why then do genderists cultivate the right to quotas and other undeserved advantages for women and girls instead of counting on their potential to succeed themselves? They cannot accept that women can be as autonomous and successful as men, even though they are surrounded by plenty of achieving women at the universities. Autonomy and individualisation have no exceptional significance in their world-view. They count on liberation through others, just like Möbius did. While he thought of benevolent yet patronising men, gender ideologues are hoping for the regulations of the welfare state. This encourages passivity, triggering a deep dissatisfaction and leading to a life without freedom. Additionally, it is a plea for supremely traditional relationship-arrangements, which many women—especially highly educated women—have left behind a long time ago.⁵

Wholly in contrast to the life of women envisioned as depressing, the life of all men is being imagined as pleasant, satisfactory and exhilarating. And it is envied. As if men's lives were free from any burdens and sacrifices and day in, day out a single jamboree. If their work is perceived without its complexity and hardships, then this amounts to tunnel vision.

And this is how we have encountered for about three decades in wide parts of society and especially the media a ritualised rhetoric, according to which *all* men are violent and *all* women are peaceful. Their everyday life in their partnerships is broken down into irreconcilable antipodes as a consequence. It is not surprising that the state of being enamoured with victimhood cannot dissolve, making way for the transition to rational research within the humanities.

The followers of gender ideology are, as I need to highlight here expressly, characterised more concisely by their psychological motives than their political ideas. They are plagued by what the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud described as penis envy. For this reason we can consider the anatomical difference as the main source for their stubborn state of being enamoured with victimhood. Not as an explanation for individual women, but as a model of analysis for the reasons behind the irreconcilability and the supposed lack of a future in relation to the male. As long as we cannot openly speak about this, we are upholding personal dissatisfactions that might exist. Furthermore, this alarming culture of bipolarity complicates the finding of a solution for conflicts—conflicts that have shaped the relationship between the sexes since the dawn of time. In order to keep the ideology of the irreconcilable relations between the sexes in place, all men have been subjected for more than three decades to an unflattering overall condemnation. Every single myth should debase them, not allowing anyone an escape and simultaneously ought to deliver another pretence of being able to still envy them wholeheartedly. Gender studies as a royal road to women’s redemption.

In the 1980s Leonore Weitzman and her female team conjured up the fable that all men were enriching themselves in the divorce process and successfully pushing their ex-wives and children into poverty. This went hand in hand with the attempt to revoke and revise the recently liberalised divorce legislation in almost every western society in order to ensure the preference for mothers before the law. This legal liberalisation was characterised not only by the facilitation of divorce but especially by the equal treatment of both partners in regards to child custody. This revisionist attempt was imbedded in the lingering lore of men subjecting their ex-wives and children to violent control. Just recently the die-hard feminist Gloria Steinem declared: “The most dangerous place for a woman in this country is her own home!”⁶ And that despite the fact that women are packing a punch just as often as men do.⁷

Even the notion of a wage differential between the sexes is put to bed, because this white lie for the benefit of women does not withstand the realities as captured by the Federal Statistical Office (and its equivalents).⁸

A polarised world-view is to be maintained at all costs, and therefore no accusation steps too low. For instance, one of the many denunciations currently circulating is the claim that western civilisation was similar to a *rape culture* and all men were their protagonists. An-

ybody opposed to this myth is being branded as a member of the fantasy collective of the *angry white men*, as it was termed by Michael Kimmel.⁹ As one of the most devoted defenders of this viewpoint, he wants to maintain the purity and benignity of all women in image of the Virgin Mary.

All terrifying claims, of which I only recounted the most frequent ones, have been scientifically refuted. Some of them are even considered as a falsification of research results by biased interest groups (that is, advocacy research pushed too far).¹⁰ They could only continue to exist as left party politics as much as the accompanying sexual arousal kept the debate alive. Not to forget the culturally embedded tendency to portray women, like children, as particularly in need of protection.

Gender ideology thrives off destroying imagined enemies. That is not a model for social change, but for belligerent actions. It has nothing to do with science. It is a danger for the individual as much as it is to society. Usually, conflicts are solved with the help of science and professional mediators. In that process, people are not perceived according to their anatomical sex but in keeping with their social, ethnic, religious and other relevant attributes—such as their lifestyle or a passion for or an abhorrence of autonomy based on cultural or personal factors. Those factors specifically that allow distinction between the individuals, that separate, bring together or cause conflict. Gender studies, on the other hand, deny any other determining factor from class-affiliation, education, and ethnos to personal responsibility. As social and individual moments do not have significance any longer, recourse to the genital anatomy as the last remaining differentiator occurs.

The social changes of the relationships between men and women are liable to multifaceted historic, cultural and material factors. These are in constant motion. They are not determined by our bodies. Admittedly, the existence of these is presupposed. To sort men and women commensurate with their anatomical sex is therefore a biologist misconception. One's anatomical sex in itself is not a social category.¹¹ Gender studies are succumbing to the paradox that they are flatly denying the relevance of biology, yet they are dividing people relative to whether they have a penis or a vagina and, ultimately, reducing them to it.

Vienna, May 2016

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- 1 In the German school system at the time, children were sorted after the first four elementary school years according to their academic ability and resources. They then continued their education at different school types—the Gymnasium or grammar school being of the highest academic standard and later allowing for entrance into universities, the Mittelschule was open to able children who would eventually enter the apprenticeship-system, while the Volksschule, as a continuing elementary school, offered the most basic level of education and was the “normal” choice for the working-class children up until the educational reforms in the 1960s.
 - 2 G. Amendt (2009), “Die Opferverliebtheit des Feminismus oder: Die Sehnsucht nach traditioneller Männlichkeit; Die Zukunft der Männer jenseits der Selbstinstrumentalisierung für Frauen,” in *Befreiungsbewegung für Männer: Auf dem Weg zur Geschlechterdemokratie; Essays und Analysen*, ed. P.-H. Gruner and E. Kuhla. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 41–55.
 - 3 D. Riesman (1950), *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
 - 4 Cf. M. Mitscherlich (1983), “Antisemitismus—eine Männerkrankheit?,” *Psyche* 37/1: 41–54.
 - 5 And generally, the collective identification of women on the basis on their anatomical sex is increasingly perceived as anachronistic. Hillary Clinton, in her recent bid for the presidential nomination in the US American elections 2016, called for women to vote for her because she was a woman herself. The actress Susan Sarandon declared in response: “I don’t vote with my vagina. It’s so insulting to women to think that you would follow a candidate JUST because she’s a woman.” See <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/susan-sarandon-not-vote-vagina-article-1.2536095> (18 February 2016).
 - 6 G. Steinem in conversation with NPR (26 October 2015). Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2015/10/26/451862822/at-81-feminist-gloria-steinem-finds-herself-free-of-the-demands-of-gender>.
 - 7 See R. A. Medeiros and M. Straus (2006), “Risk Factors for Physical Violence Between Dating Partners: Implications for Gender-Inclusive Prevention and Treatment of Family Violence,” in *Family Interventions in Domestic Violence: A Handbook of Gender-Inclusive Theory and Treatment*, ed. J. Hamel and T. Nicholls. New York: Springer, 59–86.
- See also M. Philips: “The Scandal of Women’s Violence to Men: Feminists Ignore the Fact That Aggression in the Home is a Female, as Well as a Male, Problem.” *The Times*, Opinion, (11 March 2016), Retrieved from <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article4710456.ece> . And G. Amendt (2013), *Von Höllenhunden und Himmelswesen: Plädoyer für eine neue Geschlechter-Debatte*. Vienna: Ikaru, 64ff.
- 8 Cf. a publication by the German Federal Statistical Office: “As a measurable chief cause for the gender pay gap we can identify a diverging choice of professions or rather industries between male and female employees (four percentage points) as well as the unequally distributed job requirements in regards to management and qualification (five percentage points). It can be observed that women, compared with their male colleagues, are more likely to pursue an occupation that is in tendency linked to a lower earnings potential and lower requirements. Ultimately, the higher number of women within minor occupations also contributes to the gender pay gap (2 percentage points). [...] The net gender pay gap in Germany amounts to ca eight per cent.” C. Funke (2006): *Verdienstunterschiede zwischen Männern und Frauen*, ed. Statistischen Bundesamt, Wiesbaden, S. 5 [translation mine]. Retrieved from https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/VerdiensteArbeitskosten/Verdienstunterschiede/VerdienstunterschiedeMannFrau5621001069004.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.

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- 9 To the critique of *Angry White Men* see M. Groth (2014), "An Angry Non-White Man? Research and Rhetoric in Michael Kimmel's *Angry White Men*," *NEW MALE STUDIES* 3/2: 90–122.
 - 10 R. R. Peterson (1996), "A Re-Evaluation of the Economic Consequences of Divorce," *American Sociological Review* 61/3: 528–36.
 - 11 J. Alber (2010), "Geschlecht—die überschätzte Dimension sozialer Ungleichheit: Zentrale Herausforderungen liegen anderswo," *WZB Mitteilungen* 129: 7–11.

AUTHOR PROFILE



Gerhard Amendt, Ph.D., is an emeritus professor of the University of Bremen (Germany) and founder of the Institute for Gender & Generation Research. He has published numerous books and essays on the dialectic of gender relations and their conflict dynamics. Amendt is critical of any notion of gender with an inherent polarisation and instead proposes a dynamic model for reorientation within the gender arrangement. Amendt has worked in the past as a documentary filmmaker and had been for many years the chairman of the German Pro Familia, first clinic for abortions). Amendt is currently preparing a conference to take place in 2018 in Frankfurt, aimed at professional helpers to familiarise them with the paradigm shift from polarisations to a dynamic understanding of violent conflicts in family and partnership.

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TEN REASONS WHY MEN AREN'T GOING TO COLLEGE

James Shelley



ABSTRACT

This article examines the gender gap in college enrollment rates, as well as why males are lagging in academic persistence and performance. The article looks at these disparities from both a community college perspective which, because of its broad accessibility, reveals challenges faced by a wide demographic spectrum of males, and also at four year colleges where anti-male sentiment is becoming more structuralized. Many of the contributing causes, such as gender differences in language development, begin at earlier ages, so the article extends its search for causes into K through 12 educational settings.

Keywords: Education gender gap, College gender gap, men in college, college graduation rates and gender, academic achievement and gender

INTRODUCTION

The gap between the number of males and females in U.S. colleges and universities continues to widen. In 2016, an estimated 57.3% of bachelor degrees were awarded to women, 42.4% to men (Perry). The gender gap in associate degrees was predicted to be even wider. Despite the fact that this disparity has attracted national attention by widening almost yearly for the past three decades, there has been little discussion of possible causes.

As director, since 1996, of one of the few Men's Centers at a U.S. college, I've had a vested interest in this growing gender chasm. A community college's broader accessibility perhaps best showcases the wider spectrum of challenges men face in pursuing higher education. But the gender disparity in graduation and success rates exists about equally for two-year and four-year colleges, and many of the root causes are the same.

Below are ten reasons why men may not be going to college or---when they do---why they are less likely than women to graduate.

1. The allure of a "good job" out of high school

There are arguably still more high paying jobs for a male high school graduate than a female. But these are the jobs in our post-industrial economy that are in decline. Moreover, these jobs are usually either hazardous, manufacturing based, physically demanding, or all three. What happens to that high school graduate (or drop out), ten, twenty, thirty years later?

For some, their jobs are "off-shored" to Mexico or Asia. Or, they lose out to automation. For others, their bodies become damaged, or worn out, and they must seek less rigorous work. Whichever the case, if they are the primary breadwinners in their families, it is problematic for them to divert time from wage earning to "re-tooling" their skills, whether at the local community college or public four-year university. Most often, they will accept a lower paying job in lieu of additional education, sacrificing long term career development. To make up the loss in income, their spouses must often increase their contribution to the family income. Or, as a family, they make do with less.

When we do see displaced workers as new students, it is usually after a futile employment search. Despite fears of inadequacy or feeling out of place, as first-time students they tend to do well academically. But too often, part way through their first or second semester, I get the call: “I’m not going to be able to finish the semester; I just got a new job.” The siren call to provide for their families---or rather the desire to rid themselves of the daily depression of being a failed provider---kicks in.

2. The gender cleansing of “boy behavior” in kindergarten through 12th grades.

Zero tolerance policies (zero conflict, zero threatening language, zero agitation, zero noise, zero boisterous activity, etc.) were vigorously introduced in the 1990s to respond to a potentially less secure environment. But since these policies largely target boys---90% of discipline problems (Gurian, 57)---one wonders: what are the effects of the systematic suppression of boy behaviors in our schools?

In their respective books on boys, Michael Gurian and Christina Hoff Sommers have expressed concern that the “pathologizing” of boy behaviors has contributed to a classroom of suppression. This notably includes restrictions on movement which can negatively affect boys’---who have a greater reliance on a kinesthetic learning style---ability to absorb academic lessons. Adding to this are restrictions on outside recess, both in terms of time allocated and in the widespread curbing of competitive playground games favored by boys. Restrictive classroom and school policies gained momentum in the 1980s culminating in the zero tolerance craze of the 1990s. Not surprisingly, according to a University of Michigan study, the number of boys who said they disliked school rose 71% between 1980 and 2001 (Tyre, 46).

3. Education as a factor in career success is more important to women.

Perceiving that the workplace is still a man’s world, the female students I talk to generally believe that they need all the educational “backing” they can obtain in order to succeed professionally. Indeed, according to the Dept. of Education, eighth-grade and twelfth-grade girls are more likely to have higher educational aspirations (Gurian, p. 56).

But women also have more options. As Warren Farrell has pointed out in *The Myth of Male Power*, when a young single woman and a young single man meet, they appear to be equals (p. 52). But if they should marry, the woman usually has more choices: she can work, mother full-time, or some combination of the two. By contrast, the male generally has one option: work full-time. One might add a fourth option for women: if her husband's income permits it, attend college. This may happen after their children attain a certain age. If, before returning to work, a full-time mother already possesses an undergraduate degree, then it might be a graduate degree that she pursues.

Despite a steady, if very incremental increase in stay-at-home dads, these gender propensities remain strongly delineated. In Australia, a Productivity Commission study showed that men and women still substantially embrace a traditional division of labor (Gilfillan and Andrews p, 26) Women in general still assume men will take the lead as providers, which can lead to a difference in educational opportunities. The expectation is true even of professional women. It is a well known caveat of online dating services that men who fail to include "financially secure" in their profile – or some assurance of career success – are unlikely to get many dates.

4. Title IX.

This controversial federal education amendment was enacted in 1972 to address discrimination on campuses on the basis of sex. It has primarily been employed to make federal funding contingent on how compliantly inter-collegiate sports participation reflects gender enrollment ratios. If a college has 58% female enrollment, then having less than 58% women in its varsity athletic programs can be judged as unlawful sex discrimination. Yet we know that in high school athletics, where students have equal opportunity, participation is significantly higher among boys than girls. According to The National Federation of State High School Associations, in 2014-2015, 4,519,313 boys participated in high school sports versus 3,287,735 girls (2014-15 High School Participation Survey). Because of Title IX, that ratio is, in effect, governmentally reversed in college.

In soccer, 531 Division I colleges and universities sponsored soccer teams in 2013 (College Soccer & Scholarship Opportunities, 2015). Mainly because of Title IX, the number of men's soccer teams

versus women's was 203 to 328. Moreover, the women's teams averaged 14 full scholarships per team while men's teams averaged 9.9. (Need we wonder why the U.S. Women's Soccer team outperforms the U.S. men in international competition?) Men's baseball and wrestling programs have been especially decimated by Title IX. Yet, every college admissions office knows that one of the most effective ways to increase male enrollment and engagement would be to expand, not reduce, opportunities for male athletes.

One wonders why Title IX is not applied to student support services on the basis of gender. Virtually every college or university provides additional services for women, usually in the form of a Women's Center. Such programs, especially at the community college level, can provide critical assistance to women struggling to improve their lives through education. So what about the men who struggle?

In any given year, the number of programs nationally for college men (not including programs for minority males) can be counted on one hand. Every year I field calls from men---administrators, faculty, students---who wish to start some level of men's programming at their institution. They speak of institutional resistance and a lack of sympathetic funding sources. Some small scale initiatives may wobble into a trial existence, but never get traction. Why are women, with academic performance and college completion rates significantly exceeding those of men, the sole beneficiaries of dollars spent on gender-specific support programs?

5. Indifference to the literacy gap between boys and girls.

Boys have consistently lagged behind girls by one-and-half years in reading and writing skills (Gurian, 56). The gap begins in kindergarten (or pre-school) with boys' exhibiting delayed language development compared to girls. While this establishes an enduring performance gap, it may also engender an early dislike of school. Sports provides a corollary as to why. When a boy realizes that he may never be "good" in a certain sport, he will likely search for another sport or activity where he feels more competent. If he views school as a place where, at an early age, he becomes a bench warmer on the "literacy team", he will never become an enthusiastic participant. Later---with 32% of males

dropping out of school (Whitmire, 213)---he may indeed decide to seek another activity. According to James Earl Davis, a professor of educational leadership at Temple University in Philadelphia, boys start school just as eagerly as girls, but by the third or fourth grade “this is squelched”. The reason, Davis states, is that boys “continue to get the message they’re not doing right.” (Ricks).

In the 1990s, there was considerable national focus on the math gap between boys and girls, resulting in federal, state, and district initiatives to alleviate this achievement gap. This soon resulted in measureable progress toward narrowing of the gap, which today is considered insignificant. Seeing the effectiveness of gender-based math initiatives in their country, the British government wondered: would comparable measures help reduce the literacy gap? In the mid-1990s they acted, introducing a number of literacy programs to address the reading/writing gap between boys and girls (Sommers, 152). It included, for instance, the inclusion of more non-fiction reading, preferred by boys. Australia and Canada explored similar initiatives. And in the U.S.? Despite the exemplary success of math initiatives for girls, and positive outcomes from literacy initiatives for boys in other English-speaking nations, neither the U.S. Department of Education nor state education boards have shown a detectable interest in closing the gender literacy gap. Indeed, The Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights 2012 report, *Gender Equity in Education*, omits any reference to a gender literacy gap (Sommers, 34).

6. Women have a more cooperative approach to learning, men a more independent approach.

At my college, a female is 33% more likely to use academic support services (e.g. counseling, tutoring, etc.) than a male. They are even more likely to approach a professor or another student for a post-class discussion. Women, it appears, are better at developing the web of supportive relationships necessary to achieve success in college.

A possible cause for this difference is male bravado---that male students, not wishing to display weakness, are less likely to seek academic assistance. As I have found, in my initial meetings with male students, there is validity to this. But this tendency has become overstated as a tenet of the

“man-box theory”, which posits that male students inflict harm on themselves and women through rigid self-adherence to historical definitions of masculinity. This theory is making nascent inroads on campuses searching for formal interventions to change “negative” male behaviors. But flagging traditional masculinity as a deeply flawed self-concept, and hoping to re-program it, is not an effective strategy for increasing academic support to males.

For male students, channeling is more effective than changing. We know, for instance, that boys in K-12 are more likely to cooperate in learning environments that emphasize action-oriented group work, corralling their energies to focus on clearly set team-based learning goals, incrementally achieved. This can be more difficult at the college level where learning is less structured and support systems outside the classroom are more feminized. An orientation workshop for new students may begin by asking participants to circle their chairs and individually respond to the question: What is your biggest fear of attending college? Women, who are more likely to connect through self-disclosure, will be more welcoming of the opportunity to share. Situations that require males to disclose personal fears will rarely engender a comfort level. But if male students are asked: “What do you see as your biggest challenge to achieving success at college, and how do you think you can address it?” it reframes the milieu from problem-admitting to problem-solving. Other men in the group will join in to troubleshoot. As trust builds, the more personal may follow. Male students will likely seek help at a higher rate if support systems are not perceived as interactions that require instant self-disclosure.

7. Fewer, non-government financial aid opportunities are available to men.

Of the low income students at my college, a much higher percentage of female students---usually as single-parent mothers---are on public assistance. While their lives are difficult, basic support systems (i.e. food, housing, medical, etc.) often enable enough long term stability to complete educational goals. The low-income men we advise seem more subject to wilder survival swings, often forced to seek temporary jobs---or homeless shelters---once their student loans are expended in a given semester.

For both two-year and four-year colleges, men also have fewer financial aid opportunities to fund higher education. Do an internet search, “College financial aid for women”. Do the same search for men. No matter how you phrase the query, there are usually twice as many links for women.

8. *Lack of a Major War Requiring a Draft.*

It is no surprise that the largest spikes in college enrolment for males occurred after World War II, the Korean Conflict, and the Viet Nam War. The G.I. Bill enabled the millions of young men who survived those wars to attend college for free. Let us hope that this is not the only effective way to increase male college participation.

9. *An embedded belief on college campuses that “Men are the problem”.*

I recently heard from a student at a public university who attributed “anti-maleness” on campuses “to 1st and 2nd Wave Feminists being ‘at the reins’ in college life.....It has become largely about revenge instead of equality, and that’s a shame.” Although his angst is directed toward feminists, there is no shortage of male administrators lacking their zeal, at least when it comes to behavioral issues. In any event, “anti-maleness”, whether from a compensatory fixation or from fears that young men are behaving badly and need to be re-programmed, has become structural on most campuses.

The Department of Education’s 2011 mandate on sexual misconduct, which allows schools to convict accused persons on a mere preponderance of evidence rather than “clear and convincing” evidence, has made campuses a political---and legal---minefield for young men. Another layer, the “Campus Save Act” amendment, was added in 2013. The issues, such as date rape, which these attempt to address are serious and require diligent attention. But the liability of negotiating such dangerous ground is squarely placed on male students. Fair or not, institutionally conveying that message---as part of new student orientations or other mandated programs---can be jarring. As one young man from a California college told me, “I was welcomed to college by being implicated as a potential rapist”.

Fraternities are under a microscope, both institutionally and in the national media, for any evidence of young men behaving badly. Although the focus is on binge drinking and sexual predation, it's clear that fraternities, as a perceived vestige of male exclusivity, are an easy political target. Colleges should not turn a blind eye when young men behave badly. But neither should bad behavior in a fraternity house be treated more drastically than the same bad behavior in, say, a dormitory. In any event, college administrators should not lose sight of how a college experience is ultimately measured. There is no data to suggest that college men who join fraternities have a higher failure rate, after graduating, in developing into responsible fathers, loving husbands, successful professionals, or involved citizens.

Virtually all public universities, and many private colleges, require one to two courses in Women's Studies as a graduation requirement. Viewed originally as a new discipline to shine light on neglected history, Women's Studies courses too often serve as mission-driven vehicles to showcase "structural white-hetero-patriarchal" historical abuses. Women's Studies can be an enlightening piece of the academic canon. But subjecting college men to the "sins of the fathers" via academically sanctioned shaming only contributes to an anti-male environment. Moreover, the resentment it engenders negates the intended outcome.

10. Negative media images of men.

Watch 100 TV commercials in which there is interaction between males and females. In commercials where one of the genders is depicted as less intelligent, nearly 100% of the time it will be a male. Funny, yes. But does anyone ever wonder about the cumulative effect on our sons? At what point do they subconsciously start believing it?

There is no study espousing that years of viewing exposure to Homer Simpson's portrayal of fatherhood as an extension of infancy has negatively influenced how young fathers view themselves. But we do know that, historically, if a gender or race is systematically made to feel inept in certain ways, at some point it is collectively internalized.

Perhaps our young men are already doing this. When I walk the hallways of my college, the young men generally look less mature than the women. With their baseball caps and baggy pants, they look like overgrown 12 year old boys, not 18 to 24 year-old men. Historically, the fastest way for a young man to enter the world of men was to look more mature and smarter than his actual years. What makes our young men want to look less mature? Are they starting to reflect media images of themselves?

CONCLUSION

If the educational gender gap is such a problem, why is virtually nothing being done about it? What I have started to hear in recent years is that change must first occur at the K-12 level, and that it won't be government or school driven but via a grassroots effort led by mothers with sons. I hope this is true. On college campuses, real interest in helping men, rather than structurally demonizing them, remains a non-topic. When I write or speak about the gender gap, the predominant pushback (by far) comes in this form: "Men still have all the power (and/or the higher pay) *so how is this a problem?*" This sentiment is so instantly dismissive---and knowingly employed as such---that we cannot as a society even get to a dialogue level, much less a policy one.

But let us, for a moment, agree with the belief that men still have all the power. Isn't that reason enough to pay closer attention to the education of our sons?

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HEROISM AND GENDER

Tim Patten



ABSTRACT

A discussion of heroism and how men and women react differently. The double standards between men and women in society.

Keywords: Heroes, heroism, masculinity and heroism, save the day

INTRODUCTION

When a young woman is brutally gang-raped on a college campus, many men feel compelled toward bravery. Emboldened with courage, they will often challenge the perpetrators head-on, seeking justice for someone who may be a complete stranger. Such a response is called heroism, deeply valued across cultures.

More broadly, when men are confronted with dangerous situations, they will consider strategic and heroic actions aimed at creating desirable outcomes. It helps that most receive training early on--through sports, play fighting and teasing from peers--about how to think and act courageously, which serves to refine and strengthen their natural instincts. They learn to quickly calculate alternatives and solutions and act on that information in order to survive.

Still, not everyone responds this way, which raises the question of why some make the choice. History suggests that few of us wake up with the intention of being heroic; usually,

things unfold spontaneously, a spur-of-the-moment decision. According to the dictionary, heroism is an instantaneous desire to help someone without expecting any financial or moral reward in return. It is a gift given unselfishly; its value is even greater when people place themselves in grave danger, risking their lives, regardless of the cost.ⁱ

MASCULINITY TO THE RESCUE

Men have saved innumerable lives throughout history, perhaps from the very beginning of time. Following the sinking of the infamous Titanic, for example, reports indicate that only 19% of the men aboard survived, largely because hundreds of engineers and other males sacrificed their lives for the benefit of women and children passengers.ⁱⁱ For a great many men, such heroism comes automatically; it is an instinct they are born with.

There are numerous examples of just how brave and altruistic men can be. Recently, a sixty-one year old Brazilian homeless man, a victim of poverty and social oppression, rushed to save a woman he didn't know, sacrificing his own life in the process.ⁱⁱⁱ Last year, a South Dakota firefighter overcame dangerous conditions to rescue a woman and her cat from a burning house.^{iv} Before that, Carlos Arana, a firefighter from Valencia, Spain, performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on a two-month old Yorkshire terrier,^v causing eyes to water (and tugging at our heartstrings). In 2005, California Highway Patrolman Kevin Briggs stopped a distraught 22-year old father of a newborn child from jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge.^{vi} In Afghanistan, two brave soldiers confronted suicide bombers and saved colleagues' lives.^{vii}

These and countless other episodes make it clear that most men are born with empathy and a deep-rooted concern for others that repeatedly facilitates their transformation into everyday superheroes, where they perform life-saving miracles for no other reason than that it is the right thing to do.

Sadly, the fact that so many will readily step in and help those who are being victimized is often overshadowed by reckless claims that males, generally speaking, are responsible for violence around the globe. Many college-level women's studies devotees maintain that masculinity is violent and oppressive by definition. In contrast to what numerous female academics say, masculinity has proven, time and again, to be an incredible gift to society.

