Postgraduate Symposium on Men’s Issues

Friday 22 October 2004

Room 3, Building H7
Hawkesbury Campus
University of Western Sydney

Hosted by Men’s Health Information and Resource Centre
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Dear Colleague,

On Friday 22 October 2004 six postgraduate students from across the country joined us at the Hawkesbury Campus of the University of Western Sydney, to share and discuss their research.

A symposium such as this could not have been organised even 5 years ago, as there were not enough researchers with an interest in men's and boys' issues to hold such an event. Also any academic discussion about men's issues held 5 years ago would not have accommodated the wide range of views and expounded. I was interested to observe that the emerging academic discourse about men's and boys' issues is growing to accommodate different frameworks for working with men. Strength-based discourses - such as the salutogenic approach – are challenging and expanding the existing masculinities/pro-feminist ways of conceptualising men and male behaviour.

The range of research is also heartening, from investigating the challenges health services face in consulting men, through to boys' education and men's use of services, to issues for older, rural men. I will not comment about individual presentations as the abstracts of each presentation and the contact details of all researchers are included in this booklet.

I congratulate all of the presenters (including the two who could not make it due to ill-health on the day) and thank everyone who came and contributed.

It was gratifying to hear the work of both young researchers starting their academic career, as well as those with more experience in the field. We are happy that we were able to bring these together with practitioners working with men and boys. The day made me realise again that there is still much to learn about of men and boys lives, and the experiences and challenges they face.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. John Macdonald
Director
Foundation Chair, Primary Health
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This symposium grew out of a chance meeting with Bill O’Hehir in August. After the meeting Bill and I were discussing about our own PhD work, and as all PhD students know once someone starts taking an interest in your work it’s hard to stop talking about it.

Bill made the comment that it was good to talk with another researcher and that he’d like sometime to visit us at the Men’s Health Information and Resource Centre (MHIRC) and talk to the colleagues here and get some critical feedback on his work.

This got me thinking that other researchers in other universities could be feeling the same way, and after discussing this with Prof. Macdonald, MHIRC decided to host a symposium for postgraduate students working with men.

The response from the students we contacted was very enthusiastic, and we very quickly found that there was enough interest to host a modest get together.

As a student myself I found the day a great chance to meet and talk with other people in the same boat! I hope others found the day to be as interesting and useful.

It was unfortunate that circumstances conspired against Bill, who at the last moment was unable to attend. But don’t worry Bill (and the other people who told me they wanted to come but couldn’t make it on the day) we will be hosting another opportunity for postgraduate students, perhaps again at University of Western Sydney or possibly as part of the 6th National Men’s and Boys Conference in Melbourne next year.

I’d like to thank everyone involved for their enthusiasm and support on the day. I’d also like to acknowledge the effort of some presenters and participants who travelled quite a distance to get here.

Sincerely

Anthony Brown
Project Officer, Men’s Health Information and Resource Centre
PhD, Candidate
Session 1: Older Men and Community

Place and my place within the Mature Men Matter project - a learning journey exploring masculinities, ageing and later life transitions in rural NSW.

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Abstract
This paper will explore the process used within the Mature Men Matter project and the place of the PhD student as a non-metropolitan mid-life female researcher within the action research process. The research integrates spirals of planning, action and refection in recognition of the multiple dimensions in the lives and masculinities of males who are ageing in rural places. The approach to the research seeks to move beyond lineal research models with their implications of a set beginning and end point in recognition that it is in the process itself that the opportunity for learning arises. The actors, facilitators, participants and collaborating service providers involved with the Mature Men Matter project during 2003-2004 have taken part in a learning journey which involves the sharing of stories, experiences, observations, reflections, knowledge and understandings about later life transitions. This is a journey in which contributions of participants at all levels are given value, rather than a didactic process which assumes that understanding lies only in those with specialised knowledge or expertise. The presentation will integrate footage filmed during several workshops to illustrate the learning process.

Recreating Meaning: The Lived Experience of Retired Men’s Involvement in Community Organisations

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Abstract

Many men define themselves through their work, perceiving it as the activity that gives their life purpose and meaning. Many men report changes in their expectations of the world post-retirement.

Older men who ‘successfully’ negotiate the crisis of retirement, appear to do so by involvement in activities that recreate meaning activities. For some men these activities are involvement in various community based groups, these groups may include (but are not limited to), social groups (such Older Men: New Ideas), service clubs (Rotary, Lions, Apex), religious or spiritual groups (Knights of the Southern Cross, or Masons), or interest groups (antique motor clubs, gardening clubs).

This paper will investigate the need to explore how men have used the experience of belonging to such groups to construct (or re-construct) meaning in their lives.
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Session 2: Frameworks for Understanding Men’s Interaction with Society

Dialectics of Survive – a “Salutogenic Orientation”
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Abstract

In the main, this doctoral thesis will be a philosophical exploration of the adequacy of a particular theoretical approach that seeks to explain human functioning sufficiently well to ground health promotion research, teaching and practice. Aaron Antonovsky contended that the “Salutogenic Orientation” should be adopted by health scientists as they seek to identify, explain and engender the conditions that give rise to optimal human functioning. The intention is to move beyond the mechanistic accounts of disease that have provided a powerful foundation for medicalised approaches to illness and its treatment. In order to move beyond pathology as the basic model for exploring health and illness, Antonovsky proposed that researchers and practitioners should focus on the health generating (salutogenic) aspects of human functioning. To ground the thesis in reality, the researcher will explore the issues to the surviving and thriving of the men comprising “A Force” on the Burma-Thailand Railway during World War 2.

