



Engaging Male Clients in Counseling

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Introduction to Presenter and Topic

- Bob Carty
 - 38 years working in behavioral health
 - Various roles: counselor, supervisor, trainer, author, ICB board member
 - Currently, Director of Clinical Services at Hazelden-Chicago
- “Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends to which, if preserved in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me.” ???????



Training Objectives

- Describe the impact of gender socialization on males
- List at least three core issues that men may experience
- Define “toxic masculinity”
- Explain how male clients may manifest depression differently than female clients
- Identify effective clinical strategies and techniques to engage men in counseling



Biology of Being Male

- While we will focus primarily on psychosocial factors in male development, keep in mind the impact of testosterone
- Vital to development of male physical traits
- Surges in adolescence, promoting growth and sex drive
- Testosterone also increases
 - Aggression
 - Competitiveness
 - Self-Esteem
 - Confidence in decision-making



Gender- Linked Socialization

- Gender roles tend to be established in early childhood
- Messages to girls
 - Be nice
 - Look pretty
 - Help others
 - Others?
- Messages to boys
 - Be strong/reduce emotional vulnerability
 - Win at all costs
 - Work hard, play hard
 - Others?



Socialization and Barriers to Clinical Engagement

- As boys learn to hide some of their emotions (such as fear, hurt and sadness), they shut down others as well
- Many male clients feel forced into counseling (to save their jobs and/or relationships)
- Their presentation in clinical situations tends to be defensive, hiding their vulnerability
- The more out-of-control they feel, the more they need to convince others (including you) that they are in control
- NIDA study: higher treatment dropout rate for men than women



"We Got Stuff:" Men's Core Issues

- Men as work objects
- Shame
- Depression
- Rigid psychological defenses
- Trauma
- Father-son issues



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Men as Work Objects

- Men frequently demonstrate their self-worth via their work, making other priorities seem secondary
- Measured by their salaries, their job status, and the number of employees under their authority
- Ability to function at work is used as a defense against any accusation that he has an AODA or MH problem
- Men who lose their jobs may experience an overwhelming sense of failure and loss of self-worth

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Shame

- "The intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging"
(Brene Brown)
- Being socialized to be competitive/strong/independent leads men to assess how they measure up; need to "man up"
- "Am I ____ enough?"
 - Strong/Tough
 - Rich
 - Dominant
 - Connected

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Depression

- **“Men lead lives of quiet desperation” (Henry David Thoreau)**
- Terrence Real (*I Don't Want to Talk about It*): depression is under-diagnosed in men as their symptoms might not match the typical symptoms (depressed mood, diminished interest in activities, decreased ability to think, crying jags, etc.)
- Men may experience emotional numbing, hyper-focus on work, manic behavior, explosive rage, high-risk activities, and increased use of alcohol and other substances



Rigid Defense Structure

- Basic defenses hide their self-doubts, shame, and anxiety – denial, minimization, rationalization, comparison, and others)
- **“Impression Management”**
- Like wearing a suit of armor to keep threats out...unfortunately it also imprisons the wearer
- Trade the suit for a shield...



Trauma

- Most males have experienced some form of trauma
 - Family of origin (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
 - Bullying
 - High risk behaviors leading to accidents and/or injuries
 - Military/police/fire fighter experiences
 - Violence, including high rates of homicide
 - Suicide attempts : 77.9% of suicides are men (CDC, 2015)
- **“Toxic masculinity” = self-destructive, male identification...**
 - Difficulty asking for help
 - Poor self-care practices (including eating and sleeping patterns)
 - Ignoring signs of physical pain/discomfort
 - Not getting regular check-ups (medical, dental, etc.)



Father and Son Issues

- A boy's father is his first primary male role model; however this relationship may be troubled
- Examples
 - "Father hunger:" occurs when the father is either physically absent or emotionally disconnected from the son; generates sense of unworthiness and longing
 - "Father wound:" occurs when the father abuses the son in any one of many ways this may occur; generates fear, mistrust and victimhood



Effective Clinical Approaches

- Wide range of clinical approaches are helpful for different reasons
 - Motivational Interviewing
 - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
 - Narrative Therapy
 - Twelve-Step Facilitation
- Therapists providing individual counseling need to...
 - Establish counseling as a safe place (sanctuary)
 - Help client to understand the potential value of counseling for him
 - Listen closely to the man's perception of his past, present, and future
 - Assess the impact of core issues
 - Mutually develop specific goals and tasks
 - Strategically challenge the man to extend his reach in recovery



Therapeutic Metaphors: Defining the Counseling Process

- How we describe counseling and/or the recovery process is important
- Many images are effective with male clients, such as...
 - Working a program
 - Learning skills with recovery tools
 - Breaking the chain of addiction
 - Stepping up to the plate
 - Building a new life



Band of Brothers: Group Counseling

- Gender-specific groups for men are very effective
- In establishing a "container," sacred space can be created in which
 - Men feel safe and free of criticism
 - Men hear their own fears, doubts, and struggles in the stories of others in group
 - Men allow themselves to be more vulnerable in their sharing
 - Men become more open to feedback from others
 - Men learn from their peers (sometimes what they resist hearing from counselors)
- Helps clients see other members as partners in recovery, not as competitors



Experiential Learning in Men's Groups

- Experiential learning can create powerful insights in men's groups
- Examples include
 - Male Stand-Up
 - The Roles We Play
 - Finding Our Wounds
 - Father-Son Circles



Non-Clinical Resources for Men

- **Victories of the Heart**
 - Offers weekend retreats and one-day workshops on various men's issues
 - Retreats include Break-Through Weekends, Shadow Weekends, and Wisdom Years Weekends; peer-facilitated, including staff with clinical training
 - Focus on emotional discovery and integrity to enhance one's relationships
- **Mankind Project**
 - Offers New Warrior Training, designed to strengthen a sense of masculinity
 - Focus on helping men to gain a deeper sense of mission; peer-facilitated, including staff with clinical training
 - Promoting inner strengths to become more fully involved in life



Recommended Readings

- Brene Brown (2012). *Daring Greatly*.
- Sam Keen (1991). *Fire in the Belly*.
- Ralph Keyes (1992). *Sons on Fathers*.
- Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner (2010). *Men's Lives*.
- Terrence Real (1998). *I Don't Want to Talk about It*.
- SAMHSA (2013). *Addressing the Specific Behavioral Health Needs of Men. TIP 56*.



Closing Comments

- **When men get engaged in counseling, we witness such outcomes as:**
 - Deeper sense of integrity and accountability
 - New awareness of their behavior in relationships
 - Stronger connection with other men
 - Greater sense of purpose in life
 - Enhanced willingness to become more involved in their families and communities



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