WOMEN AND HEROINISM

It is ironic that women, many of whom seem to lack the life-saving trait, are often quick to manipulate men into heroic behavior. Certainly, there are vast numbers of females who have saved the lives of children, often driven by maternal instincts. There are also accounts of women--doctors and nurses--who went beyond the call of duty to help others. But for most females, dangerous situations and loud noises--and men--are unsettling and immobilizing. They might respond with words, but they often go running for safer spaces.

In the aftermath of a house fire or similar tragedy, for example, it is not all that odd to hear a man say, "I saw women stand around crying in hysterics while valuable minutes were slipping away. Another guy and I ran in and did what we had to help those who were in trouble."

Not surprisingly, most people believe that the feeling of "terror" is more common in women than men,^{viii} and that many females have the "poor princess syndrome," where they anxiously wait for a knight in shining armor to rescue them.^{ix}

It's been said that if a woman who has been sexually assaulted comes forward and tells her story, she is heroic. But in reality, this act can really only be considered brave or courageous. In fairness, the difference between the concepts is probably misunderstood by most people. It's not heroic, for instance, for someone to witness a car accident and dial 911 for help. That's just good citizenship. But to crawl into a crumpled, burning car and pull someone out, at considerable risk to life and limb? That's heroism.

MALE DISPOSABILITY

There are other areas of life where the distortions of gender-twisted thinking are rampant. If the U.S. homeless population was entirely female, it is unlikely that there would be a "homelessness" problem. Rather, those unfortunate feminine souls would have access to incredible shelters, much like those set up for battered women. Aside from providing clean, decent housing, those facilities feed, counsel and educate the clients they exclusively serve.

But that is not what we see in a downtrodden part of society that is, unfortunately, dominated by men. In a sexist world, masculinity is unworthy of such humane and caring

treatment. In fact, male lives often seem to have little value. Over the next 20 years, for example, a team of 8,000 men will be exposed to deadly radiation as they work to disarm and remove melted fuel from Japan's Fukushima power plant, which suffered a triple meltdown following the 2011 tsunami. How many will become diseased or die as a result?

Cynically, some might say that if the Catholic Church had been protecting and covering up for priests that had actually molested ten thousand little girls, instead of boys, on an almost daily basis, the organization would be thoroughly destroyed by now, its pedophiles and other members imprisoned or dead.

BOYS AND MEN ARE STEREOTYPED

Boys and men are stigmatized, marginalized and penalized by for being born male. They are also held to a double standard. Society seems happy to take advantage of them, capitalizing on their eagerness to help others or throw themselves at a challenge. When men grow up, they are relegated to risky and often deadly occupations; they dominate the front lines of societal conflict and war. Some might deny that our world rests on the premise of "women and children first," but a cold, hard look at reality quickly refutes this idea.

The truth is, women almost always assume that men will save them and bear what may be a very heavy cost. They use males to do the heavy lifting and then dispose of them when they are satisfied. Where are the calls for equality when human life and survival are at stake? Nowhere, it seems. Males are disposable and women are indispensable. There is no equality: women are on a pedestal, coddled from birth to death.

TOXIC FEMININITY EXPLOITING HEROISM

When a woman seeks to exploit a man she smiles, flicks her hair, or gives him a peck on the cheek. Most men respond accordingly: they want to buy her gifts, shower her with attention, and take care of her for the rest of her life. Such feelings are, however, obsolete relics of our hunter-gatherer past, harkening back to a time when men were, by nature, designed for protection. And yet, modern women continue to deploy these manipulative tactics on a regular basis. In fact, it isn't only them who take advantage in this way; businesses also use females to tap into the male wallet.

This toxic femininity, where women manipulate men with charm and sexuality, permeates our world. Female infants and girls learn to manipulate fathers, uncles and men from early on.^x If she cries for help, daddy comes to the rescue. If she gives dad an ultimatum, he quickly succumbs. From the day girls are born, they embrace the tenets of male subjugation and abuse. As they grow up, most become learned master-manipulators, withholding what men desire most and giving in only when there is an exchange they deem worthy. For the majority of women, life with men is a simple repertoire of basic manipulations.

Arguably, some are fairly harmless. Few people will likely find fault with requests for help in fixing a leaky toilet or avoiding the abusive words of a barroom troublemaker. But when it comes to the sorts of manipulations that lead to male violence and death, or which contribute to the pain that males suffer from domestic violence or in other settings, such enticements are undoubtedly wrong. Moreover, while many women are quick to allege--and college-level women's and gender studies programs are narrowly focused on--violence against women, they ignore equally disturbing concerns about male suicide and rape, and violence against men.

A MALE REVOLUTION

Now, though, men are realizing that a rigged and biased game is afoot.^{xi} They are stepping off treadmills and pulling noses from grindstones, and taking a serious look at the ugly gender politics that is all around them. A hurricane of awareness is circling the planet, helping men to recognize manipulation and resist heroics based on exploitation. Whether they are coal miners, office workers, artists, fathers or students, they are embracing the modern--and amazing--masculinity.

Using the power of the Internet, a growing number of young men are sharing and collaborating with millions of like-minded individuals to readjust the trajectory of their lives. Brimming with pride, the enlightened among them are channeling their innate heroism to raise awareness and empower others to free themselves like they have and become the most remarkable and resourceful beings on Earth.

Gloria Steinem once said to her female minions, “*Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.*”^{xii} But her statement seems especially relevant to today’s male. Around the globe, men are taking these thoughts to heart, casting off behaviors that have outlived their usefulness and freeing themselves from abusive patriarchy. Many are seeking to understand their self-defeating motivations and behaviors, and are dreaming of a time when they cut through the shroud of exploitation and focus on their own goals and happiness.

Everywhere one looks, a wave of consciousness is washing ashore: men are going their own way (MGTOW), discovering online communities and growth. Among them, Warren Farrell’s White House Council on Boys and Men^{xiii} is making significant political headway ([sign the petition here](#)), while the academic *New Men’s Studies*^{xiv} is playing an energetic role in leading boys and men out of the darkness.

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ON WOMEN QUOTAS AND OTHER UNDESERVED COMFORTS

Gerhard Amendt



ABSTRACT

According to the current political rhetoric, women are prevented from ascending to higher positions through discrimination. If they do manage to participate in the labour market this is celebrated as an emancipatory victory over discriminating men rather than as a result of successful individual female endeavours. Such an assumption implicitly belittles female potential and motivations for joining the work force.

Research shows that only 28% of women want to further their career. Among men, in contrast, it is 50%. The desire for professional change generally seems to be less pronounced among women than among men, which has given rise to the well-established division of labour between the sexes. This enduring state cannot be changed by state intervention but only by tacit decisions in partnerships over time. Quotas are an ineffective mechanism for increasing female labour market participation due to the underlying mistaken assumption that women are swayed mainly by means of successful models. Therefore, changes will not be achieved easily. Despite the political tendency to level essential differences between men and women, there remain male preferences for certain professions that are unattractive to women and vice versa. This explains why women, despite quotas and preferential treatment, have low participation rates in the IT sector, for instance, or become pilots as often as men. We have to accept that basic differences between men and women are reflected in their choice of professions and that they might always remain in place.

Keywords: Labour market, female quotas, discrimination by men, discrimination of achievement, inferiority

INTRODUCTION

For many female academics with children, choosing a full-time job is subjected to two major considerations. On the one hand, there is the neglect of their children due to practicing a remunerated occupation. On the other, there is the personal loss of not being able to spend time with ones children in their early lives. The question here is: why have children at all, if not being able to enjoy their company? Many women are not prepared to accept the loss of a close relationship with their children - as fathers have done since the dawn of time. That way, many women's professional orientation today can - at least for those with a relatively privileged life-style - be subjected to critical consideration. This often leads to their decision against participation in the job market with full heart and force.

In Germany, this weighting is most likely the decisive cultural factor that prevents many women from investing time and energy in their careers for the long-term. But it is my belief that it is exactly this temporal commitment that is vital for any outstanding professional success. While this is self-evident for men and is part of their standard biography, this commitment is now to be imposed on women in a flattering manner. Yet this highly ambivalent decision only applies to educated women with a high marital living standard, the latter of which is a prerequisite for such a choice. We know from the USA that being 'only' a housewife with an academic education is merely possible if their husbands have top career jobs. For a large part of the middle class and the lower income groups, such a choice is non-existent any longer. Fathers and mothers both have to work full-time, sometimes even have several jobs, in order to afford their children's attainment of at least their own educational level.

The portrayal of market requirements as a measure for the advancement of women shows us that politicians are very aware about the fact that economic incentives - such as childcare assistance or competitive salaries - are insufficiently motivating for many female academics. According to the degree of esteem for children and empathy for children's needs, the non-working woman is therefore classified as politically conservative or reactionary. Behaviour that once would have been met reproachfully and described as that of being an uncaring mother, is now declared to be the inescapable norm. In the end, the question is whether women derive

larger satisfaction from their professional occupation while using public childcare. Or whether they, and their husbands, are more contented due to the increased togetherness of mother and child. Part-time work as the model of choice for many of women is thereby merely an intermediate form between those two approaches.

Politics, which does not recognise this decisive dilemma or fails to address it, instead finds a promising solution in promoting undeserving women into sensational top positions. In the Social Democratic and Green Parties' lines of thought, this quandary is concealed through an ideological preliminary decision according to which women's freedom and autonomy were only possible through full-time employment and socialised childcare. Part of this ideology is the destruction of the family as the supposed means of repression and oppression, as suggested already by Marx and Engels. Consequently, single parenting is declared as the complementary strategy to female autonomy; whereupon the concurrent burdens - such as isolation and feelings of guilt -, and especially those of the children, are being neglected.[iii]

In the end, this perspective bears a correlation with the Social Democratic Party's (SPD) programme, according to which the attainment of a human society is only possible by overcoming the male. Instead of freeing women from idealising ideologemes, which reach back from National Socialism to German romanticism, they are subjected to an aggrandising normativity once again. They are not expected to represent anything less than humanism itself. Social policy without idealising women is apparently not yet possible in Germany.[iv] And as every idealising is always complemented by a corresponding devaluation, we have also witnessed a defacement of the male and the fatherly in the past decades. [v, v(a)]

The drying-out of the labour market is to be avoided by luring academically educated women, with good arguments and symbolic gestures, into full-time employment. Massive tax-reductions would therefore be unnecessary. Equally, the impression should be avoided that the strategies of the imploded socialist systems are becoming an integral part of our democratic politics. However, it is apparently deemed impossible for women, who are enlightened about the future's labour market, to choose a binding occupation due to this particular discernment.

Above that, quota politics could generally become the established instrument for attributing status within the labour market. That is, interventions moving beyond the usual state fine-tuning - such as the prevention of lay-offs during the crisis in 2008. The right to freely choose and practice a career would be restricted in tendency. Above that, manifold quota models would promote a national restructuring of society. By avoiding educational standards and professional qualifications, members of politically relevant groups could be incorporated into specific professions. This could also apply to immigrants and refugees in order to speed up their integration.

In the USA, such quotas were introduced for Afro-Americans more than 30 years ago at elite universities in California and Chicago. Subsequently, these were abolished due to a lack of success of the measures, to the ensuing discrimination of better qualified candidates and to negative economic outcomes. As these state interventions favour women, it is obvious that only desirable professions - such as positions in executive and supervisory boards - are subject to quotas. This in turn entails a concentration of men in professions that are either not desired by women or are avoided by them because of their lack of qualifications or motivation. We would be confronted with the paradoxical reaction of women to continuously avoid technical professions despite multiple measures to encourage them. Not only would the existing disparities continue, but men alone would take on the technical development of progress, qualify for it and further perpetuate the disparities. A free career choice and quotas would drive the labour market toward typically male and female professions - divisions that initially were supposed to be abolished by means of the quotas. We would promote the very issue that we wanted to avoid. A quota for women would fast-track the process toward gender-specific career preferences. [vi]

QUOTAS AS AN ANTIPODE TO THE GENDER ARRANGEMENT

The decisive questions we are dealing with here are about the implications of employment policies that are falsely portrayed as enhancing equality as well as their consequent impact on gender-relations and the sexes' lifestyles. The manifold lifestyles are described as a particular *gender arrangement*. [vii] Arrangement is referring to the countless reciprocal effects within the social, interactive, psychic, and psychodynamic domain; men and women enter this domain daily,

in every situation of life, within their own culture and social class, and thus they change their circumstances little by little, and according to a tacit consent. This approach is diametrically opposed to the expressed notion of a polarised world between bad men and perpetrators on the one hand, and good women as victims on the other, between helpless women and omnipotent men. The term gender arrangement, on the contrary, has the underlying assumption that men, as much as women, are responsible for their own success and failure within their mutual relationship. That counts for all areas of life. The term is opposed to the political defeatism that only perceives a bipolar society. In order to understand how the gender arrangement affects lifestyles, some arguments for the implementation of measures advancing women should be analysed. Particularly, as politicians expressly accept the fact that highly qualified women are more easily integrated into the work process if the polarisation between men and women is prevalent in the media.

According to the political rhetoric, women are prevented from ascending to higher positions by means of discrimination. If they do participate in the working life, then this ought to be celebrated as an emancipatory victory over discriminating men. However, this argument lacks convincing empirical backing so far. Therefore, the argumentation has changed. Now it is said that women needed to prepare for careers as a matter of principle. And this could be advanced by offering particularly successful women for identification purposes: that is, quota-women. The intergenerational transfer of withdrawal tendencies is accepted as a given. This, however, is simultaneously acknowledging that discrimination is not the essential factor for the quota. Rather, exemplary women in exposed positions - such as, erstwhile, the *Heroes of Labour* in the GDR - are supposed to stimulate women to seek promotion. The lack of such a pursuit of top positions is confirmed by a poll conducted by *Accenture*. [viii] It suggests that only one in four women are wishing to move up, as they are discontented with their present professional situation. Only just 28% of women want to further their career. Among men, in contrast, it is 50% wishing to advance. The desire for professional change generally seems to be less pronounced among women than it is among men. [ix]

IDENTIFICATION AS LIBERATION: 'GOLDEN SKIRTS'

Quota-women in top positions are meant to seduce highly qualified yet work-resistant women so that they refuse part-time work and do not give a life with children priority. Rather, the desire for a complete professional integration ought to be fostered. The economic argument is that educated women, who are preoccupied for several years with childcare, are not only withdrawn from the labour market, but furthermore, their initial education is not profitable. This, however, is true to a certain extent only. For academic education is linked to a high degree to the development of extra-functional abilities that lie beyond the mere acquisition of specialist knowledge - such as history, pedagogy, technic, or medicine. And these former are conveyed to children through their upbringing. Among those are the ability to verbalise, self-reflexion, self-management, responsibility, systematic thinking, empathy and assertiveness; simply all the qualities that are less pronounced or non-existent in the lower strata.

Essentially, the differing parenting-styles are determined by the parents' own class and educational level. The transfer of a privileged upbringing from one generation to the next is thereby continuous. It does pay off economically. Incidentally, it ought to be an individual's decision whether he/she expects the cost of one's education to be partially or wholly amortised. Notwithstanding, it all suggests that coercion into the labour market is to be replaced by a seductive and narcissistically quickening type of recruitment. But what is the essence of this seduction? What are the underlying wishes of well-educated women? And what is the image of women that is nurtured by quota-supporters?

In Scandinavian countries, quota-women on supervisory and executive boards are labelled as 'women in golden skirts'. It makes sense that this term has become established and it initiated a rightly derisive commentary culture. That is because this term is ambiguous. The colour of the skirt, gold, recalls a valuable material, but simultaneously it is a fashion item and only seasonally significant for women. It is a valuable piece for embellishment, calling for admiration. It is fashion. It expresses a certain quality and a pronounced female one. It neither acknowledges nor symbolises any form of achievement, it just stands for stylish, everyday demeanour. Therefore, the acquisition of the highest salaries and social status is put on the same level as the purchase

and wearing of a golden skirt. At the core of this is something real, regarding the salaries and the status, but also something pejorative.

It is insinuated that highest job qualifications and determinedly working one's way up can be simply selected just as a fashionable item of clothing can. As if this golden skirt could be put aside any time, like an old accessory, to be replaced by the next fashion. Directorial positions are transferred into the realm of seasonal consumption of fashion. Constantly working one's way up to success, under stressful circumstances, is being equalled with the spontaneity of a shopping spree. This is not very flattering, as it insinuates that women neglect professional requirements and mistake their vocational responsibilities for consumerism. Apparently, these women, who call for the quotas politically, have a derisive or cynical view of the requirements for leading personnel and, in the end, of the principle of merit. That is why female politicians are behaving consistently if they try to seduce other women into leading positions by way of offering naïve identification - for instance, images of successful women in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. Hard requirements one has to master do not feature in their argumentation. The quota-protagonists' naïveté, averse to effort, could be linked to the fact that many of them only know to access the professional world by means of identification. They have their own phantasies about the men's world of work, how it looks like or functions, but they have not set foot in a factory, a mine, or an office. Identification is apparently the way of quota-supporters to paint the manly workaday life in bright colours. It is a fantasy world in which they do not partake. The identification with illusiveness functions as a protection from the severity of the working life.

IDENTIFICATION, JUST LIKE IN THE CINEMA

The argument about successful women as role models for the younger generation of women draws from the simple mechanism of identification, alien to the sensual experience of the professional world. The supporters of the quota are evidently convinced by the notion that this mechanism alone is sufficient to motivate women to seek higher purposes.

The quota-protagonists' escapism suggests narcissistic self-involvement and superficiality. They transfer this onto women whom they want to see in top positions. This self-image does not draw from reality, but rather resembles idealising notions of femininity as perceived through the

mass media. These are identifications such as spectators may develop with the captain and his female officers of *The Dream Boat*, or female police inspectors at the *Coast Guard* (both German TV shows), and especially the protagonists in *Sex and the City*. This fantasy world has nothing to do with the life of either the personnel on a cruise ship or the managerial staff on the bridge. The narcissistic projection, the joyous emulation, prevents the acknowledgement of several necessary requirements for success, such as self-management, equanimity, assertiveness, stress-resistance and team-playing. It is subject to denial that the path to success is paved with exertions, with tough competition and frustrating back-lashes. [x]

This blindness for reality is probably due to the fact that quota-supporters are rooted in organisations where they have the status or fulfil the function of the quota-women themselves. Or they hark from political family dynasties and receive directly a post and dignity without having made some effort. Generally, it can be claimed: The readiness to accept quotas is relatively larger, if success or existence of a company or an institution is less dependent on market performance. That applies to public service broadcasting authorities, bureaucracies, especially within political parties, the church, schools and parts of the humanities. The relative neglect of qualifications and acceptance lower levels of accomplishment signifies a devaluation of the recruitment process. Contaminations such as these are the more established the less success has to be proven. Instead, factors can be the proof of membership to a party or religion, as much as social provenance, nationality or social class. Women obviously encounter these requirements, too. They have to fulfil these as much as everybody else as they are common and affect all applicants. They do not represent discrimination, but are typical selection criteria adjusted to the culture and tradition of the specific business. Admittedly, concrete discrimination does occur. Yet, discrimination is not exclusively suffered by women. For instance, it was far more difficult in the past for medical students from Austria's working-class to train as specialist registrars compared to the students from medical families. Upward climbers very often encounter the defensive culture of those enjoying a special social status. Just think of the exclusivity of the 'Rhenish capitalism' in the post-war era. All of this is well-established.

QUOTA - AN INSTRUMENT OF ABSORBING QUALIFIED LABOUR? OR: 'THE GENITAL QUOTA'

[XI]

The question of the actual suitability of the quota for women is increasingly pushed into the background within this exalted debate. If no structural change occurs, an individual promotion becomes part of an endless project of so-called 'equality bureaucracies', leading a parasitic existence parallel to productive structures. This can only be avoided if this individual promotion does not only serve cosmetic political ends. Rather, it has to convey to women further missing extra-functional abilities, now and for many generations to come. This is not possible through the perpetuation of equality bureaucracies, but only through the changing female life-priorities. The latter have been evolving successfully for a while, entirely unaided by these interventions.

Women cannot acquire their missing abilities through the short-term appeal of women's magazines such as *Brigitte*, *Elle*; of celebrities such as Claudia Schiffer, Naomi Campbell; of the identification with the career of Anne Marie Slaughter in Obama's government; or of female newsreaders. In contrast, such role models and media may be appeal enough for the purchase of a face cream, any kind of wardrobe, or cleaning products. It is out of touch with reality in as much as this mechanism is meant to be sufficient for the acquisition of professional excellency, although it only indicates: 'I want to be like her, I want to have what she has, I want to have her breasts, her make-up, her seat in the supervisory board or management, with a chauffeur and a golf-club membership.' The process of appropriation through identification is superficial because it only reflects appearances. It is a process of imitation rather than one of autonomy and effort. In terms of developmental psychology, it is much closer to the infantile. Therefore, this is not appropriate for adults and it is, furthermore, highly unfit to represent the corporate requirements for our top executives.

This process resembles the world of young children, who appropriate the alien world in its colourfulness. Later on, this is followed by more complex procedures to not only see this world but to understand it. However, when adults apply this pattern it is testimony only to infantile naïveté. Every cinemagoer identifies temporarily with the characters of the film and returns to reality afterwards. If teenagers become violent themselves after having seen a violent film, it

means that they could not find a way out of their state of identification with the violent heroes, thus continuing their game outside of the cinema. They misconceive reality and endanger themselves and others. As this is about a simple imitation of others, we can identify envy of the other's belonging. Such envy is by no means problematic as long as there is a willingness to work for the desirable through personal effort. This is not possible via identification alone. Particularly, as all requirements for top executives are arranged by law and not through the visualised golden skirt.

I believe this term took hold in Scandinavian countries as it focuses on the narcissistic smugness, as is common in women's magazines, for instance, in order to increase their sales. The fact that women are missing certain prerequisites for success in management is apparently insignificant, given that the quota bureaucracy is already taking care of it. As if women had found within this arrangement someone who is reading an intense desire from their lips. And that one does not have to fulfil oneself any longer. If women had to do this themselves, it would reduce the narcissistic enjoyment of wish-fulfilment considerably. That is why women have disproportionately higher esteem for gifted diamonds versus those acquired with their own money. Although women may intensely desire a transfer of this culture of gifting into the professional world (as we have indicators to believe they do), this yearning has no future despite Scandinavian golden skirts.[xii] Evidently, the majority of young women are oriented toward the professions' reality principle and do not expect the highest happiness to be awarded by men as in their grandmother's days. Culturally and psychologically, the quota-perspective is a regression toward traditional gender arrangements, which party politics aims to revive. This regression could well be attributed to a fear of too much unaccustomed responsibility as a consequence of new liberties (Bruno Bettelheim).

The quota debate is part of a wide-spread triumphalist rhetoric.[xiii] It does not only celebrate women's successes that have not even taken place yet, it furthermore is bound to the men's downfall. In effect, this only constitutes a transfer of traditions from the private sphere into the public domain. And as men sense this intuitively, they prefer to remain silent. [xiv] The old arrangements are not being altered if women skirmish on male terrain without becoming actual

competitors and carriers of responsibility. Were that the case, they would represent the highest risk to men's feelings of self-worth. And this is why quota-women cannot be regarded by the younger women as the embodiment of arduously acquired success. You cannot embody something you are not or do not have. Quota successes, therefore, do not impress the generation of younger women much. Among young men, however, this does not only lead to irritation, but even to protest - as was the case at the University of Vienna, where the admission to the medical faculty was not based on exam result any longer, but proportionally according to the number of male and female applicants.

THE IMPACT OF THE QUOTA ON THE GENERATION OF DAUGHTERS AND SONS

Initially, quota politics had been justified with the reference to discrimination at the workplace. As the arguments did not uphold, they silently disappeared. Since then, the rationale has become more and more arbitrary. For instance, a journalist for the newspaper *Handelsblatt*, Tanja Kewes, attempted to conjure the 'angry female citizen'[xv] (in analogy to the 'Stuttgart-21-movement'), in order to forge a political alliance between upward climbers with adjustment issues on the one hand and the ecological movement on the other. Women were fed up at 'having to be twice as competent functionally in order to have a career, at having to make excuses for everything and nothing - such as their too short skirt, their childlessness, their severity, their structuredness.' This goes in hand with the higher expectations of newcomers such as fathers on the playground or at the domestic cooker with a demand for more participation in child rearing. The natural monopoly of influence on the world of the infant held by mothers makes it hard for them to compete in this domain. Owners of a status are always reluctant to integrate 'alien' newcomers into their group - whether these are men on the playground or women in executive positions. This is especially the case if novices offer promises of salvation,[xvi] representing themselves as the embodiment of a better future and claiming to have overcome the disadvantages of the past - whatever these might have been. According to this line of thought, the financial crisis of 2008, for instance, could have been averted through the mere presence and application of female virtues. Karl Marx had imagined the proletarian revolution as the beginning of the Empire of Freedom. The entry of women into supervisory and executive boards, in contrast,

is positioned into the realm of financial stability.[xvii]

The potpourri of random substantiations was widened by the Austrian family minister Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek with the reference to the 'double burden of the woman' through the combination of job and family. Missing qualifications should not be to the detriment of women, as these are lacking due to 'structural disadvantage' in the first place. Equally, additional salary payments ought to be introduced until the differential in salaries of alleged 23% has been abolished. The quota therefore ought to even out these salary imbalances; but upon closer inspection, the disparity shows to originate from the multifactorial better qualifications of men. Quite similar are the arguments of women's representatives on faculty boards who want to push through less qualified female applicants for professorships. It is secretly acknowledged among colleagues that this is often not about the bias toward women with similar qualifications than those of men, but rather a preference for women in general, be they sufficiently qualified or not.

The mentioning of 'structural disadvantages' indicates furthermore a problematic feature, dating back to the heyday of identity politics of sexual and ethnic minorities in the last decades. Women are - such as sexual minorities - classified as members of a deprived group. From this membership derives the right for all members of the collective to be supported. Initially one of the adamant supporters of this policy was the French philosopher Julia Kristeva, but she eventually distanced herself from this stance in 2001.[xviii] Yet the quota rhetoric stubbornly holds on to the belief that women ought to be assigned to an identifying collective of victims, whereas it is precisely this collectivising that robs them of their subjectivity and individual responsibility. As social moments do not have much impact any longer, it is their genital, their anatomy that constitutes the abstract collective in the end. Affiliation, education, ethnos and personal responsibility, and other factors as formative elements, are disregarded.

Seen in this light, social mobility is always a political success and never a personal one. Utterly in contrast with the women's movement, feminism established the loss of subjectivity as a mighty tradition and within this, women are generally perceived only as victims. The same is true for partnerships, family life, conflicts culminating in violence [xix] - such as divorce battles [xx]-, or disputes at the workplace. The unifying element that women can hold onto is their victimhood,

simply an all but biological essentialism. This resembles the notions of men and women, arguing in traditional terms. By modifying a statement about female sexuality by Luce Irigaray, the core of the homogenising of all women can be climactically described in the *Vagina Monologues*. Because for Irigaray, the man's penetration into the vagina is the source of violence and the destruction of woman's dialogue with herself. [xxi]

THE ISSUE WITH ROLE MODELS

Simply seeing the golden skirt will not motivate daughters to achieve excellence in their professional lives, but rather the participation in the daily life of women who make an effort, who know their strengths and weaknesses, who deal with conflicts at the workplace, who enforce salary increases, who aim for higher positions during reorganisations and who can cope with crisis. Daughters have to experience this in a participatory manner. Men alone can rarely provide sufficient motivation for this. Unless, if fathers do it very early on in their lives.

