

Twelve reasons to take a more balanced view of issues that confront men: Editorial for a special issue on male psychology

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I'm delighted to have been invited to be the guest editor for this special issue of *Psychreg Journal of Psychology* (PJP) on male psychology. Having co-founded the *Male Psychology Network* and *Male Psychology Section* of the *British Psychological Society*, and co-edited the very popular *Palgrave Handbook of Male Psychology and Mental Health* (Barry et al., 2019), and co-author of the forthcoming book *Perspectives in Male Psychology: An introduction* (in press), it's a great pleasure to be able to bring together a collection of 12 new papers, submitted from seasoned academics and from newcomers to the field.

As an experienced researcher, it's very exciting to see so many different methodologies represented here, from cross-sectional and longitudinal, qualitative and quantitative, and from a clinical case report to a study involving 7,000 men. We also have papers from authors based in different countries, and the range of themes is exciting too. Not only are there studies focusing on mental health – something now recognised as an important issue male psychology – but also several submissions highlighting the relevance of bias against men in various ways.

If this special issue of PJP was a diagnostic test of the health of male psychology in 2020, I would be very impressed to see so many green shoots sprouting vigorously across the world. Given that male psychology only began life as a concept in 2010 when clinical psychologist Martin Seager proposed a BPS Section, and considering that the call for papers for this special issue only went out in August 2020, it is very rewarding to see how far this field has come.

Given the replication crisis in psychology, the first paper in this special issue gives us reason to feel optimistic. It combines two surveys I conducted, firstly of 2,000 men in the UK in 2017 and a year later 5,000 men in the US. The main UK finding was that by far the best predictor of men's mental wellbeing is job satisfaction, and this was resoundingly echoed in the US sample. The public response to some media coverage of the two surveys was very positive, perhaps in part because the findings were a welcome change to the 'toxic masculinity' narrative so often found in the media. You can find out about some of the other interesting findings by reading *Job satisfaction, relationship stability and valuing one's health are the strongest predictors of men's mental wellbeing*.

The next paper is an interesting combination of clinical case studies, demonstrating how expressive writing can be a useful way of dealing with posttraumatic stress. For anyone who has ever found writing to be a therapeutic / cathartic experience, this paper makes a lot of sense. Read Dr Kevin Wright's *Effects of expressive writing on posttraumatic stress symptoms and other traumas: Case study of male clients in therapy settings*.

The paper *Loneliness, impaired well-being and partner abuse victimisation of separated fathers in Wales* is a very welcome contribution from a highly respected academic, Dr Richard Bradford. His survey highlights how men can suffer terribly from abusive relationships, even after the relationship is – on paper at least – over.

In one of the first longitudinal studies of the impact of family breakdown on men, Louise Liddon and I found that *Child contact problems and family court issues are related to chronic mental health problems for men following family breakdown*. As with Richard Bradford's paper, this study puts a spotlight on the chronic mental turmoil that many men experience in the months and years after their family comes apart.

We are fortunate that one of the leading authorities on male childlessness – in the UK if not the world – has submitted a paper to this PJP special issue, on the question of *Male Broodiness: Does the Desire for Fatherhood Effect Men?* In his paper Dr Rob Hadley uses mixed methods to explore yet another issue that is often either overlooked or misunderstood. Rob is no stranger to male psychology, having contributed to the *Palgrave Handbook of Male Psychology and Mental Health*, and having spoken at the *Male Psychology Conference* on a number of occasions, and the forthcoming online *BPS Male Psychology Section* mini-conference on 11th December.

A paper from another contributor to the *Palgrave Handbook of Male Psychology and Mental Health*, Nathan Hook, explores an issue with far-reaching implications for the *gender empathy gap*: the question of whether there is a sex difference in in-group bias. Find out the result of his study in the enigmatically titled *Men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross: Gender differences in shared-religion bias in identifying with fictional characters*.

One of the key papers in male psychology of the past 10 years was published in 2014 in *The Psychologist* magazine, on the topic of the feminisation of therapy (Morison et al., 2014). The lead author was Dr Linda Morison, and I was very fortunate to have teamed up with Linda, along with Martin Seager, Louise Liddon and Jordan Holbrook, to produce another arguably ground-breaking paper, which concluded that *Adults are expected to take responsibility for their problems, especially when those problems are congruent with traditional gender role expectations*.

Dr James Nuzzo is an exercise scientist, and though is a relative newcomer to male psychology has recently produced several excellent papers focusing on sex differences in relation to sports and exercise. His paper in this special issue continues his research excellence and originality, discussing *Bias against men's issues within the United Nations and World Health Organization*.

Sometimes papers based on lived experience come across as overly subjective and difficult to generalise to the experiences of others. A paper on the experiences of a male mature psychology student in South Africa might at first sound as if it would fall into this category, but I challenge anyone who reads the paper by Angelo Vincenzo De Boni not to feel that you are walking in the shoes of someone whose experiences resonate with you, no matter what part of the world you are from. Vincent describes vividly how gender politics frustrate his efforts to learn about psychology, and how his own experiences make him question the prevailing gender narrative he is expected to uncritically accept. *A male perspective of psychology from the Rainbow Nation* is, in terms of methodology, one of the most modest papers in this special issue of PJP, but nonetheless it is one of the most powerful.

One of the most downloaded chapters of the *Palgrave Handbook of Male Psychology and Mental Health* was on gamma bias (Seager & Barry, 2019). This concept resonated with many people – as shown by the number of views of our animation on the topic (Male Psychology Network, 2019) – as a coherent and comprehensive explanation for the types of gender biases that we see all around us. Gamma bias joined to the two gender biases already recognised (alpha bias, beta bias), and delta bias is a new addition. Although much more specific than gamma bias, it highlights an issue that many people will recognise, for example, in relation to workplace gender equality quotas and programmes. Find out about *Delta bias in how we celebrate gender-typical traits and behaviours* by Martin Seager and myself.

Given the relatively low uptake of men to therapy, the question of how to make therapy more male-friendly has one that has received much attention in the Male Psychology Network, and our work so far on sex differences in preferences (Liddon et al., 2018) for therapy has attracted a lot of interest. Our new survey examining how therapists view masculinity in therapy has yielded findings that are so interesting we thought that it would be helpful to share our preliminary findings from the initial participants (we are still recruiting at the time of writing) in this special issue of the *PJP*. If you have ever wondered *How much*

are therapists' views on patriarchy related to their approach to therapy for men, you can find out in this special issue. If you want to find out more, Louise Liddon and I write about this topic in our new book *Perspectives in Male Psychology: An Introduction* (in press).

The issue of therapy for men is a hot topic, especially since there now exist guidelines that suggest taking a view of men that is, in part, influenced by patriarchy theory. One clinical psychologist in the US felt so impassioned about this issue he has written an open letter to the *American Psychological Association* (APA) asking them to reconsider their position: 'An open message to the APA on ethics and ideology'. We think Dr Shawn Smith's letter, in calling psychologists to make therapy for men more male-friendly, is a fitting conclusion to this *PJP* special issue on male psychology.

There is little else to say, other than I hope you enjoy the diversity of the 12 papers in this special issue, and I hope they might inspire you to reflect in new ways on male psychology.

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