At best, you can say of a quota woman that it was the quota bureaucracy that promoted her. Merely wanting to be like successful women and men in a company is not sufficient. Just as little as the wish to show men that you can do it just as well as they do. Motivations built on envy, malevolence, cantankerousness are not sustainable. It is important for young women to say 'That is what I am going to do, as it interests me; others should choose their path, I choose mine.' Only through this confidence and participation in a strenuous process can others be motivated to imitation. Most young women give preference to this path. Hillary Clinton had to experience in March 2016, during her quest for party nomination for the presidential election, that the rhetoric of victimhood is not successful among young women any more. Young women today consider themselves as individuals and not as members of an ominous collective of victims.

Despite the fact that the political mobilising for women's quotas has little public support, companies will have to continue to create token positions within their supervisory boards due to political pressure. These positions do not cause damage and the costs are just peanuts. It is in this spirit that the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* comments on March 9th 2011, on the executive position at *Daimler AG* awarded to the former judge and expert in constitutional law Christine Hohmann-Dennhardt. Such a habit of implementing token positions could be a political solution

with conciliating effect. A more thorough examination reveals this is simply a degradation of all capable women.

The fact that well-intentioned actions can have the adverse effect can also be seen in other contexts: the advancement of female pupils unrelated to their academic achievement and due to a personal preference by their teacher. Their grades may be good, but their self-esteem is being damaged in the process. [xxii]

In a similar fashion, universities undermine women's feelings of self-worth and confidence in their abilities. This is due to the premiums the institutions receive that are proportionally bound to the number of their female students, PhD candidates and professors. This causes self-doubt, which burden the women in their professional lives. 'What am I worth? Do I meet the requirements or am I being aided out of pity, because there is no confidence in my abilities?' Paternalistic forms of advancement counteract the intention to prepare women for the labour market and to convey experience onto younger women. This is stripping them of the opportunity to gain extra functional abilities. As token women are freed from the requirements altogether, they cannot pass these abilities on - neither within a company, at a university, within the family or any other social institution.

QUOTA POLITICS AND GENDER ARRANGEMENT

Quota politics discriminates against everyone who is highly motivated. It violates against the principles of a meritocracy and undermines an essential source of self-assurance of both men and women. Secondly, it influences the way men and women encounter each other in their daily lives. Quota-women do experience an increase in status, but the downside is secret abashment. After all, they are aware that they have circumvented the principle of achievement. Humiliation is not only felt in relation to male achievers but also toward women who successfully followed the path of accomplishment. The omnipresence of the quota in public dialogue, as much as within the companies, subjects accomplished women especially to the lingering doubt of being part of the quota arrangement. This way, traditional notions are being revived according to which women's actual area of life is at home and at the stove, after all. This doubt is one of the consequences of the quota and hitherto not considered. That is, how women are viewed

reductively anew despite their accomplished successes. Likewise, the preference allocated by quota is mingled with the dark habit of entertaining a sexual relationship with a superior, as this can be profitable. Thereby moving the old model of 'sex in exchange for ascent' into proximity of the in-company quota woman. Occasionally, the mentor system in companies and universities are hiding a hybrid form of the old sex-related promotion practices. This is degrading for accomplished women. It insinuates that they are achieving something in exchange of sexuality, which they cannot through effort.

Within the Anglo-Saxon sociology, the researcher Catherin Hakim appealed to women to use their 'erotic capital' in order to push their careers. [xxiii] The competitive advantage resulted mainly from the fact that female sexual desire was less pronounced than that of men. The larger libido of men ("They only want one thing!") is said to be for women an inexhaustible resource of a perpetually renewing erotic capital, calling for utilisation by all women. The personal commercialisation of the women's erotic capital is nothing new. Yet it was not openly discussed in the past. And to offer it in exchange for promotion was considered as undignified. Beauty, however, was recognised as an aesthetic allure. It facilitated privately and professionally the upward mobility (sometimes through marriage). [xxiv] However, the premium on women's beauty (which is still offered by men today and which can be increased by women through a less developed sexual desire) [xxv] ought to be optimised through the target-oriented application of this erotic capital, according to Hakim.[xxvi] She recommends, admittedly, to change the order of things: first the promotion, then the sex!

THE QUOTA'S NEO-CONSERVATIVE CORE

At the core of the momentous problem with women quotas lies the anachronistic notion of the nature of women. Simultaneously, an equally strong view of men is being revived. Women, as much as men, could feel reinforced to resuscitate their old life arrangements and consider these as the only true way. In accordance with this, women do need a supporting man and if he is useless, then the providing state has to intervene. That alters the life-style. It is just the same with a tyre change: all women are able to do it, yet there are so many obliging men along the roadside, impeding women to apply their abilities. And many women simply cannot pass on this offered

assistance. The resurgence of this increasingly inconsistent arrangement of relationships is revealing a considerable willingness to return to the traditional. Yet this stands in the way of both the men and women's ability to flexibly shape their own life-styles. As long as the men's purpose in life is fixed to having to bear the main responsibility in providing for the woman and children, then they will not be able to free themselves from that role and cannot increase the participation in the family life. More and more they are pushed into the position inhabited by women before they entered the workforce in large numbers: 'Do it all in order to have it all.' [xxvii]

The former courtesy of men toward women, however, is a ritual irrelevance. That is to say, men's support for the quota - occasionally coined as the Kimmel-Sattelberger-Syndrome - signals the transitions from ritual protection to patronising assistance. Perhaps this is why many men remain silent about the disadvantages that arise for them. Women, who are supporters of the measures, correspondingly embody the old-fashioned expectation to be spared of the hardships of professional life. Without having to renounce any of its advantages. They want to have that shiny success without being exposed to the dull efforts of career advancement.

The insistence on this kind of politics is an expression of a generational problem, still linked melancholically to the old. This ambivalence is reigning over women, who do stand their ground in the non-domestic world, but who simultaneously want to hang on to the family's protection within their professional routine. The fact that rather traditional men among this generation are supporting the quota demonstrates the awkwardness that has settled into men's complimentary roles.

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THE AFTERMATH OF VIOLENCE: DIFFICULTIES FACED IN THE ATHLETIC CAREER TRANSITION OF CONTACT SPORT ATHLETES

Gary Senecal



ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the effects of enabling violence, the provocation of violent tendencies, and, ultimately, the emotional draw to violence in the lived experience of individuals who have competed in contact sports. Many athletes will leave the unique social arena perpetuated in contact sports for careers in a society governed by laws of civility and propriety that suppress and deter the level of aggression and violence condoned in their former career. Many of the participants in this study expressed how they find satisfaction in violence and were initially drawn to contact sports as a result of the longing to express violent mindsets and behaviors. However, in the advent of retirement, participants expressed how they often miss the process of releasing aggression and engaging in physical contact regularly. The vacuum for violence experienced in retirement often led to certain psychosocial frustrations for participants in their lives after sport.

KEY WORDS: Aggressive Outlets, Reversal Theory, Violence and Motivation, Violence and Arousal, Psychoanalysis, Athletic Career Transition, Contact Sports, Catharsis, Social Reintegration

INTRODUCTION

Recent attention has been paid to the serious difficulties that former contact sport athletes may face in their career transitions out of competition. Much of the attention has been offered through the lens of neuropsychology and the discovery of the singular neuropathology chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) in the brains of deceased former contact sport athletes (Stern, et al., 2011). Nonetheless, some of the correlating symptoms to CTE – irritability, explosive outbursts, rage, domestic abuse, high-risk behavior, suicidality, and an outright display of violent mindsets and antisocial behaviors – can also be tied to the promotion of violence inherent in contact sports. Despite the volumes of research being produced around head trauma, only a relatively small amount of formal psychological research has been offered examining how contact sport athletes respond to the conditioned cognition of violence formed in their athletic careers (Zillman, et al., 1972; Woods, 2016).

This paper will examine the effects of promoting violence, the provocation of violent tendencies, and, ultimately, the emotional draw to violence for individuals who have worked in a career that encourages and allows violence and aggression. Many athletes will leave the unique social arena of violence perpetuated in contact sports for a career in a society governed by laws of civility and propriety that suppress and deter the level and types of aggression and violence endorsed in their former career. Much theory in psychology speculates that the draw to violence is only a conditioned acquisition of behavior over time. However, many individuals in this study expressed how they simply find satisfaction in acting aggressively and engaging in violent circumstances. Several expressed how they were initially drawn to contact sports as a result of this longing to express violent mindsets and behaviors and now, in the advent of retirement, they simply miss the process of releasing aggression and engaging in physical contact regularly.

In the conclusion, an examination of psychodynamic theory will be appropriate in attempting to conceptualize the draw of violence. Beyond this theoretical examination, this paper will investigate the psychosocial effects of being trained and rewarded to perform violence and release aggression on such a regular basis. Focus will be on how these effects may play a significant role in causing complications for the athlete in his or her career transition

out of contact sports. I will hypothesize that the ability to replicate some emotional, social, and physical aspects of violence as it was experienced in one's career may also prove imperative in one's transition back into civil society.

CATHARSIS AND INSTINCT THEORIES

Catharsis and instinct theories must be addressed in attempting to conceptualize the draw to violence for individuals who find they long for unique expressions of aggressive mindsets and behaviors. Freud – as well as psychoanalytic theory, at large – has devoted serious intellectual resources in attempting to conceptualize why some humans are so easily provoked and so readily enticed by violence, antisocial relations, and high-risk situations. Freud's original conceptualization of this propensity was coined the death instinct, appearing as a revision of his view of the economic delivery of drives in his enigmatic text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922/2010). For Freud, the theory of Thanatos takes much of its original inspiration from the - at the time - recent scientific discovery of cells in the human body that are biologically designed to die. This biological anomaly serves as a metaphor for Freud; a metaphysical theory of human existence that is able to account for our most confounding behavior, thought, and desire. From this theoretical jumping off point, Freud attempts to make sense of desires and behaviors that muddy the otherwise clear divide between our pursuit of pleasure and our avoidance of pain. Freud points to a series of case studies - veterans experiencing relived trauma from war, individuals suffering from repetitive compulsion disorders, masochistic behavior, and even a close examination of a peculiar game his grandson would play when his mother (Freud's daughter) left the home to travel - that demanded he reexamine his original understanding of drives as pleasure seeking and pain avoiding/reducing. Freud articulates this Thanatos as, "an urge in organic life to restore an earlier state of things." In other words, the primal biological urge in all life to ultimately return to the origin of non-existence (i.e. death) (Freud, 1922/2010).

Beyond this earlier text, Freud's seminal work *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930/1962) most succinctly espouses his theory of evolutionary instincts that must be addressed if humans are going to live within societal bounds and overcome neurosis. For Freud, civilization was a great advancement of human evolution. Moving out of torrid world of

survival and reproduction, savagery and will, and animal tendencies that humans engaged in for thousands of years was a major evolutionary step forward. Yet, sacrificed in the civilized advancement of law, order, and safety were a whole array of mindsets, behaviors, and social engagements that were originally present and, thus, natural to the human psyche. The repression of these primal instincts - either through law and order or through the psychosocial tendency to uphold one's propriety and refute the acknowledgement of their existence - formed a sense of neurosis in our psyche and, consequently, hysterical conversions revealed as symptoms in our body. Freud saw these instincts as a form of psychosomatic energy that must have some proper cathartic release even within the rigorous demands of living in an organized, peaceful, and civilized society. For Freud, this catharsis would be psychotherapy, but later thinkers in the tradition of psychoanalysis offered a wide array of solutions to forming a healthy cathartic release of these primal drives (Reich, 1927; Deleuze & Guatarri, 1972). Inevitably, this would be the challenge - the new evolutionary struggle - of the modern human: how can one acknowledge and even release one's primal mindsets, behaviors, and desires while respecting the necessary boundaries of a civilized world?

Starting from a similar theoretical position as Freud, Konrad Lorenz (1963/1966) contests that humans must reconcile the tension between living in a civilized society and repressing basic instincts of survival, reproduction, and the protection of property. Biological predispositions toward fight, flight, protection, reproduction, and safety must be restricted while conducting one's behavior within civilized society. Yet, despite any effort at containment, the instincts exist and seek expression in their full range. There is danger in the repression of these instincts as it can lead to their wanton and spurious release in an unpredictable, vicious, and harmful manner. Ultimately, Lorenz advocates for society to offer and encourage unique outlets for these instincts that allow for healthy release without the violation of social norms of violence and antisocial behavior. Sports would serve as an appropriate outlet for the release of our primal instincts within the laws and social norms established in civilized society.

VIOLENCE AND THE DRAW TO SPORT

There is a body of research examining the role that violence plays in drawing individuals

to the arena of sport. As far back as the 1970's, psychologists were examining the relationship between exercise, arousal, and aggression. Zillman, Katcher, and Milarsky (1972) performed a Milgram-esque experiment on the conditions that would make it likely for a participant to perform a high voltage electrical shock to a peer. Participants were put in different scenarios and then asked to administer the shocks. One of the two groups of participants who delivered the highest levels of electrical shock to their peers were those who were aroused by exercise prior to being asked to administer the shock. The theory that can be drawn from this experiment is that sports, in particular contact sports that involve a high level of arousal and anger, make an individual prone to increased levels of hostile aggression beyond the arena of sport. Ultimately, Zillman and his team concluded that the experience of competing arouses an individual in a way that makes them less averse to violence, hostility, and antisocial behavior, perhaps even luring them toward a propensity for these behaviors after competing or training.

Kerr (1999; 2002; 2005; 2012; 2015) offers research on the potential positive effects of violence, as well as a healthy attraction to violence in contact sport athletes. According to Kerr, the International Society for Sport Psychology (ISSP) incorrectly conflated all forms of violence in sport when they offered an unequivocal stand against all violence in sport in the 1990's (Tenenbaum, et al., 1997; Tenenbaum, et al., 2000). Kerr uses reversal theory (Apter, 2001) to re-conceptualize the motivational processes, social experience, attractions, and pleasures that can realistically be derived from violence in sport in a healthy manner. Reversal theory offers a model of motivation and emotion that focuses on juxtaposing motivational states and individual experiences (e.g., regarding our motivations toward rules, we are driven by a desire to conform and rebel). In the case of sport, our relationships with others are driven by conflicting desires to uphold mastery/dominance and sympathy/care. The individual's ability to change states over time is based off of the ability to fulfill his or her motives within the previous state. In other words, athletes who are able to fulfill their motives around mastery and dominance of others in sport will then be offered space to shift toward an emotional and motivational lens of sympathy toward others (presumably, outside of the arena of sport). The ability to achieve competence in one state is what allows individuals to then reexamine and shift an emotional lens to juxtaposing motivational goals. Finally, a differentiation is made by

Kerr between sanctioned and unsanctioned acts of violence, as well as the type of violence that contact sport athletes engage in versus spectator violence around the sport (e.g. hooliganism in soccer).

Kerr (2012) also examines the nature of sanctioned and unsanctioned violence in the world of rugby, focusing specifically on the renowned and ubiquitous presence of unsanctioned violent behaviors in history of rugby (e.g. biting, eye-gouging, testicle grabbing, and spear tackling, among others). Much of Kerr's previous application of reversal theory to account for sanctioned violence is likewise applied here to account for these acts of unsanctioned violence. However, unique to this text for Kerr is the application of a new term to conceptualize violent behavior in team contact sports: protective or supportive violence. For Kerr, protective/supportive violence is driven by a motivation to defend, rescue, or come to the aid of a teammate within a competitive event. Similar to violence motivated by reversal theory, Kerr explains how an underlying level of pleasure and arousal are derived by teammates who can successfully use protective violence to defend their teammates, rectify an injustice committed by the opponent, or simply terrify the opponent in such a way that harming one's teammates is no longer a rational choice. Finally, Kerr (2015) offers insight into how an attraction to physicality and sanctioned aggression is also present in team contact sports for female athletes. Female athletes found these actions pleasurable and capable of eliciting a high level of arousal. Ultimately, Kerr has overwhelmingly demonstrated the real draw to violent behaviors and tendencies within the sport world, as well as just how aggression and physicality in sport can be perceived as both a singular and positive component of these games.

Woods (2016) examines the potential correlation between domestic violence rates and college athletes and cites several pieces of research showing the increased rates of domestic violence among athletes (Crosset, Benedict, & McDonald, 1995; Benedict & Klein, 1997; Koss & Gaines, 1993). Contrary to the findings of Zillman, et al., Woods argues that despite presumptions that there is some direct causal link between the mindsets and behaviors formed in sport and a resulting level of violence off the field, it is actually almost impossible to truly tell where the conditioning of violent mindsets and behaviors began with athletes. For example, it is unclear whether a violent upbringing drew the individual to sports or if sports

served to draw violence out of the individual. Yet, despite Woods' speculative conclusions from this study, at least some link drawn between increased levels of domestic violence and athletic participation has been made evident (Morris, 2014) and further empirical research must be committed to this topic to understand what is provoking athletes to be more violent than control populations and why violent individuals are more drawn to athletic endeavors.

There is also a debate in the research over whether or not directed violence in sport can lead to a substantial reduction in ensuing aggressive acts. As mentioned previously with Freud and Lorenz, the notion here is that violence in sport can work as a form of assertion – and, consequently, catharsis – as opposed to aggression. In other words, physical behaviors in sport may be used to establish dominance on the field as opposed to harming the opponent and, consequently, used as a form of catharsis prior to the release of wanton violent behaviors (Thirer, 1994). Only little empirical support has been provided on this theory while a larger portion of experimental data has shown little decrease (and more likely an increase) in violent tendencies after engaging in or witnessing a violent event (Bandura, 1973; Goldstein & Arms, 1971; Arms, Russell, & Sandilands, 1979; Berkowitz 1989).

Social psychology offers concepts such as deindividuation that may offer space to help understand the relationship between sport participation and violence (Festinger, 1952; Zimbardo, 1969). Team sports in particular can provoke a loss of individuality in the arena and, consequently, a loss of responsibility for the behaviors that one pursues. Similar to a riot, the promotion of the team or some higher purpose over the individual might open a space that provokes this individual to engage in violent endeavors and be drawn to hostile behavior in a way that eschews any sense of personal accountability. Also, researchers have argued that the process of socialization should be given serious consideration when examining the etiology of violence and aggression in contact sport athletes (Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005). However, another debate arises when reviewing the socialization and violence in sport literature. Researchers are simply uncertain as to what the definitive affect of socialization in sport will be on the athlete, even in contact sports. In some cases, athletes are socialized to engage in physical and even wanton aggressive behaviors within sport and beyond (Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005). IN others, athletes are taught cooperation, teamwork, obedience, and respect for one's peers while being socialized in sports (Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005; Bloom & Smith, 1996).

Finally, Tenenbaum, et al. (1997 & 2000) argue, that by focusing on deindividuation, reinforcement, and socialization as the source of violence in sport, psychologists are distracted from more plausible causal factors:

There is no need to rehash examples of violence and aggression in sport. The focus should be on the skills demonstrated and strategies employed by athletes and coaches rather than on acts of aggression. There are many sensitive and humane athletes and coaches who are involved in sport at all levels. (Tenenbaum, et al., 1997).

Tenenbaum, et al., argue that a greater examination of *other* factors in sport (e.g. “winning at all costs”) should be in play when attempting to understand how the athlete comes to terms with the inherent violence in sport. The key is to assist those involved in sport to be educated on the greater cultural influences around them and how certain nuances of the game (e.g. violent and assertive behaviors) are uniquely manifest as a result of these demands. Ultimately, it is the motivational mindset by which one pursues sport – as opposed to the sport itself - that correlates with a propensity for violence by an individual. This theory will be returned to in the further discussion section on account of participants in this study saying they enjoyed violence but found ways to use it inside and outside of sport for productive, healthy, and pro-social ends.

METHODS

Participants

For this project, nine semi-structured interviews with retired contact sport athletes were completed. The minimum level of experience competing to be considered for the interviews was scholarship-collegiate and/or equivalent elite level participation, with the hope of gathering elite and professional level participants, if possible. The age groups of these athletes varied in range from one to five years after their careers have completed, five to twenty years after their careers have completed, and twenty years or more after their careers have completed. The relative amount of time the athlete has from his career provided some unique nuances to this study, as well as an examination of former athletes at different points in their non-athletic careers. When selecting participants from whom to solicit the data, three in each age/retirement time range were selected.

Procedures Used

Semi-structured interviews soliciting open-ended responses allowed for the participants to engage a range of questions according to their own experience of transition from a competitive career. These questions attempt to evoke a type of answer that will describe in detail the “what” of the experience for the individual. The hope in asking open ended questions that evoke the lived experience of the athlete is to gather rich, nuanced and detailed descriptions that can ultimately evoke and give rise to grounded codes and cross-data themes.

Data Analysis

The analytic methodology used for this project is a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis (Braun, V. & Clarke, V., 2006) espouses a flexible and varying theoretical framework that acknowledges the need to let the data determine the themes and potential theoretical model that may arise. There is no master narrative approach in thematic analysis methodology; the data will always determine the theoretical construct that the analysis must develop. There are likewise very few, if any, theoretical presumptions made by thematic analysis prior to assessing the data sets.

The thematic analysis applied to this data set can be broken down to a five- step process. First, the data were transcribed from the semi-structured interviews. After transcribing the interviews from recording, I moved line-by-line through the transcriptions, combing it for the semantic themes that would arise in the specific descriptions of the participants’ lived experience. Second, meanings were assessed as they arose from the themes and descriptions of the themes were fleshed-out, detailed, and made clear. Third, themes were arranged into categories after comparisons were made among themes. In this step, themes with enough commonality were grouped together into categories. Fourth, higher order categories were formed from a comparison of the meanings that were formed from the themes. These themes served to structure a tree of the data analysis, filling in the branches of these themes with the elucidated meanings and supporting data. Lastly, a final review of the plausibility of the themes selected was assessed.

Thematic analysis ultimately allows space for flexibility in interpreting the data from the interviews. The initial coding phase of the data will espouse a, line-by-line and word-by-word,

analytic and open-ended examination of the text. In this process, codes that arise within one interview and across several interviews are tied into themes as they recur on a consistent basis, generally staying attuned to codes and themes that occur frequently and with consistency. Beyond only examining the consistencies in the data and naming them “themes,” any unique phrases, inconsistencies, or unusual statements offered by the participant become open-game for thematic analysis as well.

With all research, in particular qualitative research, generalizability can be difficult to fully assess. Certainly in this project, the utilization of nine interviews was not intended to provide a definitive picture of generalizable themes. It would be consistent with the history and application of qualitative research to use restraint in presuming the possibility of generalizability.

ANALYSIS

Satisfaction in the Violent Nature of Contact Sports

I will begin by examining a general theme that applied to many of the participants interviewed for this project: the overall sense of intrinsic satisfaction in violent behaviors, aggressive mindsets, and the ability to display of one’s physical prowess through the venue of contact sports. For the participants who expressed this notion, the ability to be violent and the anticipation of violence in competition were driving forces behind their motivation to compete. These participants expressed that they were comfortable with and held nostalgia for the violent side of contact sports during their competitive career. Several of the participants in this study received only a modest level of financial compensation for competing at an elite level. Yet, they knowingly and willingly continued to expose their body to physical harm in the desire to engage in contact sports.

Paul articulates this sense stating, “*What I do miss is the ability to turn that switch on and lose it, and, legally, do things...I miss that at times.*” In this quote, Paul is expressing how there was an ability offered in contact sports to demonstrate his physical prowess upon opponents. As a former NFL middle linebacker, Paul was praised and rewarded for his ability to deliver violence on his opponent, as well as being isolated from any legal ramifications that would occur if any of these behaviors were demonstrated in civil society. The ability to be

violent regularly, to “legally, do things,” that would be deemed criminal outside of the unique space of the NFL, is remembered fondly and with a sense of nostalgia. Moreover, there is a level of lament over the inability to recover a structured and meaningful release of these aggressive tendencies in their lives after their athletic career in team contact sports.

Paul also describes the process of conjuring violent tendencies as “turning on” and being able to “lose it.” It is valuable to reflect on precisely what is being “turned on” and what is being “lost” here. What is turned on is alluded to – a psychosomatic energy that must be conjured in order to propel one to deliver violence on one’s opponent. Such violent behavior is not something that can occur in the homeostasis of a balanced cognition and a calm nervous system. However, Paul continues, expressing how even though he misses the ability to be violent, he does not live his day-to-day life in a state of rage or aggression: “I was friends, very good friends, with a lot of the guys off the field...But in the game, there was always that switch that just went off and nobody else existed.” In his life after sports, Paul is a school administrator, coach, husband, father of three, and he has never been convicted of a crime. In order to be violent, a specific form of energy must have been conjured prior to contact sport competition. It must also be examined what Paul means when he says he misses the ability to “lose it.” It appears that Paul is referring to a releasing of energy that is continuously restricted or limited as a result of the laws, societal norms, and restrictions of his responsibilities in a civilized society. Outside of the singular vacuum of contact sports and the NFL, Paul cannot behave in a way that releases emotional and physical energy resulting from violent mindsets and behaviors. What is “let go” is the clear range of emotions and behaviors that must be severely held in check in his civilized life outside of football.

Along similar lines, when asked what he enjoyed about these violent and aggressive opportunities in his career, Paul expresses:

Probably the ability to hit, or really do whatever I wanted and get away with it... And the satisfaction of just, you know, hitting somebody and the sound, the bloom, the blam, it just...and you’re getting away with it and you’re getting paid to do it!

There are several important nuances to this passage. First, Paul reiterates a point made previously about the blurred lines of law and order when it comes to what was acceptable in

the arena of contact sports. He relished the ability to, “*do whatever I wanted and get away with it.*” Second, Paul was intrinsically satisfied with the process of distributing violence. Even the sheer sound of violence is missed in his life after the NFL. Lastly, he speaks to the promotion of violence in these arenas. Though it is clear that Paul enjoyed violence for its own sake, the fact that his prowess in his ability to be violent is paid only promotes and reinforces what were already antisocial tendencies. This seems to speak to the middle ground in the debate offered in the literature review between whether individuals are initially drawn to violence or if it is social conditions that propel one into violence. In the case of Paul, it appears as if both theories have relevance.

Lastly, for Paul, even the process of training for athletic competition was a violent endeavor that he enjoyed, expressing pride and satisfaction over how he would literally calcify his body by throwing it into trees during the offseason so that when he hit the field he would be less vulnerable to the pain he was hoping to inflict. He says:

“I was probably a nut when I did it. I was one of those guys who used to run through the woods as fast as you can. Hit trees, bounce off, line up against trees and throw forearms there. So I know that if I can get them bruised enough, I knew I wouldn’t feel it when the time came.”

Paul is unequivocal about his pursuit of violent endeavors in these passages. Though he has come to terms with a civilized form of existence, Paul clearly had and has an attraction to aspects of violence that were offered in a career in contact sports.

Ryan expresses a similar sense of nostalgia for inflicting physical harm on his opponents during his athletic career. When asked about what he will miss most from his contact sports career, Ryan states, “*Just letting that emotion go. That fire... going out there and drilling somebody, you just can’t do that. You’ve got to learn to control it.*” Ryan describes this experience – inflicting physical harm on the opponent in competition – as satisfying and how its loss is now lamented. Similar to Paul, Ryan concedes that there is a substantial release of his emotions in contact sport competition – a real letting go. This alludes to the reality of constriction around his emotions in most venues outside of contact sports. Ryan also expresses that there is a larger range of emotions available as a contact sport athlete to he

must now, regrettably, learn to control. Ultimately, Ryan was drawn to the side of contact sports that allowed for this unconstrained release of emotion and behavior. Now in retirement, he must find ways to mitigate the release of such otherwise antisocial tendencies.

According to Henry, contact sports offered a mindset that early in his life he recognized would resonate with him – performing with a sense of “reckless abandon” for his body on the field. He states, “*Oh, yeah. I played with reckless abandon. They called it, ‘reckless abandon’...I said, ‘shit, well that’s right up my alley.’*” Put succinctly, Henry expresses pride in his ability to use his body as a source of violence in particular circumstances in football that call for the most extreme demonstrations of toughness and grit. He continues, expressing how “*I could come off the corner and blow up the tackle. They were thinking someone was gonna put a move on them and I would come right up under them and put my hat on their chin.*” The ability to play this style of football was a badge of honor of sorts for Henry. He had the courage and demeanor that was imperative for the most difficult tasks on the field. He was able to conjure the level of physical violence and “reckless abandon” that was imperative to succeed in very specific tasks that were highly dangerous and usually overlooked by unknowing spectators. Contact sports require a large range of skills from its participants, but almost all contact sport athletes will candidly acknowledge that at least a few players on each team have to take on these extra violent and courage-conjuring feats within the game. Some sports, in particular hockey and football, have even separated distinct categories of defining these players as “enforcers” or “trench busters,” respectively. Henry had a unique form of power derived from this singular skill set. He took pride in his ability to stand in this separate category of an extraordinary level of toughness. Ultimately, he relished the opportunity to take on the most dangerous and violent jobs on the field. He did not doubt his ability to play with “reckless abandon.”

The Possession of a “Switch”

In this study, participants expressed the emotional possession of what they termed a “switch.” In short, this was an ability participants cultivated when they had to shift back and forth between life on the field and life off the field. In order to successfully compete in the elite level contact sports, train for competition at that level, and execute violent behaviors and

mindsets toward the opponent, participants offer insight into the psychological process of being able to cognitively shift gears between different motivational states. Discussing the nuances of this “switch” is vital for two reasons. First, it offers insight into the lived experience of preparing for violence. This can aid in understanding why participants are so attracted to violent tendencies and situations in the first place. Secondly, these passages will reveal just how extra-ordinary the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional experiences of violent tendencies were for participants. Violent encounters allowed for a unique space that demanded traits and skills that were rarely conjured in the vast majority of their lives outside of contact sports.

Paul articulates his experience of this “switch” and precisely how this mindset occurs prior to competition. Paul states:

“When I played my career in the NFL and even in college, there is ability within contact (sport) athletes, and I always refer to it as a switch. When my foot hits the field, there is a switch, and internal switch that goes on inside. Basically, you fear nothing, you feel nothing, and you are out there doing a job. And when you do that job, the adrenaline, the drug, whatever you want to call that happens to you when you are out there doing that...phew...I don’t know if there is another thing out there that can ever simulate it. And when you come off the field, that switch goes off. And in my playing days, that was very easy.”

Paul offers insight into how the lived experience of “flipping the switch” occurs. Upon entering the arena of competition, feeling his feet touch the grass, and standing tall in the stadium with competition looming, Paul expresses the unconscious and fluid ability to tap this emotional valve of energy. It is important to note that for Paul, this experience does seem to be occurring somewhat outside of his autonomy. Yet, despite this seeming lack of control, this “switch” is confined to the arena. Just as fluidly as the valve is turned on, it is able to shut off, allowing for space to perform obligations where this mindset might be detrimental. It would seem more difficult to transition between developing an ability to feel nothing and fear nothing, unleashing violence upon his opponents, and then moving back into a social space of civility and accord with his peers. However, Paul seems to have developed an awareness of the confines of these mindsets and behaviors. The phrase Paul uses to describe just how irregular

his awareness becomes when the switch goes off - “feeling nothing and fearing nothing” - must be understood within the context of his reference to the experience as a drug. In short, this “feeling nothing” is not some ascetic ability to deny oneself the experience of pain or fear but is closer to the feeling of limitless possibility one might experience on a stimulant or psychedelic drug. Paul also describes this experience as just being “out there doing a job.” This speaks to just how simultaneously rudimentary and surreal this experience was for him. This feeling of tapping into a reserve of power, courage, violence, and ecstasy on a weekly basis was just what he was paid to do. He took pride in being consistent and reliable in his ability to execute this emotional rush the way an electrician might in the ability to properly rewire a reliable lighting system. Ultimately, he concedes that there is a deep allure in these experiences and that no other experience can and ever will replicate the experience of feeling the switch go off prior to competition.

John expresses, similar to Paul, how the capacity to possess the ability to switch his cognitive and emotional state quickly was incredibly conducive to successful performance in the arena of contact sport competition. However, after his career in football, John found that this same emotional tendency would get turned on in his professional work environment and become detrimental. He offers an anecdote from his experience in an office environment at his first job after retirement:

“I get fired up real quickly and things set me off real easily. So you think about that in football – offensive guard talks crap to me, I’m fired up and I’m going after him on the next play. You transition that to the workforce, and my boss says something to me that I don’t like and I’m jacked up. I think that’s something that honestly is one of the biggest things that I’m trying to work on, my ability not to get so fired up and jacked up about things. I know when I start getting in that place, you ask any football player, its great when I’m playing, getting fired up before a football game, that’s awesome. But when it happens and I’m in my office and the printer’s broken or something like this and I started flying off the handle, then we have a serious issue.”

In some ways similar to Paul, John acknowledges his capacity to experience cognitive and emotional shifts that are beyond his control and may occur quickly. Though not as clear in his attraction to this capacity, John does concede that this ability to “flip the switch” was

quite helpful within the context of contact sport competition. John inevitably, expressed lament over these spontaneous shifts in cognition and emotion. He senses that it was irresponsible and misplaced to allow this emotional turn to occur outside of the context of contact sport competition. Lastly, the aspect of these shifts as extra-ordinary begins to take shape in this passage. John's day-to-day experience after football makes these outbursts bizarre, out of place, and irresponsible.

Ray articulates how both as an athlete and in his post-athletic career transition, he enjoys the process and experience of "battling" an opponent. He explains how he "never turned down a battle," and derived satisfaction from experiencing this process of emotionally and consciously shifting gears from civil, tranquil, and composed to angry, vengeful, and intense. Ray offers a recent anecdote of this tendency in his personal life:

"I played (golf) with a guy two weeks ago. This guy was probably a little bit better golfer than me. I respected the guy, but the guy was an idiot. I played pretty well but he beat me, right? So we played him again yesterday. Now, he pissed me off. I was struggling with the front 9, not hitting the ball the way I like. He asked me what my handicap was and I said, "well, maybe a 10." And he kind of started laughing, like, "your not a 10." I started looking at the guys like this guy is arrogant. So I get pissed. The back 9, I get up and I start just hammering the ball. I was pissed off. I birdied the first two holes and beat him in the back 9. I love that feeling; looove (sic)that feeling."

In the example provided, a peer Ray is golfing with primes him for the inevitable quick switch. Ray's opponent demonstrates what he interprets to be arrogance and a lack of respect. Ray switched gears in the middle of the match, shifting from cordial and civil day of golf with colleagues to vicious and exacting with his now enemy. This abrupt shift in cognition and emotion allows Ray to raise his golf game, as he acknowledges playing better against an enemy than a colleague. Ultimately, Ray enjoys the process of proving his arrogant peer wrong, and, at least on some level, shaming him. Later in the interview, Ray goes on to express, at least in hindsight of these experiences, some level of lament: "Sometimes you need to know when to walk away." Nonetheless, the intoxication of exacting revenge and distributing justice on an "arrogant" foe continues to draw Ray back to the behavior. Despite being later in life and well beyond his athletic career, Ray finds himself allured to this aggressive shift in thinking.

He “loves that feeling“ of – real or not - perceiving his peers as hostile and aggressively engaging them in competition.

Contact as catharthis

For participants in this study, competition in contact sports offered a unique emotional release. The vast majority of participants expressed how the greatest experience in their lives had occurred in sports and that they were unlikely to replicate the magnitude of satisfaction found in these experiences outside of sports. Though this is not a paper focusing on peak experiences, it must be noted that the arena of contact sports opens space for a singular range of emotions that are not readily available in a civilized world. It is worthwhile to explore nuances of these emotions. Contact sports offer a unique venue to release aggression, intimidation, and courage, as well as to engage in violent behavior in a legal, condoned, and promoted context. However, much of the discussion around peak and flow experiences in sport focuses on the Pollyanna description of these experiences (joy, elation, ecstasy, peace, unity, etc.) (Maslow 1962/1968; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). When considering what flow or peak experiences might look like for a contact sport athlete, a broader and more diverse palette of descriptions should be considered. Participants in this section will demonstrate the diversity and range of some of the emotions unique to participation in contact sports, as well as revealing the attraction to such endeavors.

Troy discusses how his experience of stress levels has raised since he has retired from a career in contact sports. He also expresses how the physical, violent, and aggressive nature of these sports allowed a space for a unique emotional release that lowered his tension levels at the time. He discusses this loss of release:

“I had more patience when I was in college and playing a contact sport. (Now) I don’t get to release any aggravation or aggression that I want. I definitely get more stressed now than I used to...It was just the fact of having the release whenever you wanted it because you’re out hitting guys 24-7. Contact sports and the working world, they are just completely different.”

Troy describes how in an elite level career in football, “*whenever you want to, you are out there hitting guys 24-7.*” One of the key notions to understand here is the line “whenever you want to,” emphasizing that there is a relatively regular experience of the opportunity to indulge some of his emotional drives by engaging in physical contact and some form of controlled violence. His career now - working in a biotech laboratory - has fundamentally shifted his ability to engage in this outlet, as there is really no form conflict, aggression, or violence even on a social or emotional level. Earlier in the interview, he expressed how even engaging with his colleagues and coworkers on some emotionally challenging level or with some form of social struggle toward a united goal has been difficult to reconstruct (i.e. he was met with disdain when he had asked his coworkers to sacrifice personal time and work overtime on a project he designed to treat cancer cells). For Troy, there was something healthy about aggression, competition, and physicality that would curb any general stress levels he felt through the course of a week. In retirement, there exists a vacuum for the regular emotional releases experienced in the aggression and physicality of football. Ultimately, this results in increased stress levels, a higher sense of irritability, and a pervasive sense of agitation in his workplace.

Ryan speaks to a similar issue, expressing simply and candidly that football was an outlet for aggressive and passionate expressions:

“Just letting that emotion go. That fire...just the passion for playing, going out there and drilling somebody. You just can’t do that. You’ve got to learn to control it. You can’t walk in between the white lines anymore so you’ve got to learn to control your emotions when things in life get you going.”

When asked if he wished that there were more opportunities in his life where he could allow his emotions to let free of restraints, Ryan responded pithily and directly:

“Yeah, yeah...”

As Ryan expresses here, it can be challenging to navigate these volatile expressions of emotion outside of the arena of contact sports. He articulates this succinctly – between the white lines, emotions are allowed to be let out and let loose. In his own estimation, Ryan’s

emotional life is given a space to express itself in its fullest sense without any form of mitigation in the arena of contact sports. When following up with him on the value of this space for release, he expresses his desire that this proper context for emotional release would return. Ultimately, with Ryan, we are offered our initial invitation into the nature of this catharsis – the full expression of his emotions will only ever exist between the white lines of contact sports. Accessing such a wide range of emotions that are so rare in the rest of his life outside of sport made the violent aspects of contact sports alluring to Ryan.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FURTHER DISCUSSION

The results of this research resonate deeply with the conclusions offered in Kerr's two decades of research on the topic of violence in sport. Ultimately, participants in this study - all former team contact sport athletes – found a significant sense of arousal, pleasure, and meaning in the experience of aggressive and physical mindsets and behaviors offered in contact sports. Also similar to much of Kerr's research, the participants in this study were not decidedly violent people in their lives outside of sport. Though they enjoyed physicality and aggression within the arena of competition, none of these participants had criminal records and few were prone to wanton outbursts in their life and relationships outside of sport. A serious consideration of Kerr's application of reversal theory to make sense of this complicated relationship to violence appears to be appropriate with these participants.

However, the question remains - what is it about the lived experience of violence in contact sports that is so alluring to participants regardless of the potential health consequences? This is a theme that was broached in the introduction via psychoanalytic theory, in particular in Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, but demands closer examination. None of the participants in this study expressed a desire to demonstrate violence in a haphazard manner, though some did fear the possibility of how quickly these mindsets and behaviors could be reenacted in a context outside of the competitive arena. Yet, after their athletic careers, participants lamented the vacuum for these mindsets and behaviors. In their lives outside of sport, there was no adequate context to demonstrate their most honored, celebrated, and powerful skills – courage in the face of physical fear, dominance, intimidation, imposing their will upon an opponent, and embodied sacrifice for the greater purpose of the

team and victory. The desire to turn this mindset on and let this power be enacted was deeply alluring to many of these participants and was present in the athlete well after his career has been terminated.

Ultimately, this dialogue will move in three distinct but related directions. First, it is imperative that psychology continues to probe into the phenomenon of why so many athletes are drawn with such ease toward the violent mindsets and behaviors present in contact sports. Is it only financial reward that drives individuals into careers in contact sports, or is it possible that there is some deeper draw to careers and experiences founded in violence? Secondly, it will be of deep value - for the sake of intervention efforts - to examine whether or not there are any possible outlets in civil society beyond contact sports that can allow for a similar catharsis without actually demanding the literal reenactment of such antisocial mindsets and behaviors. Lastly, the results of this study could possibly be extended to military populations and the psychosocial struggles that combat veterans face in their reintegration to civilian life.

Regarding the draw of violence, much of the research will offer two possible concepts of etiology. First, sociology and criminology have demonstrated the effect that poverty and depressed socioeconomic circumstances have as fertile grounds for recruiting an individual into behaviors, mindsets, and cultures of violence (Hsieh & Pugh, 1993). Derived from this, it could be presumed that it is the significant financial reward that motivates individuals to compete in contact sports despite the risks. Secondly, as already mentioned in the introduction, social psychology has thoroughly examined for decades the effect of auto mimicry and interpersonal influence that occurs when individuals are regularly exposed to violent behaviors. Despite the value of these theories in application to some aspects of this draw to violence, they lack in providing a framework to make sense of any original draw that violence, physicality, and aggression may have on individuals prior to conditioning. In other words, is it possible that outside of conditioning and mimicry, violence offers something inherently attractive to humans? Furthermore, why are so many individuals continually drawn to contact sports despite any guarantee of financial reward or security? Roughly .1% of all contact sport athletes are ever significantly financially rewarded for their efforts. For those who are, their professional careers last anywhere from three to six years, on average. Put bluntly, for the overwhelming majority of those who play contact sports, competing with the

intention of obtaining financial security is not a rational calculation.

Psychodynamic theories present unique and even slightly divergent conceptualizations of this primordial draw to violence: Freud's notion of *thanatos* (1922); Lacan's notion of *jouissance* (1975); Deleuze's differentiation between masochistic and sadistic violence (1991), stand out among others. Though it is beyond the scope of this essay to broach a review detailing the nuances of these concepts, it is important to note that a review of the history and theory of psychology seriously considers the pervasive draw of violent tendencies and considers their presence in the individual's psyche as primary. Nevertheless, on the topic of the primary condition of humanity, Freud offers the following reflection:

It is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct...The element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. (Freud, 1930/1962, p. 32)

Conjuring this history of theory, considering its implications, and researching the validity of this claim that the draw to violence is a primary instinct that drives human behavior must be taken seriously by psychologists who study violence. Psychology must eschew the tendency to only explain violence as either the result of conditioning, extrinsic motivation, or, even worse, mere psychopathy. As individuals continue to pursue all sorts of violence devoid of the clear results of conditioning and reward, psychology must attempt to understand the original nature of this drive.

A second discussion must be broached here, inquiring into whether or not there exist any outlets in civil society that can allow for a similar catharsis without actually demanding the full reenactment of violent mindsets and behaviors. This may be the most difficult psychological avenue to navigate therapeutically moving forward. Though it seems possible that the individual could undergo some form of cognitive reappraisal toward the event of violence – i.e. some sort of “that was then and this is now” or “different seasons of life” mindset which offers different contexts of behavior - many athletes leave the arena of sport quite

young. The desire, motivation, and learned association to reenact aspects of their former career may be resounding. Thus, it should not be confounding when former contact sport athletes act so readily upon these former behaviors and employ these former mindsets.

However, as one participant put it in this study, there appears to be a potential sublimation of the energy that can occur in pro-social and non-violent contexts. Paul was a former NFL middle linebacker and was unequivocal about the level of satisfaction he found in holding a career that promoted and rewarded his ability to display violent mindsets and behaviors on a regular basis. After leaving the NFL, he found himself wandering through a career in sales before settling into the career that would ultimately land him a position in the hall of fame – middle school administration (he was recently inducted into the school’s hall of fame for his service and efforts). Paul loved this work, found it deeply meaningful, and expressed a desire to be successful in it on par with his longing to display physical domination on an NFL field. Furthermore, Paul expressed how he felt similar mindsets and social engagements were available in working with children as were available to his career in the NFL. The transfer here was on the grounds of honesty and authenticity – two of the results of living in the midst of high-risk circumstances and violent endeavors. In other words, there was a taste of his former mindsets, perhaps the result of a level of symbolic violence, which can be made real when humans have honest and hard conversations about how they will navigate the struggles of life.

Paul still misses violence; he is lured to it as so many in this study and in American culture are. Yet, as an administrator charged with the daunting task of connecting sincerely with young people, mentoring their motivations, and guiding their behavior through a critical period of development, he has found an outlet that conjures enough aspects of his old, satisfying way of thinking. Despite the curious relationship on the surface between being equally satisfied as an NFL linebacker and a middle school administrator, psychology should take seriously the possibility that there are healthy psychosocial outlets for these otherwise antisocial tendencies.

Lastly, it seems that there is a space opened to provoke further inquiry from this study to populations outside of sport, in particular, military populations and the psychosocial

struggles that combat veterans might face in their reintegration to civilian life. Sebastian Junger attempts to account for the profound draw to violence through the release of adrenaline. Before investigating the draw to violence in military personnel, he offers statistics and basic neurological principles behind the most dangerous American occupation – just existing as an adolescent male. He writes:

(Young men) are killed in accidents and homicides at a rate of 106 per 100,000 per year;. Statistically, it's six times as dangerous to spend a year as a young men in America than as a cop or a fireman, and vastly more dangerous than a one-year deployment at a big military base in Afghanistan. You'd have to go to a remote firebase to find a level of risk that surpasses that of simply being an adolescent male back home. The basic neurological mechanism that induces mammals to do things is called the dopamine reward system. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that mimics the effect of cocaine in the brain. When the men of Second Platoon were moping around the outpost hoping for a firefight it was because, among other things, they weren't getting their accustomed dose of endorphins and dopamine. (Junger, 2010, p. 238)

Junger is broaching the data for a larger, broader, and more nuanced conversation that the history of theory in psychology takes seriously and may be able to theoretically conceptualize. It would be inappropriate to conflate careers in these two fields. One involves the immanent presence of death while the other does not. Nonetheless, further inquiry into the role that losing the loss of outlets for aggressive and high-risk behavior, as well as losing the solidarity forged in these endeavors may have on these populations is worth examination. Future research could provide early-intervention techniques that, if successful in one population, may be appropriately applied to the other.

Such a large portion of the current research and debate regarding the struggles that contact sport athletes face in their career transitions has focused on the results of head trauma and identity foreclosure. This line of research is absolutely appropriate in the effort toward unlocking the biological and cognitive etiology of behaviors, mindsets, and symptoms this population may face after their career in contact sports. Yet, it is just as essential to offer insight into the lived experience of these individuals. By doing so, this study was able to

elucidate the psychological draw that violence has on individuals and how contact sports offer a promotion of these emotions, mindsets, and behaviors.

It is shortsighted for psychology to overlook the effect that the release and reinforcement of violent tendencies can play on an individual when he or she is attempting to return to a civil society. Psychodynamic theory has offered the concept that violent mindsets, tendencies, and behaviors are profoundly alluring to individuals in a range of human activity. Yet, beyond this primordial draw to violence, individuals who played contact sports were encouraged, reinforced, and financially rewarded to perform behaviors in their athletic career that are now neither appropriate nor legal in American culture. When athletes express that they lament the loss of violent mindsets and instincts that they can no longer conjure on a regular basis, psychology ought to take this seriously and investigate the ramifications of these mindsets on the athlete's life after sports.

At a minimum, further research on the alluring nature of violence and aggression deserves more qualitative examination. As a culture, it would be appropriate to take seriously the fact that we are profoundly entertained by these individuals based off of their ability to demonstrate power, physical dominance, and violence at the highest levels of human potency. We then ask these individuals to leave this arena and obey the same civil laws of engagement that they were paid and praised to obliterate in their careers. Sensitivity to this cultural (spectators) and individual (performers) attraction to violence is essential.

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... 'Raising Boys Achievement' workshop, Charters School, Ascot, Berkshire, UK

MENGAGE: PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES ON MALE HEALTH WORK IN THE UK

Paul Hopkins



ABSTRACT

Male health improvement work in the UK lacks the framework and rationale for work with boys and men that a national male health policy, such as those implemented in the Republic of Ireland and Australia, can provide. Men's health is not a normalised part of the UK public health discourse, yet the health concerns affecting men in the UK are comparable to those in both Ireland and Australia. The current UK structure of commissioning of health improvement work by local authorities in the UK offers opportunities for work by charities and private companies where local preventative health commissioners understand the rationale for work with men; however preventative health policy has a focus on single silo concerns such as 'sexual health' or 'mental health' and health improvement work is largely gender-blind and not gender-sensitive. The available training for both commissioners and practitioners wishing to work with men is limited. Mengage is a small, not-for-profit company established to provide training and resources on male health. The initiative has a focus on putting research into practice, and implementing a social determinants and a salutogenic approach to male health, with boys' educational achievement being a significant area of work. Mengage provides workshops for teachers on improving boys' education and a gender sensitive mentoring award, as well as more generic training on male health and sports-focused work. The article describes the work of Mengage and issues encountered working in a health environment where male health has little recognition in policy as a distinct subject, and no established, consistent program of training for practitioners to address boys and men's differential concerns.

Keywords: male health, mens health, boys, education, health improvement, prevention, training, social determinants, salutogenic approach, mentoring

INTRODUCTION

A 2008 exploration of the research, practice and policy contexts relating to male health in Australia and the UK reported “*a lack of synergy within and between*” these contexts and how this had frustrated the advancement of men’s health promotion in both countries . (Smith & Robertson, 2008). At that juncture it was also noted that Australia lacked a coordinated men’s health policy approach and pointed to the UK’s Gender Equality Duty of 2007 - now subsumed into the broader Equality Act, 2010, as potentially providing an impetus to both men’s health policy and practice in the UK. The Act allows, within stipulated criteria, for the provision of separate healthcare services for men and women.

Fast forward to the present day and UK male health promotion practitioners can cast a wishful eye on Australia– and the Republic of Ireland and Brazil – and hope for comparable male health policy to act as a driver for preventative health work. Not that there hasn’t been a push for policy; the Men’s Health Forum launched a Men’s Health Manifesto in November 2014 calling on NHS England to implement a dedicated policy (MHF, 2014). At the time of writing this hasn’t happened and is unlikely to occur in the near future given the turbulence of UK politics following Brexit, yet the need for action on male health continues to grow. This is particularly pertinent with respect to rates of male suicide; government austerity programmes, and a reduction in social protection measures, together with regional patterns of job loss being implicated as potential factors for the increased rate of suicide in males aged 35 to 44, the increase coinciding with “peaks in indicators of the economic recession” (Reeves et al, 2013; HM Govt, 2015).

Specific policy is crucial to addressing these and other men’s issues and while practitioners in countries with a male health policy may bemoan that there is not enough funding to back up the context of the print in their policies, that policy is not applied or crosssectorial and that there are weaknesses (Misan, 2013), having a policy can make a difference. Former Chief Executive of the UK Men’s Health Forum Peter Baker, in his review of Ireland’s National Men’s Health Policy, notes that having a national policy makes “*the issue of men’s health more prominent and [provides] a framework for action*”(Baker, P 2015). Following on from its world-first policy, Ireland has now announced a new National Men’s Health Action Plan 2017 – 2021. Another critical factor for organisations trying to address men’s health is finance. Acknowledgement via policy may release finance into the sector through men’s health being normalised as part of the health services work discourse, and it may also increase opportunities from charitable funding providers; there is

currently limited recognition of ‘men’s health’ as a rationale for charitable funding.

Without endorsement of a dedicated policy to drive work and release funding, preventative male health work is in danger of falling behind other countries; despite the recognition of the need to implement gender-sensitive health practice as far back as 2003 (O’Brien & White, 2003), work in the UK has largely remained guided by mostly gender-blind policy on single silo issues (e.g. separate oeuvres concerning sexual health, mental health, smoking cessation, obesity). Where these do touch on a male health concern, for example chlamydia screening and young men, gay men’s sexual health, or men and suicide, whilst there is very limited practice guidance on ‘what works’, interpretation of how work is delivered is left to locality commissioners who commission provider services as appropriate.

The move from public services being a provider of preventative health services to a model largely instigated under the Coalition government’s tenure, where Public Health commissions preventative services resulted in a rupture of services, the loss of funding streams and of skilled personnel from community organisations that had prior long-term involvement with preventative health work - and who were ill-placed to survive in the new climate of commissioning work.

The dispersal of Health Promotion departments into Public Health in the mid- 2000s and the loss of skilled health promotion staff has also been raised as a concern (White & Wills, 2011). Public Health and Health Promotion are two related, but different disciplines and a lack of understanding of ‘what works’ in terms of effective practice with men may actually run counter to value for money considerations. Training on men’s health would at least provide commissioners with an insight into the financial case for male-specific work (Sibbald et al, 2010). So to date, there remain entrenched gender-blind attitudes within Public Health and health work in general as to how to deliver practical work, including how to attract men to services. Experiential circumstances of managers with no familiarity of the context and rationale for male-specific work has not created an environment where men’s health can actively flourish and be supported.

While the move to a specific male health policy in the UK has been glacially slow, there is still progress. The Men’s Health Forum is now a strategic partner of the Department of Health and at a grass roots level practitioners working with men have adapted and continued to innovate. An example is provided by Mengage, a small not-for-profit company working on male health and the issues that affect male health. The company was founded in 2014 by a Health Promotion specialist

with a background in practical men's health work, and a former teacher and education consultant previously involved in substance use and sexual health work with boys and young men. Other practitioners involved in the delivery of the Mengage programmes include a men's health specialist working in occupational psychology and behavioural change, and a youth support worker. Mengage arose from recognition of the lack of instruction for practitioners on the context of work with males and how to work with them on health and related concerns. The training available on work on men's health is limited; the UK Men's Health Forum provides a one day workshop for health personnel, however no organisation has provided easily accessible and sustainable core training for practitioners on male health improvement and related concerns that is disseminated and supported on a national basis – and also accredited.

A further factor that influenced the development of Mengage was a shift in UK health policy regarding the delivery of community health improvement work that occurred following the 2010 General Election. As described previously, the election of the Coalition government resulted in community health improvement work being commissioned by statutory Local Authorities (UK County Councils) and work being carried out by charities, local providers, and private companies rather than the previous model whereby health promotion work was largely the responsibility of the UK National Health Service. This presented an opportunity for Mengage as a provider service to supply research-based training, workshops, and resources with a male-specific focus.

The rationale for work with males is one acknowledged by people from a wide variety of academic disciplines and perspectives. How to go about improving men's health is a contested academic field; we acknowledge this and discuss perspectives on work with boys and men in the course of Mengage training and workshops, however as a practitioner-led organisation our approach - and one that we adhere to - is a 'what works' approach. We look at the research and examples of practice both from the UK and internationally, take note of interventions that have been demonstrated to work, and where applicable utilise or make recommendations as 'best practice' to people attending training and workshops. For example, in workshops informing professionals about programmes in other countries - recommending the Irish Men's Development Network's Seven Key Questions communication approach to engaging and supporting men (Men's Development Network, 2016), and in our education-based work citing the work of experts in practical work on improving boys' educational attainment and mentoring work.

People working in academic contexts in the field of work with boys and men will be familiar with many of the interventions and approaches we endorse, but these are unlikely to have filtered down to the operational practical level where gender blind practice is a likely norm; there is little synergy in the UK application of research to practice – hence Mengage’s mission to inform practice.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS AND SALUTOGENIC APPROACHES

Professor John Macdonald’s adaptation of Antonovsky’s concept of salutogenesis (Antonovsky, 1996; Macdonald, 2005), consideration of the social determinants of health (Macdonald, 2006, 2011), and application of these to work with men has been influential in determining the Mengage approach to male health. These important factors, whilst significantly recognised in UK public health via Marmot and Wilkinson’s work (2005), have curiously gained little traction in terms of UK men’s health academia and application to practical work. A strong focus on social determinants and salutogenic work has provided Mengage with a rationale for work in schools, prisons and providing training for Public Health.

With social determinants being at the whim of shifting politics and policies it was important to identify areas where social determinants-based and salutogenic work could be effectively applied by Mengage practitioners. An obvious answer is education– action on boys’ educational attainment to improve health outcomes in later life providing a rationale, drawing on evidence from across the Western world that boys tend to do less well at school than girls, leave school earlier, and are less likely to go onto higher education. In the UK boys outnumber girls as low educational achievers by three to two. As elsewhere in the developed world, there is a strong correlation of young males poor academic achievement with reduced social mobility, criminality, and poor health outcomes in later life – the case for action in this area is a strong one given the downstream impact of boys’ poor academic attainment, yet there is no UK national programme available to address this. Australia shares the same concern, yet has been much more proactive in this area – the ongoing biennial National Boys Education Conference being an example.

MENGAGE

Two bodies of Mengage work have so far emerged from a focus on boys' education that have had very good take-up nationally. Firstly an accredited award in male-specific mentoring - '*Mentoring Male*' and secondly a workshop for teachers '*The Boy Problem? Raising Boys' Achievement*'.

Mentoring Male

The *Mentoring Male* programme was developed via a semi-professional football club, Gloucester City FC, whose sport in the community programme was sending sports coaches into schools to mentor boys in the classroom with an aim of supporting learning, and addressing behavioural concerns. The sports coach scheme had been questioned by some Head Teachers when initially approached by football club representatives, asking "*where is the rationale for this?*", and "*what qualification do you have for this type of work?*" Two meta-analysis' of mentoring work (DuBois et al, 2011; Tolan et al, 2013) highlight mentoring as an effective intervention for 'at risk' young people, noting that it is effective in helping young people to avoid involvement in criminal behaviours, aggression, and improving their school performance. In this instance Mengage were able to furnish the football club with a report on mentoring and the involvement of sports coaches, providing examples of schools-based health work and evidencing coaches affinity with 'at risk' young males – in terms of male affiliation with sport and particularly work with hard-to-reach young males via sporting mediums and the informal nature of banter and discussion this engenders.

The report recommended use of the strengths-based Positive Youth Development (PYD) methodology (Lerner et al, 2007) as a basis for mentoring work; following this Mengage trained the coaches in male-specific, PYD-based mentoring, providing coaches with an accredited award. The award considers the rationale for a male-specific approach and includes scenarios using PYD, the role of the mentor, being male-positive, qualities required, how to build and maintain mentor-mentee relationships, goal setting and outcomes, maintaining boundaries, and dealing with disclosure and safeguarding concerns.

While the award is aimed at adults likely to be involved in mentoring work – teaching assistants, sports coaches, and community and pastoral workers, the greatest take up has actually been by schools themselves, wanting to train older boys (aged 16 – 18) to mentor younger boys at

their schools. This has provided younger boys' with a 'go-to' mentor in their schools and for the older boys' a demonstration of responsibility, with an accredited award that they can carry forward into post-school activity.

During initial development of the course, the intention was to provide adults working with boys and young men with a male mentoring award; an impediment to this is that funding for male-specific health work is difficult to access given that there is no UK male health policy to drive funding streams; this is further compounded by government austerity programmes that have severely cut into available sources of finance for existing health work. Schools on the other hand, with pressure to improve academic performance have funding available, hence the course has been adapted and delivered for use by a younger male audience. All participants receive the supporting *Mentoring Male* course book, an enamelled Mengage badge, and their AQA certificate stating that they have attended a course on mentoring boys and young men. The course remains available to adults and is promoted to interested organisations; it is encouraging that adult workers and professionals are signing up for workshops despite funding concerns.

The mentoring award was developed as a Level 2 award via an examinations awarding body, AQA and their Unit Award scheme, a scheme also utilised to provide the Mengage Level 2 and 3 awards in male health. This is a low level accredited attendance award – not a degree-level qualification, however further work on the course content and a bid for funding with a local university to explore the possibilities of a higher level of qualification is currently the subject of a tender, which if successful would deliver the course to undergraduate sports students, training them in male-specific mentoring and male mental health work - that they can apply in community sports settings post-graduation, helping young men and potentially acting as a source of income-generation for community sports.

'The Boy Problem? Raising Boys' Achievement'

Another component in the Mengage improving boys' educational achievement work is a teacher-led workshop, *'The Boy Problem? Raising Boys' Achievement'*, taken up by many, mostly secondary schools, nationally. This explores boys' participation in education and research perspectives on this, considers male learning styles, the importance of addressing literacy concerns, what makes a male-inclusive classroom, how to implement a whole-school strategy – and importantly, practical solutions. The workshop not only considers ways to improve boy's

achievement but also asks teachers to consider the longer-term consequences of poor achievement – that good health involves reducing levels of educational failure.

COMPANION MENGAGE PROGRAMMES

Manual Handling: Practical health improvement work with males

The companion work-stream to the Mengage education work is about addressing male health directly. This comes via an award in practical male health work – *Manual Handling*, and another programme – *Balls Out!* The *Manual Handling* course is a six part course developed with an intention of providing health improvement staff, community workers, sports coaches – anyone with an interest in practical preventative male health work with an in-depth understanding of the field and practical approaches they can implement in their own work. The six part course comes with a supporting textbook and considers:

1. The reasons for a specific focus on male health
2. Male specific illness and disease
3. Social determinants of male health
4. The paradigm issue (exploring theories on how male health improvement should be approached)
5. Strategic implications (a look at male health policy and strategy in the UK and what has been achieved internationally)
6. Practical solutions – a salutogenic approach to male health (what practical measures, services and interventions work with men; action on social determinants)

An example of the take up of the *Manual Handling* course occurred in an unexpected but significant arena – work in prisons. This again was reflective of the UK political and financial situation, where prison governors had been given responsibility for their own education budget and how this is spent; it also reflected the make-up and needs of the prison population. Males account for roughly 95% of the UK prison population – and education is a key part of rehabilitation; a National Literacy Trust report on literacy amongst prisoners and its relationship with health, employment, and crime noted “*Individuals with poor literacy are less able to obtain, process and understand information about healthy living and self-regulate existing medical conditions*” (Morrisroe, 2014). With Mengage practitioners having previously had experience of running a two session course on men’s health at a UK Category B prison work in this setting was

not new territory.

Mengage facilitators delivered the *Manual Handling* course to male prisoners at a Category D Open Prison. The course was well received with positive feedback; the prisoners proved to be a responsive group of men interested in exploring how social determinants, their personal education and employment circumstances had impacted on their health and wide-ranging discussion of 'being a man'; we were unsure initially how relevant a discussion of the paradigm issue in male health would be – a look at a male studies approach/masculinities – presented without bias, however the topic was actively debated, as was the strategic implications area of the course – particularly as the course looks at what is happening in countries with policy and the UK that does not have a policy. The participants also looked at what steps they could take to improve their own health, looking at diet, smoking cessation and self-awareness, as well as exploring involvement in community men's health work and helping other men post-release; a prison sentence signifies a loss of freedom – it should not signify a loss of health.

Balls Out!

The *Manual Handling* course provides a background to a further training course and 'product', *Balls Out!*, aimed at sports coaches from sport in the community programmes. Football and rugby clubs in the UK are involved in male health improvement work - male weight-loss programmes such as *Football Fans in Training* (Hunt et al, 2014) and Bristol Rovers FC's *Fans4Life* (Baker et al, 2017) are examples of this area of work; Premier League Health (White et al, 2012) is the flagship programme for football-based men's health work in the UK. However, a lack of training for coaches working in health and social inclusion projects has been highlighted in recent research as a shortcoming in this area – recommending that coaches should receive training relevant to the health issues work they deliver (Parnell et al, 2013).

Mengage's *Balls Out!* initiative aims to address this and also provide an off-the-shelf programme that can be used by clubs and coaches. This is based on previous work that Mengage practitioners in former statutory roles had developed for a professional sports club's 'football in the community' department's coaches, training them in sexual and mental health work with young men, and implementing an initiative working with boys in local schools. The initiative was commissioned by a public health department in the club's locality. *Balls Out!* takes this concept further, applying more recent male health research and practical examples. The training for *Balls*

Out! includes the *Manual Handling* course to give a background to men's health work and a further *Balls Out!* 'coaching manual' providing information on work in schools and individual health topics for coaches to refer to.

Boys don't cry? Supporting the mental and emotional health of boys and young men.

A more recent Mengage development is a non-accredited workshop with an intention of informing schools-based staff and people working in youth and community settings about practical measures they can implement to support young men's emotional health needs. '*Boys don't cry?*' *Supporting the mental and emotional health of boys and young men* workshops are currently commissioned by Somerset Public Health department, demonstrating that where a local commissioning authority has understood the need for action on a men's health concern, initiatives will be funded and action taken. The Mengage work was commissioned following a joint Somerset Public Health and Men's Health Forum conference, '*Putting Men into Mental Health*' in October 2015. Whilst both the conference and commissioning of male mental health workshops is to be applauded, this is not a nationwide phenomenon and reflects the patchwork of provision on male health in the absence of a dedicated UK male health policy. Where possible, we have retained good practice work from previous multi-agency initiatives Mengage practitioners were involved in; this includes the *Guidelines for Good Practice for Work with Boys and Young men* developed in the 2000s by the Gloucestershire Boys and Young Men Network; these can be downloaded from the Mengage website and provide a framework for professionals involved in practical men's work.

BARRIERS AND ENABLERS OF PRACTICE

In developing Mengage the Directors have encountered a number of barriers to delivery of work. The most significant is the lack of policy as a driver of work and hence funding. This is exemplified in the 'boy problem' regarding boys academic achievement, highlighted in examination results and progression to university. Since UK schools are monitored on their examination results, which in turn is reflected in school ranking and status, schools need to address this shortfall. Whilst there is no dedicated government endorsed programme for improving boys' education, schools are enabled as independent bodies to address this themselves, however this is at the discretion of individual schools and their funding circumstances. Another

barrier has been resistance to the Mengage concept by some school staff. Marketing the Mengage education work to schools is now outsourced to a marketing agency since early marketing attempts by the company proprietors met with little success, due to promotion of the programme being filtered out by school reception staff not understanding the need for male specific programmes. The engagement of a marketing organisation familiar with schools resulted in increased entry to schools work and the beginning of programme implementation nationally.

Accessing Public Health work has also been problematic; given the gender-blind, single silo nature of much UK Public Health work, opportunities for male-specific work are limited. While there is nothing in principle to prevent small-scale initiatives being commissioned– for example Mengage commissioned to work in Somerset on boys’ mental health , or work on male weight loss by a men’s health practitioner in Gloucestershire, because of the scale of some health work, work is more likely to be commissioned to larger-scale, big-budget charities and organisations in terms of their capacity to deliver work. This raises concerns with regard to men’s health work being commissioned by commissioners who lack insight into the field of male health, to tendering organisations that whilst large in scale also have little in the way of knowledge of ‘what works’ with regard to gender-sensitive work. While this can be addressed if a commissioned organisation doesn’t meet the terms of its contract, it is not a perfect situation and training for commissioners and other health staff is vital to recognise ‘what works’ – and what does not.

An approach by a sexual health service manager requesting Mengage’s assistance to increase chlamydia screening with young men demonstrates the issue. Mengage proposed a programme working with young men via local football, rugby and other sports clubs, based on research that this route increased screening opportunities with sexually active young men (Gold et al, 2007; Fuller et al, 2014, Mercer et al, 2015). Ample research demonstrated this approach as promising practice however, the service manager had no background in male health, and work via sport was considered too ‘out there’ and so the proposal was turned down. When wanting to actively engage with groups of men, a common practical measure is to take services to the men rather than expect them to come to the service (Australian Government, 2010). Research has shown that participants are more likely to engage in programmes in this context (MHF, 2011). Working as a practitioner can be very frustrating when there is good research that can be applied to practice, but commissioners and managers are not listening, despite evidence that gender sensitive methods can be more effective than generic practice and that financial savings can be made as a result of

such practice.

As a practitioner-led organisation it is recognised that there is a politicised debate concerning gender that sometimes feeds into our working practice. However, as practitioners we have found it unhelpful and counterproductive to make comparisons between work with males and females. Mengage has a focus on improving male health and not gender politics. As professionals with backgrounds that include clinical and educational work, our ethos is one of using ‘what works’. Mengage does not endorse any ideological or rights-based work and aims to present its programmes without bias, but still encouraging debate. Most workshops start with a rationale of “what this is about” and “what this is not about”. It’s about furthering multidisciplinary, best-practice, preventative health work with men, and not about implementing ideology or one area of academe’s sole point of view.

CONCLUSION

So what of the future for men’s health UK? The real driver for change will be a men’s health policy. It will also require a policy that recognises and takes real action on the social determinants of male health –and should include and promote salutogenic and strengths-based work as per the Australian and Irish policies. Unlike those countries the UK Department of Health has so far not embarked on this. However, a positive note has been sounded by the emergence of the new Men and Boys Coalition, of which Mengage are a member. The MBC is a coalition of over 50 organisations, academics, journalists and practitioners and has an intention of raising the profile of male issues, including men’s health and pushing for government action on interlinked issues affecting boys and men. An inaugural meeting and launch event took place at a House of Commons meeting room in London on 15th November 2016, followed by the very first International Men’s Day debate by Members of Parliament in the House of Commons on 17th November 2016 (House of Commons, 2016). The MBC brings together many strands of men’s work; it is also encouraging that the Coalition consists of a broad cross-section of professionals and practitioners representing many aspects and opinions on work with men; as journalist Martin Daubney stated at the Coalition’s launch, “*it’s time to leave the gender wars behind*” - we need to get on with the practical work that can change the lives of men – and their families, peers, and communities. Mengage is but a small part of that Coalition, hoping to contribute and to make a difference.

Further information on the work of Mengage can be found at www.mengage.co.uk

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AUTHOR PROFILE



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SOCIAL MARKETING: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO EXPLAIN THE SUCCESS OF MEN'S SHEDS FOR OLDER RURAL MEN?

Gary Misan, Paul Hopkins



ABSTRACT

Men's sheds have been described as a male-friendly service providing a 'health by stealth' approach to improving the well-being of older men. There is a dearth of theoretical models to explain the success of men's sheds. Moreover, there is no practice-based methodology to explain what attracts men in the first place, what motivates them to 'invest' in their shed, and what keeps them coming back. Social marketing is a practice-based methodology used by public health planners to deliver practical health programmes and campaigns in Australia, the UK and elsewhere, yet its incorporation into practical men's health work has received little attention. This paper explores whether the core framework of social marketing provides insight into the attraction of men's sheds. The study investigated changes in overall well-being as a result of shed participation and compared a literature derived social marketing framework with interview transcripts from shed participants. There was strong alignment between framework components and themes from interviews; several previously undescribed themes also emerged. The findings suggest that social marketing may offer a conceptual framework to explain the attraction of men's sheds and what benefits men derive from them. Results may guide the development of best practice models suited to shed development and maintenance, as well as broader interventions promoting social activity and well-being among older men.

Keywords: men's sheds, social marketing, 4Ps, rural, older men, health and well-being, Flourishing Scale

INTRODUCTION

Community men's sheds have become ubiquitous throughout Australia and are now growing in popularity in Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, and the United Kingdom (Australian Men's Sheds Association (AMSA) 2015). However, despite their popularity and the increased attention they are beginning to receive from policy makers and academics, there is currently limited research regarding possible theoretical frameworks that describe or in part account for the apparent success of men's sheds. Exploring such frameworks is important to better understand factors contributing to the planning, establishment and maintenance of men's sheds and may also help to guide broader community-based interventions promoting social activity among older men (Milligan et al. 2015:2-3).

BACKGROUND

Arguably originating in the 1970's, the typical community men's shed is a grass-roots organisation that provides a communal space for older men to meet, socialise, learn new skills and voluntarily take part in meaningful activities in the company of other men, for the benefit of the shed, themselves, or for the local community (Australian Government 2010b, Milligan, Neary, Payne, Hanratty, Irwin and Dowrick 2015, Wilson and Cordier 2013). In Australia, the men's shed movement was endorsed by the 2010 National Male Health Policy that stated the importance of men's sheds in alleviating social isolation, particularly in older males, thereby assisting in improving health and well-being (Australian Government 2010b:16). Since 2010, the Australian Government has allocated about Aus\$6 million to the Australian Men's Sheds Association (www.menshed.org) to support the growth of the national men's shed network, to develop health promotion materials for men's sheds and to administer a shed grant programme for shed equipment, programmes or health promotion activities (Australian Government 2010a, Australian Government 2013).

While the benefits of shed participation are well described (Cordier and Wilson 2014, Golding 2011, Misan and Sergeant 2009, Moylan et al. 2015, Wilson and Cordier 2013), there appears to be only one study that posits a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics or success of men's sheds (Ballinger, Talbot and Verrinder 2009). This study used the WHO Fields of Well-being model which combines the elements of vitality; positive social relationships; a personal sense of control over one's life and living conditions; enjoyable activities; and a sense

of purpose and a connectedness to community, as representative of the interdependent components of health. This work concluded that men's sheds provide an ideal health promoting environment because they promote social engagement through purposeful activity that participants enjoy and find meaningful.

While the Fields of Well-being model helps explain how men's sheds can indirectly contribute to the health and well-being of men, it fails to capture what it is about men's sheds that attract men in the first place, what motivates them to 'invest' in their sheds, how they see sheds best promoted to others and what keeps men coming back. Given that shed participants do not see sheds as an overtly therapeutic environment primarily designed to improve their health and well-being (Morgan 2010:12), the social marketing model may offer some insight into the direct attraction of men's sheds and as such served as the conceptual framework for this study.

The concept of social marketing originates from the work of Kotler and Zaltman who posited that commercial marketing methodology could also be used to address health and social concerns (Kotler and Zaltman 1971:1). Commercial marketers use the concept of segmenting markets to match products and services to consumer needs. Wendell Smith's conceptual article on segmentation of markets submitted that "*... market segmentation involves viewing a heterogeneous market as a number of smaller homogeneous markets, in response to differing preferences, attributable to the desires of customers for more precise satisfactions of their varying want.*" (Smith 1956:4). Social marketing methodology postulates that like other markets, the 'health marketplace' is divided into target groups or segments identified as requiring action on a health or social concern. Segments can be based on many factors including geography, demographics, mortality or morbidity risk factors, psychographics, attitudinal beliefs, and behaviours (Weinrich 2011:52-53).

Andreasen defines social marketing as "*... the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution and evaluation of programmes designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society.*" (Andreasen 1994:3). Applying these principles to the health sector has resulted in social marketing becoming an underpinning framework for policy aimed at effecting behavioural change and improving health (Stead et al. 2007). Market research principles are

applied to examine a segment's preferences for investing in a product – in this case a health and well-being improvement intervention – including the potential formats the intervention might take. By analysing the market in this way, the health intervention (i.e. the 'product') can be designed to best engage the target segment and address particular issues of concern.

More specifically, having identified the segment and the issue(s), social marketing methodology requires that certain core concepts — abbreviated here as the '4Ps'— be used to develop the framework or marketing mix for the intervention. 4Ps is an acronym that abbreviates the four constructs of *product*, *price*, *place* and *promotion* (Hopkins and Voaden 2010 :83 - 95). The 4Ps provide a framework enabling incorporation of perspectives from a range of disciplines including health promotion, psychology, sociology, and social anthropology among others, about how to best engage a particular population segment (Kotler and Zaltman 1971:4). The framework requires that for each particular segment and type of intervention, the 4Ps should describe the characteristics or themes that are most likely to resonate with the target segment and thus be suited to influence the target segment's health-related behaviours and their potential investment in the intervention.

The 4Ps are explicated as follows:

- *Product*: the information, service, resource, material or psychological product that may affect behavioural change and/or improve health outcomes.
- *Price*: the financial, physical, emotional, or social cost of the product ¹.
- *Place*: where the product will be delivered? ²
- *Promotion*: strategies to inform the target segment about the product ³.

¹ The questions the 'price' component aims to address are whether the health behavioural change product is culturally acceptable to the target segment, and what must the target segment do to engage with the product and invest in it? If the financial, social, cultural or emotional cost is too high this may deter the target segment's involvement with the product.

² 'Place' characteristics include providing appropriate outlets for the effective distribution or placement of the product so as to enable access to the target segment.

³ 'Promotion' seeks enunciation of what media the target segment are most familiar with and thus most likely to respond to, how might these be utilised to reach the target segment and incentivise them to invest in the product? Innovative promotion may include advertising through print or other media, broadcast (radio, television), the internet, entertainment media (e.g. sporting events), social events, social media and personal interaction.

Social marketing can thus be considered a dynamic field of practice that encompasses a broad range of initiatives including advertising campaigns, community outreach work, targeted health improvement programs, and the design of specific health services (Lefebvre 2011). Examples of health interventions drawing on social marketing methodology include public health campaigns on smoking cessation, drink driving, obesity, and sports-based initiatives. (Australian Aid 2015, Hastings and McDermott 2006, NHS (Hull:Yorkshire and Humber 2011).

Despite its use in the design of public health interventions, the application of social marketing's 4Ps to develop a marketing mix that appeals to a segment of older men has not been described as directly informing the development of men's sheds. This then raises the question: *can the apparent success of men's sheds as an effective health improvement environment for a segment comprising mainly older men, be explained using attributes that characterise social marketing methodology?* That is to say, in the absence of what we know as the community men's shed today, if social marketers were seeking to create an environment appealing to older men, where men might come together to socialise, to practise trade and other skills, and contribute to their communities, then might the marketers propose a setting that looks a lot like men's sheds do today.

The challenge is to substantiate this hypothesis. To do this necessitates the development *a priori*, a 4P framework that characterises an environment beneficial to the well-being of older men. This framework should then be juxtaposed with shed participant descriptions of prerequisites, motivations, enablers and benefits of men's sheds. The degree of corroboration between the extant 4P themes derived from the literature and participant sentiments derived from interviews and other methods, will serve to either confirm or repudiate the hypothesis.

STUDY AIM

The aim of this research was to examine whether a key component of social marketing methodology, the core 4Ps, can be developed and applied to explicate what men's sheds participants say about the attraction of men's sheds, what keeps them coming back, what they derive from sheds, how they perceive sheds and think how sheds should be perceived by those external to shed environment.

The research questions were:

- What do participants view as the main purpose and outcomes for a men's shed?
- What motivates men to be part of the men's shed community?
- What operational or other attributes of the shed are appealing to participants?
- What attributes do participants view as important to the operation of a men's shed (e.g. location, access, eligibility, cost, activity, management, promotion)?
- What are the personal and orthogonal benefits participants view as accruing from participation in sheds?
- What are the perceived barriers and enablers to participation in sheds?

STUDY SETTING

The study was undertaken in regional South Australia (SA) and a rural town in the UK. The SA setting involved 32 participants from three sheds in regional towns on the west coast of SA's Eyre Peninsula. At the time of the study, the first was a mining town, the second an electricity power generation town and the third, a small fishing town. At the time of writing the populations were 22,000, 14,000 and 1200, respectively; each town falls within the lowest decile of economic and social disadvantage for the State. The first and third sheds had been established within 5 years of conducting the study; the second had been operating for more than 10 years. The number of shed members was approximately 35, 25, and 12 respectively. Sheds were typical of sheds in the State catering for older men and offering a male-friendly environment with social spaces and a workshop for small mostly wood or metal construction, restoration or repair type projects.

The UK shed, with 11 of its 20 members participating in the study, was also established in the 5 years prior to conduct of the study and is based in a small rural town of 6,000 in the south west of England; as well as an agrarian economy the town also hosts some light industry. The UK shed offers a similar range of activities to those found in the Australian sheds. The UK town's district ward area falls into the least 20 per cent (northern part of ward area) and the second least 20 per cent (southern part) of deprived areas in England; the proportion of older people living in income deprived households falls into the middling 20 per cent.

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Study Design

A case study design was used as the project framework. A case study is “... a method of studying elements of the social through comprehensive description of a single situation, program or case [and where] emphasis is placed on understanding the unity and wholeness of the particular case”. They are often used to form the basis of a theory, to provide evidence for a theory or to bring new variables to light (O’Leary 2004, pp. 115-116). Participants were mostly older, retired men of white European heritage (demographic segmentation) with an interest in manual craft skills (psychographic segmentation) and living in comparative rurality (geographic segmentation). Four female participants were also interviewed, one of whom was a shed coordinator, one the secretary of a shed management committee, and two were partners of shed members. Each female was a registered member of their respective sheds but none participated in the day-to-day trade type activities of the shed.

Figure 1. Summary of participant characteristics

	No. interviewed	Older than 50 years	No. males	Trade background	Living alone	In receipt of welfare	Retired
Australia	32	30	29	19	2	25	29
UK	11	9	10	4	3	9	7

Interviews

Data was collected from semi-structured interviews from the four participating sheds and through the administration of a short survey. One focus group was also conducted with members of one of the SA sheds (mining town); the focus group session more closely explored the themes generated from the analysis of SA participant interviews. A summary of participant characteristics is provided in Figure 1.

The question guide for the interviews was termed the 4Ps Impact Assessment (4PIA) tool (Figure 2). The 4PIA was developed by the authors following a review of articles relating to factors promoting older men’s health (Bird and Rieker 1999, Campbell et al. 2007, Cordier and Wilson 2014, Hopkins and Voaden 2010, Milligan, Neary, Payne, Hanratty, Irwin and Dowrick 2015, Morgan et al. 2007, Robertson et al. 2015, Wilson and Cordier 2013)

Figure 2. Indicative questions from the 4PIA Assessment Tool (4PIA)

Question domain	Indicative questions
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you enjoy going to the shed? • What is your purpose for going to the shed? • What activities at the shed make it worthwhile for you to go there? • What benefits does the community get from the shed? • What help or support could you get from the shed if you had a problem?
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes the shed a cheerful place? • What social network does the shed provide? • What socialising with men from the shed goes on at other times when you are not at the shed? • What can you talk about at the shed that you might not talk about at home? • How would a lot of much younger men (<40) joining the shed make you think of it as a place to go to?
Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of welcome are new members given at the shed? • What sort of work did you do before you retired? • What if the activity at the shed was different to the type of work you did before you retired? • What do you think the opening times of the shed should be? • What more can be done to make the shed a place that men would want to go to?
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you find out about the shed? • What do you think of the wording on the men’s shed leaflet? • Which other businesses or organisations in the town do you think might help to promote the shed? • How do you think the shed should be promoted to other men?

The interviews sought information regarding participant background; their understanding of the shed aims and purpose; how members learned about the shed; their motivation for attending; what they liked and didn’t like about the shed; perceptions about access and the benefits accrued from attendance, and how they would prefer the shed to develop and be promoted (Figure 2). All interviews and focus groups in Australia and the UK were conducted by the same researcher (PH). Interviews took about 30 minutes and the focus group one hour; permission was sought to audiotape all sessions.

Figure 3. Themes derived from the literature review relating to each of the 4Ps for improving men’s health

4P component	Description	Component Themes
Product	Refers to the Product or intervention (i.e. the shed) effect on the mental health and well-being of participants	socialising; relaxing; self-worth; beneficence; support
Price	Price (or cost) refers to the factors or attributes that make investing in the Product acceptable or favourable	familiarity; humour; acceptance; appreciation; affinity
Place	Place refers to the Product’s environment and setting that makes it conducive and convenient for the participants to engage	locality; timing; access; reception; purpose
Promotion	Refers to how the Product ought to be promoted, including the message (s) used.	information; advertising; media; identification

Survey

The Flourishing Scale survey instrument was administered to provide a measure of participant self-perceived success in relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. First reported by Diener, the Flourishing Scale (FS) is a tool developed to assess psychosocial flourishing based on theories of psychological and social well-being. The FS “... consists of eight items describing important aspects of human functioning ranging from positive relationships to feelings of competence, to having meaning and purpose in life.” (Diener et al. 2010). The scale provides a single psychological well-being score; each element is scored on a scale from one (1; strongly disagree) to seven (7; strongly agree), which are then summated, giving a maximum total score of 56. The FS was given to participants to complete prior to the 4PIA interview taking place; the FS sought perceptions of participants before they joined the shed and then asked to reflect on changes since they joined the shed (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Flourishing scale questionnaire (Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi, Oishi and Biswas-Diener 2010)

For each of the statements below, please select the response which best agrees with your feelings

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	Don't want to answer
Before I joined the shed									
I lead a purposeful and meaningful life									
My social relationships were supportive and rewarding									
I was engaged and interested in my daily activities									
I actively contributed to the happiness and well-being of others									
I was competent and capable in the activities that are important to me									
I was a good person and live a good life									
I was optimistic about my future									
People respected me									
After I joined the shed									
I lead a purposeful and meaningful life									
My social relationships are supportive and rewarding									
I am engaged and interested in my daily activities									
I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others									
I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me									
I am a good person and live a good life									
I am optimistic about my future									
People respect me									

Ethics

Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were given an information sheet outlining the study aim and other details, together with a consent form. Ethical approval was granted by the University of South Australia for the Australian cohort; the UK cohort followed

the established research protocol using the FS and 4PIA tools and was undertaken independently following UK Social Research Association ethical guidelines.

DATA ANALYSIS

Survey data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Ver. 23 (IBM Corporation, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics were applied to test for the integrity of individual survey question scores as well as combined scores for both pre- and post- components of the survey. Due to the small numbers, data from the Australian sheds were deemed a single sample and were combined for analysis. Both parametric (paired T-test) and non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test) were applied for both within group (UK pre- and post-; Aus pre- post-) and between group (UK vs Aus, pre- and post -) for aggregated FS scores. The threshold for statistical significance was $p \leq 0.05$ (Figure 5).

Qualitative data was coded manually, guided in the first instance by the concepts arising from social marketing theory. Common concepts were grouped into categories which were subsequently collapsed into broader themes and sub-themes. Investigators coded interviews independently and cooperatively resolved differences in coding where they arose. The analysis involved returning to transcriptions in an iterative process to ensure essence statements, themes and sub-themes were adequately captured. Themes were identified and reported irrespective of coding and source frequency. Where descriptions were evident from 60 per cent or more of the interviews, themes were denoted as prominent and others secondary.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Analysis: Flourishing Scale

Data from 42 surveys were suitable for analysis, 31 for the Australian cohort and 11 from the UK; one Australian participant failed to complete the survey. Mean FS pre-scores were 41 out of 56 for both UK and Australia; post-FS scores were 47.5 and 45.4 for Australia and UK, respectively (Figure 5). For both parametric and non-parametric tests, pre- and post- FS scores for the Australian shed participants demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in the collective measure of wellbeing after joining the shed; a pre- versus post- score difference was not demonstrated for UK shed participants, possibly due to the small number of UK participants.

Neither parametric nor non-parametric between-group tests were able to demonstrate a statistical difference in pre- or post-FS scores between the UK and Australian samples. This result corresponds with the null hypothesis that UK and Australian samples were not different (Figure 5), although it is noted that the small sample size may have limited the sensitivity of the test results.

Figure 5. Univariate and bivariate analysis results of FS scores

Within-group tests				
	<i>Pre-FS Score</i>		<i>Post- FS Score</i>	
	Australia (n=31)	UK (n=11)	Australia (n=31)	UK (n=11)
Mean	41.3	41	47.5	45.4
Minimum score	11	18	11	21
Maximum score	53	56	55	56
Standard deviation	10.9	10.75	7.4	9.37
<i>Matched pairs T-test (pre- vs post)</i>				
	Australia (n=31)	UK (n=11)		
df	30	10		
Mean	-6.2	-4.4		
Standard deviation	9.23	12.2		
95% CI	-9.5 – -2.8	-12.6 – 3.8		
p (2-tailed)	0.001	0.26		
<i>Wilcoxon signed rank test</i>				
	Australia (n=31)	UK (n=11)		
positive differences	20	7		
negative differences	4	1		
No. of ties	7	3		
p (asymptotic)	0.000	0.123		
Between-group tests				
<i>T-test (independent samples)</i>				
	<i>Pre-FS Score (Australia vs UK)</i>		<i>Post-FS Score (Australia vs UK)</i>	
df	40		40	
mean difference	0.35		2.2	
standard error of difference	3.8		2.8	
95% CI	-7.3 – 8.1		-3.5 – 7.8	
p (2-tailed)	0.926		0.445	
<i>Independent samples median test</i>				
	<i>Pre-FS Score (Australia vs UK)</i>		<i>Post-FS Score (Australia vs UK)</i>	
total N	40		42	
median	45		48	
df	1		1	
significance (asymptotic)	0.612		0.891	
Yates correction (asymptotic)	0.879		0.823	

Qualitative Analysis

Twenty-three interrelated themes emerged from the 43 interviews of which 14 were prominent themes. Eighteen emergent themes were consistent with the 19 themes described by the 4PIA; 12 of the 19 were prominent themes. Five themes were new themes not included in the 4PIA model, two being prominent themes. The emergent themes, prominent or otherwise, were

similar for the UK and Australian samples, except as by frequency given the smaller UK sample size. For both sites, common themes emerged from *product*, *price*, *place* and for *promotion* (Figure 6). One item (*appreciation*) was not apparent as a theme in either sample.

Product themes

Socialising

Participants valued the socialisation aspect of the shed. For both samples this was a prominent theme. Participants described the shed as a setting where men could enjoy the company of other men, where new connections could be made, where camaraderie, mateship and friendship could be found and fostered, and where men could share a laugh or experiences over a cup of tea or project.

“...just the social interaction, the woodwork, the cup of tea and having a chat, it provides a network for the older men in the community who may be socially isolated – they may not be married or [may] live by themselves, or [may] have lost their partners – it gives them a whole bunch of people to talk to with [who have] different life experience.” (SA shed member)

Relaxation

Relaxation, a secondary theme was commensurate with socialisation. Participants commented that the shed provided a place where one could take a break from the rigour or stresses of home and other activities outside the shed, even though the shed itself was a ‘busy’ place. Others commented on the purposeful relaxation offered at the shed through engineered ‘down-time’ from shed activities, where members were encouraged to refrain from ‘work’ and simply sit, play games, read, eat, drink or socialise.

“...tea breaks are a good thing. It’s not just about work, it’s about having a cup of tea and having a chat, looking out for each other. It’s great.” (UK shed member)

Self-worth

Another secondary theme was that the shed provided a renewed sense of worth or identity, variably expressed as improved self-esteem, a renewed sense of purpose, satisfaction, feeling useful again and still having something to offer.

“I can teach people and people can teach me. [I get] a sense of satisfaction, that I’m doing something [worthwhile], a sense of purpose, that I’m doing something with my life. It gives me a satisfaction to be here, to teach people how to do lead lighting, carpentry.” (SA shed member)

Figure 6. Themes arising from participant interviews

4P theme set	Description	Interview themes
Product		
Socialising	Meeting for social purposes	<i>Socialising</i> ⁴
Relaxing	Affording rest from other activities	Relaxing ⁵
Self-worth	How a person values themselves	Self-worth
Beneficence	Helping others	<i>Beneficence</i>
Support	Being helped by others	<i>Support</i>
Price		
Familiarity	A comfortable environment	<i>Familiarity</i>
Humour	Being amused	<i>Humour</i>
Acceptance	I can express personal concerns	Acceptance
Appreciation	People appreciate me	<u>Appreciation</u> ⁶
Affinity	Liking others/friendship	<i>Affinity</i>
Place		
Locality	The service location	Locality
Timing	Service opening time	Timing
Access	Joining in with others at the shed is easy	Access
Reception	People are friendly	<i>Reception</i>
Purpose	The activities interest me	<i>Purpose</i>
Promotion		
Information	How I found out about the service	<i>Information</i>
Advertising	Shed leaflet/promotional material	<i>Advertising</i>
Media	Relevant media for segment	<i>Media</i>
Identification	Identifying with 'town'; a space for men was attractive	<i>Identification</i>
New themes		
External input ¹	Professional input is an incentive	External input
Leadership ²	Provides direction/governance	<i>Leadership</i>
Structure ²	Provides structure for day/week	Structure
Community cohesion ²	Facilitates understanding/inclusion	Community cohesion
Capacity ³	Adequate space and equipment are available	<i>Capacity</i>

Legend:

1. Product theme
2. Price theme
3. Place theme
4. Italic entries are prominent themes (described by >=60 per cent of respondents)
5. Regular entries are secondary themes
6. Underlined items were absent from interviews

Beneficence

Beneficence – defined as being generous or giving to others – was a prominent theme and is related to self-worth above. Many participants touted their sheds as generally magnanimous organisations where help and support to other shed members as well as to the broader community, were available. This suggested beneficence may be a primary motivating factor making a shed an attractive product for participants. Applying trade or other skills, helping others, being part of a community of men, and contributing to their local community were all valued by participants. This was augmented by a sense of satisfaction derived from participating in meaningful activities (e.g. construction or repairs) and contributing to shed and community

outcomes through the collective skills of shed members.

“It’s about wanting to see a community initiative take hold, be successful, become integral to the community and to be beneficial to the community. I don’t go to the shed to do woodwork, I can do that at home, I go to help develop the shed into something that helps the members, that provides a setting for them to socialise and do things, including for the community. These are things that the men see as beneficial.” (SA shed member)

Support

Another prominent theme was *support*, where participants described sheds as a setting where they not only received trade or skills-based support from the wide experience and knowledge-base of fellow members, but also support for personal issues and concerns, for example, grief and loss, relationship problems and ill-health. The extent of personal disclosure varied among participants with many happy to discuss concerns or issues from the outset while others waited to become better acquainted with fellow members, and a few preferring to remain private. Others commented on how the shed environment and particularly being in a group of men, had contributed to improvements in their mental health.

“It’s about maintaining my mental health, the interaction with others, while for example, repairing a table that I made 60 years ago at school; [I got] help with that. I haven’t so much talked about my health issues with others here, it’s just about being around other people.” (UK shed member)

“Since my wife died the shed has become my home, it saved my life.” (SA shed member)

Price Themes

Familiarity

The shed provided an environment familiar to many study participants, either by way of a predominantly male environment, familiar plant and equipment, or utilising skills, applying knowledge or undertaking activities familiar to participants, often from their previous working lives. This familiarity, exemplified as a shared interest in the use of tools or equipment and being able to practice a craft or skill familiar from other contexts, was a popular reason for participants wanting to invest time in their shed.

“...it’s like work but then not like work” (SA Shed member)

Humour

Laughter, joking, the light-hearted banter and cheerfulness were popular attributes described as creating a convivial, informal and positive atmosphere in sheds and making people feel welcome. These factors were pivotal in shaping the social environment and were reflective of the informal and limited hierarchy evident in the sheds compared to previous workplace settings.

*"There's always somebody doing something funny. Not necessarily silly, but saying or doing something that makes people laugh. Reacting to comments, it's just the mateship. It improves mental health. You have to be able to laugh at people, with people and at yourself."
(SA shed member)*

Acceptance

The *product* theme of 'support' refers to the shed being a setting where men are aware that support of a practical or personal nature is available. The *price* theme of 'acceptance' refers to an individual man feeling it is safe to disclose personal issues to fellow shed members to receive support. Although not widely raised, feeling accepted was generally perceived as a valued attribute of sheds because members were accepted regardless of background or infirmity. Sheds were seen as non-discriminatory and non-judgmental, accepting of members from different cultures and backgrounds and with different physical capacities. The limited hierarchy resulted in no member's background being accorded prominence over another's, and those with disabilities being accepted and supported.

An underlying strength of the shed environment and an important basis for shed operation was men feeling comfortable discussing social, emotional, physical, or psychological issues with other shed members. This comfort was attributed to the relaxed, male-friendly setting and members being confident that issues raised would remain confidential to the shed. Those who had disclosed personal concerns did not indicate that their acceptance by other members had been compromised but rather that they felt supported by their peers.

*"Sometimes [it is] men's issues, like mental health or physical health [that the men talk about]. Some men can't open up to their wives or partners, whereas they may open up in here."
(SA shed member)*

Appreciation

Being liked by others was not a theme overtly acknowledged during the interviews as a reason for participants investing in sheds. While participants commented on liking other men or admiring other men's skills and the opportunity to learn from them, the theme of being appreciated or liked by other men for their own skills or personal attributes did not appear to be a reason for men spending time at their shed.

Affinity

Camaraderie, fellowship, mateship and friendships were terms used frequently by study participants to describe the social atmosphere of the shed. Whilst not openly stating "*I go to the shed because I like the men there*", friendship and cultivating new relationships appeared to be a strong theme for men investing in the shed. This theme was commensurate with the theme of socialising, described previously.

"Enjoying and sharing good fellowship, making new friends and meeting old ones; to have a brew [cup of tea]." (SA shed member)

Place Themes

Locality

The location or positioning of the study sheds was not described as a critical factor for study participants. This perhaps was because the Australian and UK sheds were centrally located in socially cohesive neighbourhoods, generally easily accessible by private car, taxi or public transport; free parking was also close at hand. For one SA shed, placement and accessibility were important considerations from the outset, including a central, non-residential location, on a bus route. Conversely, another SA shed while initially pleased to be situated on hospital grounds, found later that this limited the range of activities available; members commented that in retrospect it may have been preferable to locate the shed at a more independent site, less encumbered by the health services risk averse policy and procedures.

Timing

As another secondary place theme, participants were generally happy with shed opening times. Restricted operating hours were most often the result of limited personnel or funding to enable adequate for additional opening times.

"I'd like it to be open five days a week. When you retire you can only walk around your house so many times." (SA shed member)

Where operating hours were limited, some saw the value in having the shed open on extra days so as to provide more flexibility and accommodate more members, although the barriers mentioned previously were acknowledged.

Access

Participants did not comment particularly on the ease of joining their respective sheds, however it was noted that some people took longer to feel 'at home' at the shed than did others.

"It's difficult to engage with some people, because they have other issues, unemployment, lack of self-esteem or confidence in joining a group; it's the more confident guys who seem to get involved. We do try to support people, that's the idea of the buddying system. If someone comes in who is vulnerable, we'll pair them with a member of the shed who's been here a while to look after them. We try to help, but if they don't come through the door in the first place then we can't." (UK shed member)

Reception

The warmth and friendliness of the welcome received by new members and the efforts shed members made to ensure new members felt welcome and supported was appreciated by many study participants and was described as a factor prompting participants to continue attending the shed.

"You're introduced to everyone, given a tour. The welcome made my mind up that I wanted to stay, that I'd feel comfortable here." (UK shed member)

There was a special emphasis in some sheds regarding pastoral care for members. As described above, the UK shed had adopted a 'buddy' system where new members were paired with existing members to provide support in the early phase of joining the shed. In one SA shed, a shed member is specifically tasked with providing pastoral care for new members as well as following up members who are unexpectedly absent.

Purpose

The range of activities available, for example tools, woodworking and learning opportunities, combined with the socialisation aspects made the shed appealing to participants.

"The shed's not a panacea and won't be of interest to all men, but for those that come it,

satisfies a number of things: camaraderie, mateship, friendship; the opportunity to make and fix things; to learn from others; to belong to something; to have a sense of identity and to feel productive. "(SA Shed member).

Also, having a variety of activities available, meant members could 'pick and choose' rather than feeling compelled to do certain activities because of limited choice or facilities.

"...the variety enables me to use the skills that I have and to learn new skills, to teach others where I can. If there was only one thing, I might get a bit bored or it might deter people who think you need to be an expert at something to come. (SA shed member)

Promotion themes

Information

Interviewees reported a range of sources regarding how they first learned about their sheds, including: public meetings canvassing interest in establishing a shed (SA shed), or reading about the shed in local newspaper articles or community notices, or through radio and television coverage. Word-of-mouth, seeing the shed being promoted at local fairs, or at the local hardware store BBQ, were other ways information about the respective sheds had been garnered by participants.

Advertising

Advertising refers to the appeal of each shed's promotional material. Leaflets and business cards, as well as apparel (shirts, aprons and hats emblazoned with the shed logo), were common ways sheds used to promote themselves. In general, participants favoured the use of this material as it was relatively low cost and had a long life span. In shed promotional material, appropriate use of language and graphics was important in order to engage the demographic of men who would potentially benefit from joining their local shed; use of humour, lay language and pictures potential members could identify with, were also seen as important.

"I think it's [the brochure] good, it covers everything. Words like 'bloke' and 'missus', that's the sort of language the blokes in the shed use. It'll help to attract men." (SA Shed member)

Some participants commented that they did not like inferences to health issues in promotional material (e.g. smoking and alcohol-free zones) because even though the sheds could have health benefits, this was seen as a secondary outcome and not their main objective.

Media

A range of approaches rather than a single medium were described when commenting on the types of media best likely to attract potential members. Local newspapers (frequent articles and adverts), local radio and television (the most costly) had been used and were complemented by use of posters, sidewalk notice boards and BBQs as well as by participating in local events. Participants acknowledged that cost influenced media choice since funds were often limited. Media that targeted partners was mentioned as a novel approach, whereby appealing to partner desires to be free of their menfolk from time to time by sending them to their local shed. Longer established sheds felt little need for active promotion; conversely, newer sheds acknowledged that promotion through a range of media was important to establish their profile.

Identification

Having the name of the town as part of the shed name was not seen as particularly important although the study sheds were all named after their respective towns. However, having 'men's shed' as part of the name was important, to give them brand authenticity and denote them primarily as a place for men. Some commented that sheds should be promoted as being primarily for older men while others suggested this not occur since it might deter younger people from joining.

"...what pleases me is the respect the community has for the concept, that may be because of the name, it may be the name being spot on about what it is, and people seem to respect it, understand its purpose and support it. The name is recognised as contributing [to local men's well-being] and therefore, people have a desire to support it." (SA shed member)

New Themes

Five new themes not previously described in the literature emerged from the qualitative analysis; two of the five (*leadership* and *capacity*) were prominent themes:

- *External input*: a *product* theme referring to health professionals accessing the shed by invitation of the shed or bringing a patient/client to the shed for therapeutic purposes.
- *Leadership*: a prominent *price* theme recognising that having good leadership is an incentive for men to invest in the shed.
- *Structure*: a *price* theme acknowledging that a benefit of sheds is that they provide structure to the week.

- *Community cohesion*: a *price* theme whereby participants recognised value in older and younger men working together in terms of breaking down community barriers and the opportunity to teach or mentor others.
- *Capacity*: a prominent *place* theme that refers to the shed being of sufficient size, with adequate plant and equipment, and workshop and social spaces to allow for a range of activities and a relatively large member base.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study support the hypothesis that the core 4Ps of the social marketing framework may present a conceptual framework to explain the success of men's sheds, in particular, what attracts men to sheds, what men value in being part of their shed community, and what benefits men derive from them. Men's sheds appear to be a generator of social capital benefiting members and their wider networks (Golding, Foley, & Brown, 2007). Social capital refers “... to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (de Hart & Dekker, 2003). Diener and Seligman suggest that people prosper where social capital is high, where there is trust, where people are mutually helpful, and there are high rates of voluntary and club membership, and social entertaining (Diener & Seligman, 2004:6). Communities possessing these characteristics have higher rates of well-being.

The FS scale results bear this out. The scale, developed by Diener (Diener et al, 2010) to measure social-psychological prosperity, demonstrated an improvement in the measure of collective well-being after joining a shed at least for the Australian sample; for the UK sample, a difference in the before and after results was not apparent. This may be due to the small UK sample size or other factors, for example, a difference in the socio-economic profile of the participants in the UK (interviewees mainly white collar background) to those in Australia (mainly trades backgrounds).

While the FS suggests that sheds may improve well-being, the 4PIA tool helps to understand the factors influencing this outcome. The analysis of interviews identified elements that corresponded to all but one of the component themes of the 4Ps, *product*, *price*, *place* and *promotion* as well as several additional themes not described previously. This outcome gives support to the hypothesis that social marketing as a conceptual framework may provide an

explanation of the success of men's sheds, in that a 4P mix can be constructed to contain components likely to attract the target segment.

The *product* component of the 4Ps describes the attributes of a health intervention that encourage behavioural change and improved health outcomes. Thematic characteristics of *product* discerned from the literature review were *socialising, relaxing, self-worth, beneficence and support* (Ballinger et al, 2009; Cordier & Wilson, 2014; Davidson et al, 2003; Moriarty, 2005). Shed participation resulted in respondents feeling useful, experiencing peer support, being helpful to others, including their wider community, as well as providing opportunities for relaxation, socialisation and camaraderie. Previous studies have also described sheds as offering relief from social isolation, providing peer support as well as tangible benefit to individuals and community (Cordier & Wilson, 2014; Golding, 2011; Misan & Sergeant, 2009; Moylan et al, 2015; Wilson & Cordier, 2013).

The 4P *price* component considers factors that motivate the target to invest (time, energy, social and psychological cost) in the intervention. Of the 4PIA price components, the key emergent themes were: *familiarity* (being in an environment they felt comfortable in), *humour*, and *affinity* (friendships/liking others). Such environments are reflective of wider men's health literature concerning attributes increasing the likelihood of men accessing support services (Conrad & White, 2007:22-26, 165-166). The sheds in this study offered a shared interest in manual craft skills, in a setting with which was familiar and comfortable, and that promoted communication in a common, often humorous vernacular.

Place refers to the setting components of an intervention that increase the likelihood that the target segment will engage with it and so is conducive to the target segment's investment in the intervention. Of the 4PIA *place* themes, *reception* and *purpose* were prominent themes. *Reception* refers to a prospective shed member's initial encounter with a shed and its influence on their decision to join. Participants reported that the welcoming, informal nature of the sheds as key factors motivating their attendance. This corresponds with studies describing older men being attracted to less formal environments than those found for example, in statutory health services, or training centres (Cross, 2007; Davidson et al, 2003; Golding, 2006). *Purpose* refers to what happens at the shed and the activities available. This was important for study participants who were interested in the practical skills environment that sheds offered. Non-trade type

activity, for example computer workshops, increased the appeal of sheds to those less interested in in construction projects.

Promotion, the final component of the 4Ps, is integral to the success of a health intervention. The 4PIA promotion themes of *information*, *advertising*, *media*, and *identification* were all evident from interviews. Information about sheds was more often available through more traditional, DIY channels including leaflets, local newsletters and newspapers, sources familiar to older readers. Participants reported being more likely to produce or access information using pre- digital-age media rather than digital media for which many were reluctant or non-users. This is consistent with studies describing some seniors as late adopters of technology compared to younger generations and being less likely to use modern media as information sources (Hanson, 2010; Lee & Coughlin, 2015; Smith, 2014).

Using 'men's shed' as part of each shed name was deemed important for *identification* or branding purposes, conveying purpose and expectation, thus enabling sheds to its consumer segment (Lefebvre, 2011). The use of branding pertinent to the target segment is consistent with social marketing customer orientation criteria. Affiliation with sheds as an authentic community brand may reflect participant perceptions as active contributors to their communities as well as challenging views of older men in decline. In this way participants both invest in their sheds and also 'build the brand' (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 1997).

Five new themes emerged that were not included in the 4PIA or immediately evident from the literature. *Professional input*, which we have deemed a *product* theme, may be a selling factor for sheds. All study sheds received input from health professionals, either where professionals brought men to sheds as a therapeutic measure or provided health information or health check sessions. While promoting sheds a health intervention might be attractive for some, several commentators suggest that this might deter others as addressing health issues by an indirect 'health by stealth' approach might be a preferred approach for older men (Milligan et al, 2015; Milligan et al, 2012; Wilson & Cordier, 2013)

Leadership was a new *price* theme that emerged from the analysis. This refers to the importance shed members placed upon leadership and management to provide vision, and direction in order to maintain, sustain, and develop shed activities and address administrative, contractual, financial, and health and safety issues. *Structure*, another new *price* theme refers to

participants commenting that knowing shed opening times enables them to structure their week, a factor that may have relevance for retired men used to patterns of working life. A third new *price* theme was *community cohesion*, referring to positive experiences resulting from intergenerational activity. Examples included older men mentoring school students, disengaged youth, unemployed men or young people with learning disabilities.

A new *place* theme was *capacity*, referring to the need for adequate space and infrastructure to make the shed more amenable to potential members. Barriers described to shed operation include lack of space, limited opening times, lack of skilled supervisors, and/or insufficient funds. The need for more space is a common refrain from men's sheds since larger sheds can accommodate more members, offer separate work and socialisation spaces, and more activities, increasing appeal to a wider cohort (Misan, 2008). For most sheds in this study, capacity was restricted by the size of venue, coordinator time and funding.

A related *place* theme described previously is *timing* with participants commenting that extended opening hours would increase shed membership. Only one study shed was open five days a week, two sheds were open in the afternoon for one day a week, and the fourth shed open two days a week (with a third separate day for military veterans). Sheds opening more frequently had more members.

Some of the themes in the 4PIA were interlinked or related and the nuanced difference between some themes (e.g. between socialising and relaxing) and men's own interpretation of these when being interviewed may mean that some themes have greater prominence than could be extracted using the 4PIA tool. The tool may require refining to address this and other emerging themes.

While the study identified themes not previously described, the study was not exhaustive in this regard. The research considered specifically to what extent the core 4Ps concept could help explain the success of men's sheds. Whilst the core 4Ps are the foundation of any social marketing mix and provided the basis for this research, it is acknowledged that other marketing 'Ps' can be added to the mix as appropriate to an intervention; for example *policy* (local and national), *purse-strings* (how will the intervention be funded and sustained), and *people* (training provided to agents of the intervention). Finally, the study only included men who were actively participating in their shed; men who are not shed members or who had left sheds were

not consulted. This may have limited information regarding barriers and enabling factors influencing men's investment in sheds.

Reported barriers to shed participation were few apart from the desire by some sheds for more space and extended opening times. For smaller sheds offering limited activities, a lack of interest in those activities offered might act as a barrier to participation. Correspondingly noise, earthy banter and limited trade skills might be off-putting for those not familiar with a workshop-type environment.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Study limitations include the small sample size, particularly for the UK sample and the reliance on participant recollection of their well-being when completing the pre-shed FS survey questions. However, considering the qualitative nature of the study and its exploratory character, this is not necessarily inhibitory. The limited number of sheds involved however does limit generalisability of the 'proof' of the hypothesis, which requires further sampling to refine the 4PIA framework.

CONCLUSION

Sheds appear to be generators of social capital benefiting members and their networks. Participants describe sheds as positive, supportive, male-friendly spaces with amenities, tools, and equipment that promote coming together to undertake a variety of activities. Enabling factors for participation are the company of other men, the informality of setting, central location, ease of access, the welcoming and familiar atmosphere, availability of tools and equipment, broad range of activities, regular opening times, as well as sound leadership combined with camaraderie, and peer support. Benefits described include reduced social isolation, improved social and emotional well-being, renewed sense of identity, purpose, and productivity together with a feeling of belonging to something worthwhile, and actively contributing to the community. Non-electronic media and promotional materials are preferred for branding purposes, importantly promoting sheds as spaces for men. Reported barriers to shed operation include lack of space, restricted opening times, limited funding and a dearth of skilled supervisory personnel.

The above attributes align well with the social marketing mix of core 4Ps constructed for the study which promoted a health improving initiative targeting older men. Emergent themes from interviews accounted for all but one of the 19 components comprising the 4P framework initially proposed. Five additional themes were identified which offer additional insight into future social marketing frameworks.

As a result, the authors believe this study supports the hypothesis that social marketing may present a conceptual framework to explain the success of men's sheds, in particular, what attracts men to sheds, what men value in being part of their shed community, and what benefits men derive from them. More research involving larger and more diverse samples may now be warranted to explore further social marketing benchmarking criteria that relate to men's sheds as well as other community-based health improvement initiatives targeting older men..

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WHAT IS MALE HOMOSEXUALITY?

Miles Groth



ABSTRACT

The custom of usage introduced during the last third of the 19th that distinguished between heterosexuality and homosexuality solidified a confusion between erotism and sexuality that had been developing for several centuries in the West in Europe and the Anglophone cultures. It also led to a misinterpretation of intimate behavior between males. The psychoanalytic interpretation of male oedipal development was guided by this confusion. A revision of elements of that interpretation is offered here. Phenomenological analysis reveals the discourse about male “homosexuality” to be about erotism, not sexuality. Male homoerotism is shown to be a form of ludic experience that made possible and is supportive of life in community as such and in the family.

Keywords: male homosexuality, homoerotism, male studies, men’s studies, father-son relationship, male identification, gender studies, psychoanalysis, phenomenological method, Oedipus complex, Jocastian complex

From the point of view of psycho-analysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact. *Sigmund Freud (1905).*

Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and he is only wholly Man when he is playing. *Friedrich Schiller (1801)*

INTRODUCTION

In any discipline, we must revise our understanding of an important topic when we suspect that its conceptualization is based on a fundamental misapprehension. I believe this is the case with male homosexuality. The misapprehension is our tendency to view human beings primarily in terms of their genital sexuality. To see human beings primarily as sexual beings (*homo sexualis*) is something quite novel (at the most three centuries old in the Western world), a perspective that was formalized at the end of the 19th century by sexologists and studied extensively through the 20th century by Freud and his followers.

Historically, we have viewed ourselves variously as fundamentally spiritual, ethical, economic, or aesthetic beings. On one account, which I will argue is essential to understanding what we call male homosexuality, we are fundamentally ludic. This was the view of Karl Groos (1901) and Johann Huizinga (1938). For the latter, we are the human being as player—*homo ludens*.

In what follows, I will offer a reconceptualization of intimate emotional and often physical behavior between males. We need to radically refocus our view of such behavior and, more important, the experience underlying it. If we do, certain preconceptions that obscure the meaning of the phenomenon are revealed.

I propose a modification of the psychoanalytic theory of male-male intimate experience and behavior. My method is phenomenological. This means I attempt to suspend presuppositions about the meaning of what we term male homosexuality and allow the phenomenon to speak on its own terms.

This is an essay that many readers will find uncongenial. I write not to discredit previous research, but to stimulate thinking about the complex set of attitudes and wide range of experiences and behavior that collectively go by the name male homosexuality. My view will likely annoy many otherwise sympathetic readers, including those who identify themselves as “gay,” as much as those for whom the topic of homosexuality in general is unsettling.

It will also likely annoy psychoanalysts for it suggests a revision of the theory of male oedipal development (Groth 2017).

To some readers, what I have to say will seem to be based on mere biological reductionism. Although much of what I say foregrounds fundamental biological facts, which I doubt anyone will deny we must consider, it will become quite clear that I do not for a moment believe that biology is destiny. But certainly scholars are not merely interested in having confirmed what they already believe. Do we not all gain from seeing what was previously overlooked?

I doubt that an understanding of what we term male homosexuality will be provided by those working in either the biological or social sciences, or by activists and journalists. A meaningful response to the question will be forthcoming only when we have all asked different questions about what intimate male-male experience means.

Briefly, I argue that male homosexuality is not a form of sexuality at all, since reproduction of the species is not a possible outcome of such behavior. A coherent use of the term 'sexual' must have reproduction as its referent. In boys who eventually eschew sexuality (intercourse) and instead are strongly homoerotic, the latter behavior is not a form of deviant sexuality—since it is not sexuality at all. Boys who later turn away from females as sexual objects are better understood as being presexual. Their experience of other males is not sexual, but rather erotic. Effectively, they have abandoned the male sexual role required by life in community, but not intense intimate experiences with other human beings, which they pursue with other males. Only if we conflate sexuality (reproduction) and erotism can we speak of intimate physical activity between males as a kind of sexual behavior, even if it contributes to the survival of the species by promoting intense, cooperative relationships between human beings on the basis of reciprocal altruism (Trivers, 1971; Kirkpatrick, 2000).

I propose to use the term homoerotism to refer to male-male attraction and intimate interaction. A male's erotic life is distinct from his sexuality and more pervasive. When anal intercourse is an element of male homoerotic behavior it mimics sexuality. My thesis is that male homoerotism is ludic (Huizinga, 1971) and that male-male physical and emotional intimacy is best

understood as a form of play.

EROTISM AND SEXUALITY

A critique of Freud's pansexualism is long past due. Having created a "whole climate of opinion" (Auden) it is seemingly exempt from reconsideration. We no longer recall that it was, after all, only a hypothesis even for Freud himself in his description of childhood (prepubescent) sexuality. His view that the pregenital precursors of genitality (Freud's term for what I refer to as sexuality) are preconditions for healthy adult reproductive behavior is open to question. We must be open to the possibility that erotism is distinct from sexuality, even though they parallel and sometimes are congruent with one another, for example, during extreme oral and anal pleasure and phallic/clitoral pleasure (orgasm).

Erotic behavior manifests as intimacy between two persons, but it does not need to involve the genitals. What distinguishes erotic experience is its playfulness. Some erotic behavior is solitary (autoerotic), but most is interpersonal. By contrast, sexual behavior is always interpersonal and can occur only between a male and a female. Contrary to Bagemihl (1999), I would argue that erotism is absent in other mammals, which like human beings also engage in close physical interactions such as grooming and practice for fighting and hunting. With the advent of reflective consciousness (apperception), language, life in community, and a sense of the numinous in human beings, erotic experience first occurs and important changes take place.

Reproductive behavior in an organized social life requires that the female make a choice from among rival prospective sexual partners, the males who are attracted to her. Her choice of a given male partner implies acceptance of him. This is in contrast to the earlier protohuman sexual interactions in which the male forced himself serially on any female he encountered. In human beings as in other animals, this meant choosing a woman who was reproductively viable (premenopausal), at a suitable moment in her menstrual cycle (detected by smell), and not pregnant (typified by the "hourglass" figure). Guided by smell, other mammals still mate only when the female is receptive. As with protohuman beings, the male chose and imposed himself on the female—any female that happens to be in proximity.

Homoerotism in males can be best understood against the background of the social taboo against the imposition of a male's sexual desire on a female: rape. The "chooser-chosen" dialectic described is inverted with the development of life in society, where the male is the chosen partner. The myth that the male chooses the female is a remnant of our protohuman experience. It is explained as an effect of compensation for having been rejected by the mother of infancy and childhood. The "masculine protest" (Adler, 1956) and male aspirations for power are reactions to the remarkable development of having been put in the position of being the chosen one in sexuality. The precondition of this is rejection by the mother as a female of the little boy's interest. A second major taboo, the taboo against incest, must therefore be in place to make way for the imposition of the taboo against rape.

HOMOSOCIALITY, HOMOEROTISM AND "SOME BOYS"

Complex social life—life in community—inverts the male's status. He is now the chosen sexual partner. But there is an exception to this that is fundamental to the present discussion. At a certain point in childhood some boys do not come to see themselves as the one to be chosen in relationships with females, the first of whom is, of course, his own mother. Most likely because their mothers tacitly give these boys the impression they have successfully chosen their mother as objects of sexual fantasy—and here Freud was certainly correct in postulating oedipal desire in boys *at the level of fantasy*—such boys continue to see themselves as *choosers* in the world not only of the mother-son relationship but eventually in the sexual drama with any female. This, I suggest, is the precondition for the psychological birth of the homoerotic male.

Homoerotic males are in a sense revenants of that era in our evolution before the advent of complex social life with its primary taboos, when males were the adamant and usually ruthless choosers in the reproductive encounter. In other words, *what we see in male homoerotism is the re-emergence of the original male sexual disposition to choose a female at will*, the orientation that is not permissible in large, complex societies, which ironically enough were very likely an invention of males for the protection of women and children.

Assuming the role of the choosing partner requires aligning oneself psychologically during childhood with the female sexual role. This assertion requires considerable elaboration and

adequate justification, which I will attempt to provide in what follows.

In the homoerotic male, we have the paradox of someone who aspires to be both giver and chooser, someone who, like the female, plays the role of chooser in sex but whose performance with his partner is that of the male, the giver in sexual transaction.

Society, first and foremost in the person of the mother, teaches boys that choosing is not an option for them but rather that they must wait to be chosen. Most boys learn to wait. Early phallic strivings are discouraged. A boy must not climb onto his mother's body after a certain age. He must not display his penis to her after a certain age. The boys we are interested in understanding do something different, however. They do not resign themselves to waiting to be chosen. Instead, having successfully chosen their mother, they have no need to seek prospective reproductive partners. Such a boy is an Oedipus whose origins are never revealed to him.

Ordinarily, a boy's father is the first person with whom he can realize his impulse to be the chooser in a relationship. This may be the trade-off in the change to life in community, which as David Gilmore has shown, is coterminous with the appearance of manhood (Gilmore 1990). The relationship is not sexual and mediates the boy's identification with the males of our species, represented in the world of the nuclear family by the boy's father. Matters are somewhat different in cultures where a collective representation of the male (elders) imposes on a boy the rituals that lead to his assuming the status of manhood. In contemporary families where the father is missing—physically or emotionally—the situation is problematic for a boy. In the case of the homoerotic male, such a relationship is foregone, since the boy has had an experience of successful agency in the relationship with his mother whom he has come to believe he chose and was accepted by. Such boys have first experienced being loved and initiating love with the same person. His mother has not discouraged her "little man's" presocial male behavior, indicating to him that the injunctions against the male being the chooser at stake in community life seemingly do not apply in his case.

Why does such a mother allow the sanction against incest to be breached, if only in fantasy? Does she merely fail to discourage her son's fantasies of "sexual" behavior with her or does she

actively (albeit unconsciously) encourage such fantasies and even permit and welcome childish attempts at enacting close physical contact with her, contacts that express more than responding to the boy's need for ongoing security and warmth? Some mothers do both. The latter occurs most commonly when the mother is young and immature or, more often recently, has been physically or emotionally abandoned by her sex partner or husband and is emotionally (and likely sexually) needy. In truth, for homoerotic males, Freud's Oedipus complex is better named the Jocasta complex. Ordinarily, the presence of the boy's father strongly limits his playing out these classic Oedipal fantasies with his mother. A physically absent or emotionally distant father may even encourage such behavior in the mother and indirectly sanction her active engagement with the son's intimations. Here we must appreciate the crucial importance of the son-father relation in homoerotic boys.

There are then two commonly observed situations in the lives of boys who are strongly homoerotic: (1) a mother who is seductively compliant with her son's fantasies or even allows them to become conscious and acted out "playfully" and (2) a father who does not act as a buffer between the boy and his mother by becoming involved in the powerful affectional system of son-father identification. On the one hand, a boy must be afforded the opportunity of a father with whom he is the agent in fulfillment of the process of identification. On the other hand, this must not occur after the boy has first succeeded in being the chooser in his relationship with the "Jocastian" mother. The experience of being the chooser must occur first with the boy's father in the wake of having been loved by his mother. We recall that any infant's response to maternal love is gratitude. At the most we could consider it to be reactive not proactive love.

As one might expect, the boys I have been describing often report having felt very little rivalry with their fathers, as Freud observed most boys do. More important, such a boy often recalls having had little interest in his father, either as an object of identification or as a rival. Later in life, other males are also seen not as rivals for the interest of females but rather as objects of fascination with whom the boy desires emotional intimacy. He repeats with other males the emotional scenario he has experienced with his father. Other males become possible objects of choice against the backdrop of "successful" incestuous love. Homoerotic interest continues the

unfinished business of identification with the male but not a male whose destiny is to be the chosen in the sexual scenario. Such boys are both chooser and chosen, a situation that sets them up for confusion and frustration in relationships with other males. Most boys go on to assume their role alongside other males as candidates for choice as the sexual partner of a female to whom they are attracted.

Most homoerotic males are aware of attraction to other males before they reach puberty, most by adrenarche around age 10 (McClintock and Herdt, 1996; Herdt, 2000) when a child's attraction to one sex or the other is known to him. The homoerotic male sees females in the role of chooser all around him, but because he succeeded in having chosen and been accepted by his mother he is not motivated to put himself forward to compete with them for choice by a female. The sexual scenario is irrelevant to him. Instead, his emotional life becomes organized around *erotic* experience. The only choices of a body with which to be intimate that remain for such a boy are the boy's own body or another male's body. A female's sexual behavior toward him will be incompatible with his view of himself as the chooser in such relations. For this reason, he is either oblivious to the sexual interest girls show him or he ignores it. On the other hand, the easy *social* compatibility of homoerotic males with women is based on their shared existential status of being the chooser in interpersonal relations.

In the psychology of homoerotic males the notion of sexual choice is an oxymoron. Homoerotic males are, strictly speaking, not sexual beings at all. Better expressed, they remain presexual. In terms of how life in community has developed, they are an anachronism but they are remarkable in giving us a glimpse of ur-maleness, that is, maleness before the arrangement of relations between male and female human beings was structured by life in community with its norms and taboos. Their *erotic* lives, however, are very rich.

THE PARADOX OF HOMOEROTIC RELATIONSHIPS

How shall we understand the intense emotional and often physical relationships some males have with each other that take the place of sexual relationships?

Little attention was given to homoerotic experience until Freud and his follows, especially Sandor Ferenczi (1980 [1912]). The homosexual was invented only in the last third of the 19th century, but the homoerotic male has been known at least since the biblical story of David and Jonathan. Nearby, but a world apart from the scientific study of sexuality in Europe in urban centers, were the everyday intimate experiences between men. In the States, as recently as the end of the 19th century American men behaved toward each other in physically and emotionally very physically intimate ways (Deitscher, 2001; Katz, 2001). “Male adhesiveness” (Rotundo, 1989; Lynch, 1995; Deitscher, 2001; O’Donnell and O’Rourke, 2003) was as essential feature of men’s everyday emotional lives. Then quite suddenly intense male friendships were explored by medical psychologists and sexologists in terms of the newly invented contrast between homosexuality and heterosexuality (Laqueur, 1990; Katz, 1995; Terry, 1999; Ibson 2002). “Here is [male] adhesiveness” (Lynch, 1985). The common, uncomplicated and average expectable contacts of an affectionate and playful nature between men were subjected to the suspicious gaze of science and pathologized. They were now a form of aberrant (hetero)sexuality, what I will term pseudosexuality. Many of these relationships may have included mutual masturbation of the sort one still commonly sees among young teenage boys but they remained pseudosexual. Perhaps the most eloquent accounts of such intimate male relationships are to be found in the novels of Herman Melville (1819-1891) and the poetry of Walt Whitman (1819-1892). These relationships dominated by adhesiveness were, however, of a very different sort than those between the post-Freudian homoerotic male

THE PARADOXES OF MALE HOMOEROTISM

There are at least two paradoxes at the heart of male homoerotic (presexual or pseudosexual) experience. Taken together, they help us understand male homoerotism. First, each partner in a male homoerotic partnership has something to give (the ejaculate) but neither can receive in a biologically meaningful sense what the other has to offer. Where there is genital play an encounter occurs between two phalluses attached to their respective bodies, where the phallus has become a symbolic equivalent of the male’s body as a whole. The act allows for enacting the giving of the male sexual gift. Hence the great importance to many homoerotic males of the phallus. But the act is pseudosexual. For both partners the experience must be

recurrently frustrating. This is likely one of the sources of the compulsive (often termed promiscuous) quality of male homoerotic activity.

Second, male homoeroticism precludes love between the partners. If you have remained with me as a reader up to this point, note that I define love as the unconditional devotion to another human being. The model for this is the mother-infant relation. It is uni-directional (mother to infant). Mature loving is possible only in (hetero)sexual relationships, where it is, again, unidirectional—from female to male. Males may allow themselves be loved, but they are not capable of love as defined (unconditional). This is not to say that men cannot learn to *simulate* such devotion and many men do, especially in the context of marriage and the raising of children. As we will see, such simulation parallels the simulation of (hetero)sexuality in homoerotic male relationships.

Homoerotic yearnings can be satisfied only at the level of playfulness. Before continuing, I must add that while there cannot be love between two males, friendship (*philia*) can and does more than compensate for what is missing and often “surpasses the love of a woman” (Old Testament, II Samuel: 26).

In addition to being unable to bear a child and know the feeling of unconditional devotion to another human being, a male’s inability to love is a feature of the male infant’s highly charged relationship with his mother. In his discussion of men who batter women, Jukes (1993) argues that short of drastically changing the way we socialize males or altering human biology, men’s extreme ambivalence towards females will not change. Jukes’s view is based on Melanie Klein’s revision of classic Freudian psychoanalytic theory (Hopper, 1991; see Groth, 2000, for a review of Jukes). Briefly summarized, Klein’s view is that an infant male’s perception that his mother is in the position to allow his death causes a psychological splitting of the mother into a pair of opposites, incompatible *imagos* (versions): an all-good mother (to whom he is strongly attracted because he believes she will save him from every danger and keep him alive) and an all-bad mother (whom he fears and hates because she is capable of bringing about his physical and psychological annihilation). A boy’s subsequent feelings of primal hate toward his mother are repudiated as unacceptable and incompatible with his attachment to, dependency on, and feelings of gratitude

towards as all good, but they remain in the boy's psyche, "encapsulated" (Hopper, 1991) in a sequestered, isolated part of the boy's unconscious. They may break through at any moment as rage, especially when a male feels his existence is threatened. They are released as unexpected violence against females. The most important example of this leads to breaching the taboo against rape.

Reference to Jukes is also germane to the present discussion because he suggests that, ultimately, the anodyne to male ambivalence toward females (which will continue to characterize men's attitudes towards women as long as boys are reared by their mothers) will come from a concerted effort by males to change the way they relate to *other males* and subsequently to their sons if they should father children. Knowing that his role as a male includes competing with other males for a female's choice of him as sexual partner, much effort will have to be made to overcome socially programmed rivalry and competitiveness between males even when it is balanced by male adhesiveness.

With Jukes's observation in mind it seems obvious that expressed homoeroticism expressed between males would lead to less competitive behavior between men and encourage the inhibition of violence against women that seems to be elicited when sexual rivalry between men is most intense.

But to return to the main argument. While love is out of the question in homoerotic relations, males are nevertheless clearly capable of powerful interest in each other in homosocial relationships, expressed as friendship and homoeroticism.

If habitual searching is *de rigueur* for (hetero)sexual males, it should also be true for homoerotic males. And it is, but with this crucial difference: in the latter, each of the males is out to choose his other, not to be chosen by him. Hence, the paradox and frustration of such relationships is that we have two choosers and none who is willing to be the chosen one.

If homoerotic experience between males is not about sex or love, what is it about? I have suggested that it is best understood as erotic in the broad sense (pursuing intimacy), but it is erotism of a special sort: ludic erotism. Having tried to avoid the Scylla of psychopathology and

the Charybdis of masculinist ideology, I am not promoting male homoeroticism, since because it is in any case universal, it has no need for promotion or encouragement, but only permission. As we navigate out of the mainstream of Freudian pansexualism into what I take to be the post-gender era, realizing that male homoeroticism is not a form of sexuality will make it less forbidding to men.

MAN PLAY

It is now time to look more closely at the ludic quality of male homoeroticism. According to Huizinga (1971), *homo ludens* is more fundamental than even *homo faber* (man the maker), who is collectively said to be responsible for having built the monuments to humanity that we see around us, from pyramids to computers. In our post-industrial period, however, *homo ludens* has become more visible again. Not that he disappeared—he was, however, suppressed.

Playing has been characterized both as a form of experience intermediate between work (the world of *homo faber*) and leisure (time for reflection) and recreation (time for diversion), and as rehearsal for work (as seen in animal play, which is practice for important survival skills such as hunting and fighting predators or rivals). Ludic behavior first means handling everything within reach. It is in this sense fundamentally linked with curiosity. For males, it is first evident in abundance in boys. While much of a boy's playfulness is vigorous (rough-and-tumble play), it can also be gentle. Following puberty, playfulness becomes part of (hetero)sexuality as foreplay. In homoerotic males, however, playfulness becomes an end in itself and is the primary characteristic of the relationship.

Many homoerotic males are satisfied with exploring the other male's body in tactile contact, especially in athletics. Some homoerotic men simulate the sexual act, but I believe it is a mistake to assume that all or even most homoerotic males simulate (hetero)sexuality, especially in the form of anal sex. Such males, however, have been the most visible subgroup of homoerotic males because they are readily comparable to males and females who engage in sexual behavior. The active ("top") partner in these relationships that mimic (hetero)sexuality are probably also the central figure in the unconscious fantasies of men who are homophobic in both senses: afraid of men and afraid of anal penetration by another male

Just as there are as many embodiments of masculinity as there are males, there are endless varieties of male homoerotic experience and behavior. Everything depends on the fantasy underlying the play. In this sense, the original conception of homosexuality as a paraphilia was correct¹.

For most homoerotic males, masturbation is the culminating form of pleasure-producing behavior. This is the legacy of male anatomy and phallic masculinity. However, as males discover the possibilities of pleasure elsewhere in their bodies, masturbatory behavior will be supplemented and enriched by other forms of physical contact.

Homoerotic behavior is a variation on the theme of autoerotic experience. The functions of masturbation in homoerotic relationships are both the release of tension and the production of pleasurable feeling. As in (hetero)sexual intercourse, there is the unique male gift (ejaculate). Like autoerotic behavior, mutual masturbation is primarily narcissistic; that is to say, it is not focused on the other but carried out for primarily for one's own pleasure, even masturbation is in tandem rather than serial. Like "exercise play," masturbation is a kind of behavior functional pleasure ("for its own sake") and not directed to another end such as the satisfaction of one's partner. Masturbation is linked to a primary fantasy that is repeatedly imagined while masturbating or being masturbated.

I am not at all suggesting that because male homoerotism is essentially ludic, homoerotic males are immature or developmentally arrested. As we now know quite well, most homoerotic males are as socially and emotionally competent and responsible as most other males. The point I wish to make is only that homoerotism is a form of play, not (hetero)sexuality. To repeat, from the perspective of earlier childhood development it is presexual and from the perspective of (hetero)sexuality, it is pseudosexual. Nor am I suggesting that homoerotic experience is less gratifying than sexuality. In fact, it may be more pleasurable, just as masturbation is known to be more pleasurable than sexual intercourse for both males and females nearly all the time (Kinsey et

1 A paraphilia is scenario in which "tragedy is turned into triumph." Although dozens have been named and classified, each paraphilia is unique to its experiential provenance in the individual (Money 1990).

al., 1948; Hite 1987; Reinisch et al, 1991).

Homoerotism has the same quality as autoerotism. In the end, it is, as Meister Eckhart said of the rose, “without why”: “It blooms in that it blooms.” That is it. It does not need to mean anything else. It is there “at its own pleasure,” as Rumi says of the soul. It has no consequences (pregnancy, progeny). By contrast, even when it is carried out as recreation, (hetero)sexual behavior always has a serious underlying agenda—possible pregnancy and reproduction, no matter how advanced the contraceptive technology.

CONCLUSIONS

There are advantages to characterizing male homoerotic experience as ludic rather than sexual. Above all, it relieves males whose experiential valence is homoerotic from any association with notions of sexual deviance or psychopathology. Although thanks to that famous vote, in 1973, of psychiatrists to depathologize homoerotic experience (“homosexuality”) (Stoller, 1973) and its deletion from the paraphilias for the *DSM-III* (1980), its ghost lingered in the *DSM-IV-TR* (2000) in the category of “gender identity disorders” and haunts the Gender Dysphoria diagnosis of *DSM-5* (2013).

As an existential therapist who has practiced since 1985, I can report that even though homoerotic males are in general not feared and loathed as they once were, clients who are self-identified as “gay” consult me with problems that are no different than any “straight” male’s problems, but often enough because they are still dealing with the label “homosexual” they are less able to enjoy their experiences with other men. Seeing male homoerotic experience as ludic moves the meaning of such experience and behavior entirely out of the realm of medical psychology. This is certainly an advantage of seeing homoerotism as ludic.

A further advantage is that it allows us to see males (and females) with not solely in other than primarily (hetero)sexual (reproductive) terms. The pansexualist worldview has put women in the impossible situation of having to be everything to her sexual partner—not only mate, but also surrogate mother, sister, confidante, best friend and mother of the partners’ children. No woman can be all of these and still be herself. The easy participation of men in erotic relationships with

other men including homoerotic play and friendship should liberate men to enjoy erotic as well as (hetero)sexual relations. And just as men can learn to love as women do, perhaps women can learn to play as men do.

QUESTIONS

This essay has reconsidered the meaning of male homosexuality and found it to be problematic. I have suggested that it is not a form of sexuality at all, but rather an expression of ludic experience in human life. The discussion has depended on defining sexuality as a strictly reproductive phenomenon, allowing for a broader field of experience that I have termed the erotic. Within the range of erotism are male homoerotic relationships (that is, so-called homosexuality) and friendships. Some of their unique qualities have been named.

Many questions remain, however, following this fresh look at what we have come to know as male behaviour. I close with a selection of the most pressing of them:

What might be the evolutionary purpose of the return of “presocial” male behavior (homoerotism)? Are homoerotic males only a revenant of an earlier form of the human male, *or* do they also represent a further stage in the evolution of human nature, including another kind of man? What do homoerotic experiences and the relationships based on them teach us about the way males related before the emergence of life in community?

Is male homoerotic behavior an adaptation that provides the prototype for a kind of masculinity that prevents certain forms of socially unacceptable behavior such as rape from entering into society more frequently than it does? Could the way homoerotic males relate to each other serve as a model for a revised way for all males to relate to “the second sex,” to other males, and to children?

Why do some fathers not act as a buffer between a son and his mother? Why do they allow or encourage a son to enact fantasies that they themselves have repressed? Do some fathers indirectly (unconsciously) encourage such behavior between a son and his mother, perhaps to defuse tendencies (described by Jukes) toward aggressive behavior toward her that might be on the verge of emerging in his behavior? Was such a father’s own homoerotism suppressed but is

now being permitted vicarious expression in his son's behavior? Why do some boys whose fathers have been emotionally distant or actually absent not become homoerotic male, while others do?

What is the meaning of a male's fascination with the body of another male? How shall we account for the wide range of behaviors based on this fascination? What are the aesthetic principles of male desire for other males "without why"?

What are the implications of recognizing and welcoming the erotic dimension of males' lives in addition to the (hetero)sexual?

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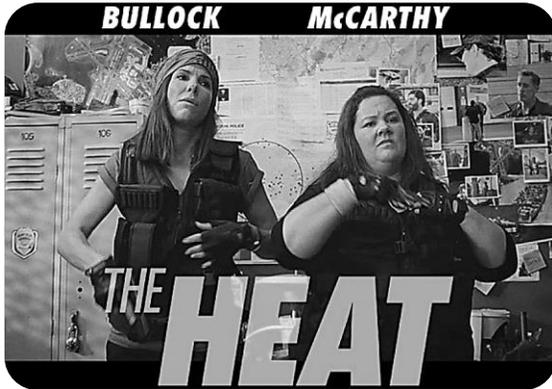


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THE HEAT (2013): ARE NARCISSISTIC CHARACTERS IN FILM “FUNNY”?

Douglas Gosse



ABSTRACT

The Heat stars Sandra Bullock as uptight FBI agent Sarah Ashburn, who is paired with a coarse Boston detective, Shannon Mullins, played by Melissa McCarthy, to capture a drug lord. This quintessential odd couple, forced to work together in Boston, display character traits that exemplify narcissism, racism, ablebodism, and sexism (both misandry and misogyny). I pinpoint and destabilize The Heat’s superficial appropriation of feminism via critique of Ashburn and Mullins’ outrageous behaviours and actions. Their narcissism, entailing self-interest, ruthless competition, and scorn of those marginalized—eventually binds the crime fighters together. Stemming from a long line of films that purport to repudiate the patriarchy, The Heat actually reinstates capitalist and hegemonic principles. Under a shallow feminist veneer, The Heat further reflects a North America pop cultural trend of upholding a modern version of professional womanhood that disdains men, while paradoxically elevating women who embrace uncivilized and narcissistic behaviors as heroic sisters.

Keywords: capitalism, narcissism, sexism, misogyny, misandry, racism, ablebodism

INTRODUCTION

Written by Kate Dippold, and directed by Paul Feig, who also directed the sophomoric 40 Year Old Virgin (2005) and Bridesmaids (2011), *The Heat* (2013) stars Sandra Bullock as uptight FBI agent Sarah Ashburn, who is paired with coarse Boston detective Shannon Mullins (Melissa McCarthy), to capture a drug lord, Simon Larkin, and his henchman, Julian Vincent. Since its June 2013 release, *The Heat* has grossed over \$230 million from a \$43 million budget. *The Heat* highlights a modern cinematic penchant for disdaining men but in doing so, reimagines Ashburn and Mullins as prototypical patriarchal males — controlling, violent, obnoxious, and ruthless.

Not surprisingly, the soundtrack, “Sittin’ on a rainbow”, was co-authored by songwriter Gail Delta Collins (1941-2013), who shot and killed her husband Felix Pappalardi on April 17, 1983. Collins was convicted of criminally negligent homicide rather than murder. The judge admonished the jury for their gullibility. Sentenced to four years in prison, Collins served only two. Tethered on its girl-woman power predecessors, from *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *I shot Andy Warhol* (1996) to *Kill Bill: The Whole Bloody Affair* (2011), at least *The Heat* (2013) does not justify killing male characters in response to female oppression. Rather, and just as problematically, Ashburn and Mullins mercilessly humiliate men, women, and each other in the movie. Puig (2013) graciously allots that, “The formulaic male-dominated genre needed some gender diversity. This action comedy pairing Melissa McCarthy with Sandra Bullock is no less predictable, but it’s bawdier and funnier than most of its masculine counterparts.” Bullock and McCarthy had leeway to ad lib from Dippold’s script, and McCarthy dove in. However, *The Heat* exceeds vulgarity to become a carnival of pathological speech and acts.

In her squalid apartment, Mullin keeps a fridge filled with weapons, including a grenade, a combat knife, a Marlin 1894CB rifle, a Smith & Wesson Model 59 pistol, a FN PS90 personal defense weapon, an AK-47 rifle, and a Browning Auto-5 shotgun. Mullins and Ashburn arm themselves and become “the heat”, rogue law enforcers, when both are taken off the case for their reckless behaviour.

James (2012, p. 5) says “assholes” systematically allow themselves to enjoy special advantages out of an entrenched sense of entitlement, and are immunized by their sense of entitlement against the complaints of other people. While Mullins shows loyalty towards her Irish Catholic

community and family, and the dedicated yet isolationist Ashburn hankers for a promotion in the male-dominated FBI, both frequently behave like “jerks” or “assholes.” Indeed, Ashburn and Mullins are noteworthy for their dominance, arrogance, superiority, power seeking, and disregard of others, traits which are also indicative of narcissistic personality disorder (Ronningstam, 2011).

SARAH ASHBURN

Early in the movie Ashburn’s boss, Hale (Demián Bichir), tells her that he’s received “countless complaints of arrogance, and competitiveness...showmanship”, narcissistic traits (Twenge & Campbell, 2009) which Ashburn carries over in her new Boston assignment. When Ashburn arrives at the Boston precinct of Captain Woods (Thomas F. Wilson), she imperiously demands to curtail established custom, and immediately interrogates the prisoner brought in by Mullins, who is absent:

Ashburn: Frankly, it doesn’t matter. I have jurisdiction and every second we stand here is interfering with a federal investigation. So open his cell and be so kind as to show me to an interrogation room.

Ashburn comports herself as “the big wheel”, oblivious to local politics, and autonomous in her investigation, for she looks down on others. They are inferior and seen as a hindrance to her expertise and efficiency.

Ashburn has a sense of grandiosity. She is confident she can best optimize resolving her cases alone. She calls her boss, Hale, to have Mullins suspended or sequestered rather than trying to work with her. Indeed, women in management and organization “often are not friends, do not cooperate and do not support each other” (Mavin & Williams, 2013, p. 178), contrary to popular beliefs that women have a more collegial leadership style and work ethic. Later, a medic chastises Ashburn for performing an unnecessary emergency tracheostomy on a man in a diner, when he simply needed a piece of pancake removed from his mouth. Most revealingly, towards the end of the movie, Ashburn sends Mullin’s brother, Jason (Michael Rapaport), a reformed drug dealer, into the criminal fold as a mole, impervious to Mullin’s concerns for his safety. Jason is shot and ends up in hospital in an induced coma. Ashburn presents herself as an expert in all things, and above

everyone, for “the end justifies the means” to obtain her coveted promotion.

She is a classic narcissist.

It is revealed that she grew up in foster care, to perhaps explain her trouble forming attachments with other people, and to garner sympathy from viewers. The divorced Ashburn’s sole companion, Pumpkin, a cat, actually belongs to a neighbour.

SHANNON MULLINS

Shannon Mullins’ mother, known only as Mrs. Mullins (Jane Curtin), is distant and antagonistic towards her. Mrs. Mullins gives her daughter the finger when driving by her in the street. In *The Heat*, there are multiple allusions to Mullins’ promiscuity and inability to form enduring romantic attachments, also characteristic of narcissism. Attachment theorists believe that the initial bond between caregivers and children plays a pivotal role in determining future adult intimacy, and is linked to narcissistic defense mechanisms, including a tendency towards suspicion of other people, hypersensitivity, a sense of entitlement, and a desire for dominance (Smolewska & Dion, 2005), traits typified by Ashburn and Mullins.

The narcissist’s modus operandi entails lack of respect for authority, disdain for procedure, short cuts, and disregard for other people’s feelings, contributions, or welfare, except when it suits their own purposes. Mullins is unmoved when people indignantly glare, or dare to complain about her outrageous behaviours and rants, which most don’t since she is a bully, and intimidates them. While Ashburn is unmitigatedly arrogant, competitive, and lacking in social skills, in particular, it is Mullins who showcases traits that are racist, ableist, and sexist. With Ashburn sometimes following her lead to a lesser but still problematic degree, Mullins is completely comfortable flouting accepted social conventions, thereby additionally conforming to James’ (2012, pp. 5-7) definition of an “asshole.”

RACISM

Terrell Rojas (actor-comic Spoken Reasons), one of few African American characters in *The Heat*, is stereotypically portrayed as a local pimp, extortionist, and small-time drug dealer, who

has possible ties to kingpin mobster Larkin. Mullin chases him and hits him with her car. She then chases him over a fence and tackles him to the ground. They have the following exchange:

Rojas: Lady, what the hell did you throw at me? *Mullins:* A watermelon. *Rojas:* A watermelon! Oh, hell! Ah, see, I told you, you was a racist!

Mullins then warns him, “Shut up before I feed you watermelon. Get up!” *The Heat* uses watermelon as a racist trope (Black, 2014), a longstanding pop cultural symbol of black people’s perceived uncleanliness, laziness, childishness, and unwanted public presence.

In another scene, Mullins and Ashburn hoist Rojas upside down by his legs over a fire escape, threatening to release him if he does not provide information. They drop him.



With so many cases of racial profiling and brutality towards African Americans à la Rodney King (Rabinowitz, 2015), this violence is disturbing, and indicative of widespread racialized misandry.

Furthermore, Mullins tells Hispanic Bureau Chief Hale, “You’re not my boss, Puss in Boots,” referring to the Spanish-speaking cat played by Antonio Banderas in the 2011 film of the same name.

Minorities are mocked in *The Heat*.

ABLEBODISM

Equally appalling, disability is up for guffaws *The Heat*:

Ashburn: I'm a Federal Agent. I'm a special agent, I work...*Gina* (Jessica Chaffin): Special like retarded? *Ashburn*: Well, we don't use that word, we say, 'special needs'. But I...I have a very high IQ.

Mullins calls a male medic a “fucktard”.

Early in *The Heat*, Ashburn is seen in her apartment, cuddling with Pumpkin (her neighbour's cat, for she has no real friends), watching television. Ashburn flickers through *Foul Play* and *The Matrix Reloaded*, both movies featuring male albino villains terrorizing female characters, foreshadowing that there will be an albino misogynist in *The Heat*. When Mullin and Ashburn meet Special Agent Craig Garrett (Dan Bakkedahl), DEA, Mullins says, “What the hell is that?” to which Ashburn replies, “I don't know.” Mullins tells him, “You look evil as shit” and “Your wife must be a five-pound bag of flour with a hole in it.” She says, “Fuck you, chalk balls” and calls him “Fucking snow cone.” When Ashburn's car gets blown up, Mullins says, “I know when I smell a fucking albino rat!”

A pop cultural trope has arisen in recent years in movies—that of the “evil albino” (Simmons, Falto-Aizpurua, Griffith, & Nouri, 2015). The evil albino has pale skin, platinum blonde hair, and blue or red eyes. In *The Heat*, he is also misogynist. However, albinism is a genetic condition, characterized by a lack of melanin and the absence of pigment in skin, hair, and eyes. In keeping with *Foul Play* (1978), *End of Days* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008), *I Am Legend* (2007), and the *Harry Potter* movies, *The Heat* equates albinism with evil but also targets this genetic disorder for ridicule.

SEXISM

Sexist ridicule towards both male and female characters runs rampant throughout *The Heat*. Misogyny is a favourite choice for mirth. For instance, Mullins tells Ashburn, “My fear is that I'm gonna put you in a bikini and you'll still look like a fucking bank teller” adding that the way

Ashburn dresses is a “boner killer.”



Dressed in business attire, Ashburn is often targeted for her so-called “unfeminine” appearance. This comes to a peak when Ashburn visits Mullins’ family, and Mullins’ brothers’ girlfriends. Beth (Jamie Denbo), asks her, “Are you a boy or a girl?” to which one of Mullins’ brothers adds, “From the get go? No operation?” Beth then asks Ashburn, “How you get that close a shave on your face?” Apparently, to be a “real” woman, one must slather on make up, wear skin tight clothes, and sport big hair, like Gina and Beth the girlfriends of Mullin’s brothers, and Tatiana Krumula (Kaitlin Olson), a Bulgarian drug distributor.

Ashburn is analogous to “a woman in drag”, and therefore privy to heterosexist censure by other characters. Ashburn was raised in foster care, while Mullins was raised with her brothers, who she says all turned out “terrible”. Neither has a female friend. Thus, both are portrayed as ersatz males, and this is implied as a feeble excuse for their over the top machismo and lack of “normalcy”.

In another scene, Mullins and Ashburn have this exchange:

Ashburn: I'm gonna say this one more time. Stand down, Officer. *Mullins:* Fuck off, Officer. *Ashburn:* Oh, okay. Guess what? Now you've really done it. I'm going to call my boss. *Mullins:* You do that, tattle-tits! Fuckin' narc!

Likewise, Mullins tries to pawn Ashburn off to a man she dated:

Mullins: Her lady business is like an old dirty attic. Full of broken Christmas lights and like shoes and shit. Why don't you clean THAT out for her? *Ashburn:* Uh, that's a... that's a misrepresentation of my vagina.

At her family house, regarding his girlfriend, Mullins warns her brother, “You tell Gina to shut her mouth before I strangle her on the dinner table!”

If a ‘real’ man were to say such things, it’d be misogynist and unacceptable, but when a mannish woman says them, we’re supposed to laugh?

In North American culture, misandry is often presented as legally and morally acceptable (Nathanson & Young, 2001), which may explain the contempt towards male characters such as Craig Garrett, Rojas, the detectives’ friends and foes, even superior officers. Early in the movie, Mullins makes a show of looking around her Captain’s office for his “balls” when she doesn’t get her way. She calls an officer “motherfucker” (a favourite expletive throughout the movie) and a perp a “piece of shit”.

Julian Vincent (Michael McDonald) is the second-in-command of Larkin's organization. During interrogation, Mullins plays Russian roulette with Julian’s genitalia to get him to talk. Towards the end of the film, Ashburn shoots DEA Agent Simon Adam (Taran Killam), who is in fact the mastermind, Simon Larkin, twice in the crotch.

There is no subtlety regarding Freudian laced hatred of the male phallus in *The Heat*, and the ideological feminist triumph over patriarchy it represents. In bringing down the bad guys, and overcoming the bad [male] cops, Mullins and Ashburn have become “sisters”, a message which Mullins scrawls in Ashburn’s high school yearbook. Mullins gets a distinguished service award, and although Ashburn does not get her promotion, she happily settles into a position in Boston to continue fighting crime. In reality, both would likely have been fired and charged with multiple crimes, since they acted while suspended.

Narcissists do not follow the rules, and America celebrates this phenomenon, with the most self-absorbed celebrities being female reality TV stars (Taylor, 2011). The number of youth classified as narcissists has doubled in the past 3 decades, and is now held to be about thirty percent, so many youthful viewers may identify with the selfishness, self-importance, and disregard for others, embodied by Ashburn and Mullins.

What else may account for *The Heat's* success and popularity?

Katie Dippold won the Best Comedic Screenplay at the American Comedy Awards (2014) but as Paul Travers (July 8, 2013) notes, “The subtext in the all-over-the-place script by Katie Dippold is that women can behave just as boorishly as guys. Point taken, but that point gets tired very quickly.”

Could it be that in an age of political correctness, *The Heat* allows viewers to be irreverent for 117 minutes?

The Heat does show how both men and women may conform to being “assholes”, inflicting racism, sexism, and ablebodism, for example. Because misandry is more tolerated than misogyny in society, the fact that Mullins and Ashburn are women may underscore their vile behaviours, particularly towards male characters. That Ashburn and Mullins behave in narcissistic ways—opportunistic, cunning, obnoxious, and isolationist, may be mitigated by a prevalent ideological feminism notion of the glass ceiling—tacit yet unbreakable barriers supposedly limited to women and minorities attempting to rise through the ranks in institutional hierarchy, in this case, law enforcement.

However, *The Heat* does not merely replicate, but exemplify, negative traits commonly associated with patriarchal males in pop culture. Mullins is particularly racist, ableist, and sexist. Archie Bunker, the quintessential parody of a male chauvinist pig, comes across as a puppy dog in comparison. Ostensibly encouraging us to excuse their extreme incivility by being women in male-dominated law enforcement, Ashburn proffers, “Being a woman in this field is hard. Men are just so intimidated by me” but as Morgenstern (July 27, 2015) observes:

Mullins's insanity can be extremely funny from time to time, but her anger grows as punishing for the audience as it does for the victims of her unrestrained police work, and Ms. Bullock is more to be pitied than censored in her thankless role of straight woman to a garrulous psychopath.

Both Mullins and Ashburn have difficulties sustaining satisfying relationships. They are overbearing, manipulative, hypersensitive, self-important, and braggarts, fitting multiple characteristics of narcissism, if not psychopathy. This might be partially explained by examining the phenomenon of power in capitalist society, as portrayed in movies, such as *The Heat*. According to bell hooks (2004, p. 55):

As women have gained the right to be patriarchal men in drag, women are engaging in acts of violence similar to those of their male counterparts. This serves to remind us that the will to use violence is really not linked to biology but to a set of expectations about the nature of power in a dominator culture.

As the old adage goes, “Two wrongs do not make a right.” Boorish behaviour is boorish behaviour, whatever the sex or gender of the offender.

In the real world, neither Mullins nor Ashburn would have received accolades for their insubordination but the North American public glorifies Thelma and Louise-type anti-heroines. In pop culture, as in much academic literature of an ideological feminist nature, a gynocentric stance permits largely unfettered attacks on men, as a homogeneous group. Men are equated with evil and women with goodness. The idea that Mullins and Ashburn are rebelling against a patriarchal glass ceiling in law enforcement may not only excuse their abhorrent behaviours but also gain viewers' applause. When we all “know” that women are subjugated in male dominated professions, and that women are all inherently good, it may become impossible for many viewers to process that Ashburn and Mullins are “assholes” or narcissists. This knowledge is not bearable.

They are merely fighting against “the man.”

On a redeeming note, perhaps *The Heat* allows audience members to laugh at tense situations in a capitalist workplace, where an increasing number of narcissists and sociopaths run rampant, and workers have little recourse? A number of books have been written on this phenomenon, including *Bullying: From backyard to boardroom* (McCarthy, Rylance, Bennett, & Zimmerman, 2001), *The no asshole rule: Building a civilized workplace and surviving one that isn't* (Sutton, 2007), *The narcissism epidemic: Living in the age of entitlement* (Twenge & Campbell, 2009), and *Assholes: A theory* (James, 2012).

Sandra Bullock and Melissa McCarthy are talented actors, beloved by millions of fans, and within the movie industry. Certainly, Bullock and McCarthy wholly invest in their ridiculous roles as Ashburn and Mullins. *The Heat* captured the People's Choice Awards (2014) for Best Comedic Movie. For her role as Ashburn, The Broadcast Film Critics Association Awards (2014) nominated Bullock for Best Actress in a Comedy, while The Women Film Critics Circle Awards (2013) hailed McCarthy as Best Comedic Actress in her role as Mullins.

Fortunately, The Alliance of Women Film Journalists (2013) saw fit to nominate McCarthy for the EDA (Eda Reiss Merin) Award for Actress Most in Need of a New Agent for her 2013 roles in *Identity Thief* and *The Heat*.

There is some common sense, after all.

Overall Rating (1/5): Watching *The Heat* is like going to a junior high school improvisation night, catching your kids mouthing off and behaving like beasts, and wanting to yank them off the stage, only to sit paralysed in utter embarrassment.

The Heat is demeaning, sending a message that narcissism is acceptable and funny when the protagonists are women. To achieve gender parity, we need to acknowledge that both women and men in positions of power can show strong collegial and leadership skills, or paradoxically behave like "assholes". We need to question the celebration of narcissism in cinema, and problematize what this says about our cultural norms and values, including racism, ablebodism, misogyny, and misandry.

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DE PROFUNDIS HOMINUM

Jan H. Andersen

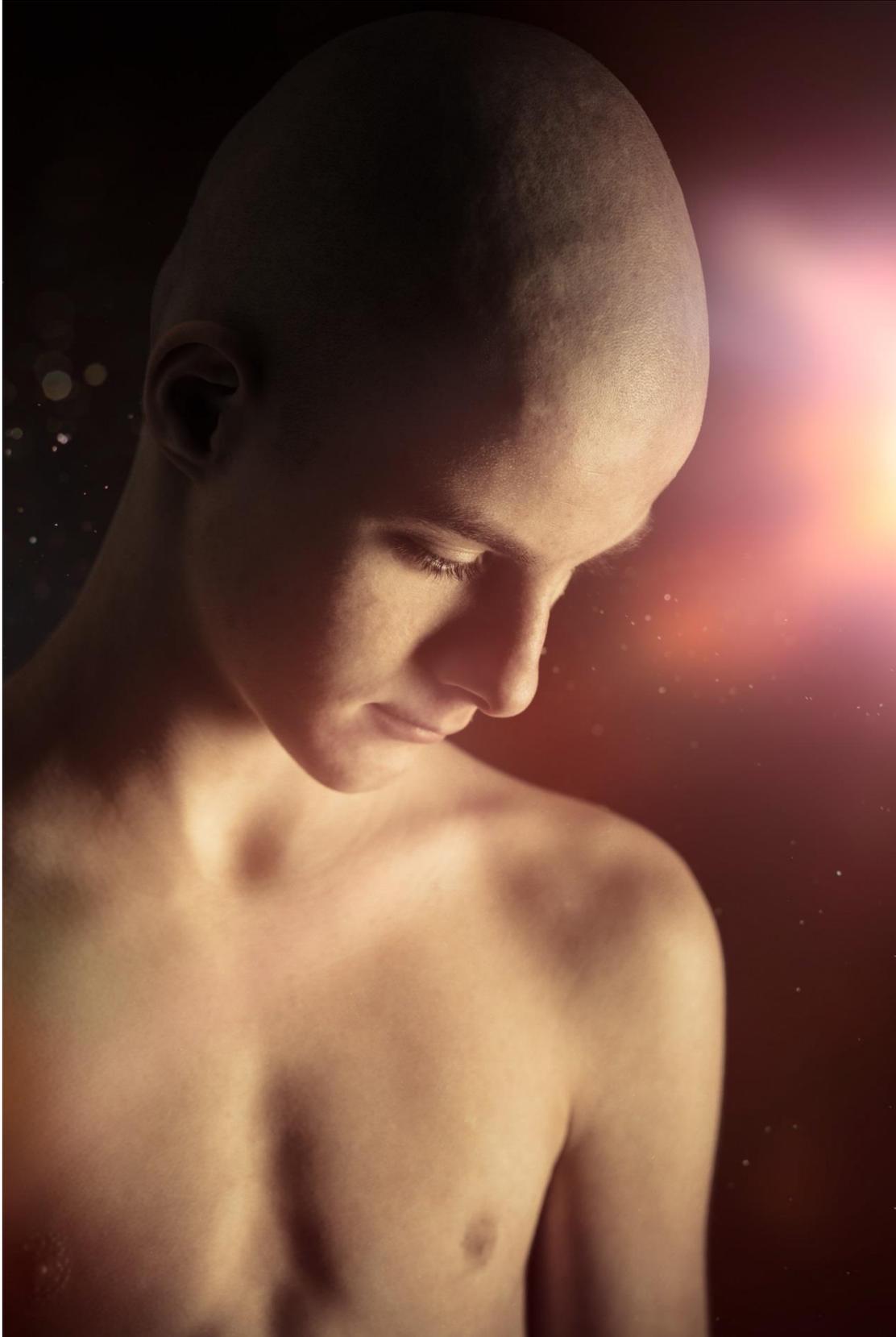
The belief in something greater than ourselves has existed for as long as mankind itself. With very few exceptions, the connection between humans and their gods has been administered by men.

- ∞ Is the idea of a god an innate male trait like the death drive?
- ∞ Is men's belief in being unique and omnipotent a uniquely male trait?
- ∞ Is the downfall of patriarchy why religion is fading in the western world?
- ∞ And what will happen to us men, when we are no longer the tongue and hands of God?
- ∞ Will we seek the spirituality in solitude or will we simply fall into the darkest of madness?

What follows is an excerpt from the series "*De Profundis Hominum: From the Depths of Man.*"

DE PROFUNDIS HOMINUM













Jan H. Andersen is a Danish photographer, software developer, and author specializing in topics surrounding children and teenagers. With a degree in child care and with many years of experience working with troubled kids and families, he writes with passion about child psychology, boy issues and parenting. You can read more at his website www.jhandersen.com and reach him at jha@jhandersen.com

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