Heroes and Wimps: How boys negotiate their ‘maleness’ in relation to sport.
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Abstract

Sport has become one of the central sites in which white Western masculinities are constructed and contested (Connell, 1995; Whitson, 1990). School is one of the most powerful social institutions for establishing gendered expectations. For boys, school sport is one of the most significant areas of curriculum for the reinforcement and negotiation of dominant masculine identities. Traditionally, research that links sport and the school setting has focussed almost exclusively on adolescent aged boys who are considered to be high achievers in mainstream, school-based sports. But, what happens to boys who aren’t good at sport? How do they identify as acceptably masculine? This paper is an introduction to my research that will intersect and extend the current literature by placing primary school aged boys, who are not considered to be outstanding achievers in school sport at the centre of investigation.
INTRODUCTION: ‘Consumer participation’ is becoming increasingly important as a tool to assist health care managers and other health care professionals provide quality care to specific communities within the population. For this to occur it must be true participation with all sectors of the community, for along with the concept of participation comes the concept of marginalisation for those who miss out.

In the past those groups representing separated fathers have been ignored, criticised or actively rejected by researchers. This is despite separated fathers having poorer health on a variety of measures. This study has the presumption that those groups need adequate recognition in the participation process to provide them with appropriate health care. From this assumption we develop the following aim.

AIM: Can groups representing separated fathers contribute and work effectively in partnership with practitioners and policy makers to effect change to positively impact on the quality of their members health care?

METHOD: To test this aim a participation model similar to that described in “Improving Health Services Through Consumer Participation”, Department of Public Health, Flinders University (2000) is to be used. Initially fathers’ organisations will be surveyed by telephone to obtain a broad idea of the issues they have with the health system. This will be followed by a questionnaire about the key issues. These issues will be presented to a small group of health care workers. Health workers and fathers representatives will be asked to work together on practical solution development.

To examine the effectiveness of this process surveys of the attitudes of health workers and fathers representatives will be conducted. As well interviews will be conducted to determine how suggested solutions were implemented and why solutions were not implemented.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:
7. Department of Public Health, Flinders University and South Australian Community Health research Unit (2000), "Improving Health Services Through Consumer Participation - A Resource Guide for Organisations" Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, Canberra, Section 2, pp5
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An investigation into the efficacy of the Internet as a self directed mode of therapy addressing male sexual anxiety among rural Australian males.

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Abstract
Computers offer the opportunity for information dissemination to isolated areas such as rural Australia to a degree previously unachievable. Medical and para-medical information such as psychological therapies are now accessible to lay people through the Internet. What is not clear is the efficacy of computer intervention as a medium for individualised self-awareness therapy. This research, over a three year period, has investigated the complex area of Male Sexual Anxiety with two objectives: a) to develop a Male Sexual Anxiety Scale and b) to develop and evaluate a computer based intervention program to address these issues. One study involving males (n=152) and a second involving females (n=152) have attempted to define gender based sexual anxiety. Results from these data indicate that there are four factors influencing the male experience of sexually based anxiety: 1) Individual Concept of Self Worth; 2) Sense of Sexual Efficacy; 3) Fear of Negative Evaluation and 4) Autonomic Responses to Sexual Anxiety. Data from the study involving female participants are currently being analysed. The results of the study involving males have contributed to the development of a computer based intervention program. A third study will be carried out between November (2003) and February (2004) with the aim of addressing the question “How effective are computers as therapeutic intervention tools with complex psychological issues such as Male Sexual Anxiety?” This study will comprise 3 groups of males. One group will be exposed to computer intervention, a second group will be exposed to Bibliotherapy, and the third will be a “waiting list” control group. It is hoped that the males exposed to the computer intervention will make significant gains in relation to their anxiety experience.

Confronting the reluctant users: Investigating why men don’t seek help
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Abstract
It has been recognised internationally that men of all ages are reluctant to seek help and use health services. Despite this realisation, there is little consensus as to why this is so. The most plausible explanation is drawn from psychosocial research, which explains that the social construction of masculinity has a complex relationship with men’s interaction with health services. Currently there is scant research investigating this relationship from a consumer perspective. Subsequently, a public health study of the facilitators and barriers of help seeking and health service utilisation among men with respect to conceptions of masculinity has begun. This research forms part of the Florey Adelaide Male Ageing Study (FAMAS) a longitudinal research initiative conducted through the University of Adelaide. The study, a work in progress, aims to investigate how and why the social construction of masculinity influences help-seeking among men, and the way in which this implicates men’s access and utilisation of health services. Qualitative research methodologies will be used, as men’s understanding’s, thoughts and lived experiences will be sought. A combination of both in-depth and focus group interviews will be used to draw rich descriptive data from participants. Accordingly, this presentation aims to explore current literature with respect to men’s health, masculinity and help seeking, and will explain the aim, objectives and anticipated methodology of this important men’s health research.
Abstract
This exploratory study sought to investigate the association between hegemonic male gender expectations, help-seeking attitudes and indicators of male depression in a homogenous non-clinical sample of older men. Hegemonic male gender expectations were concerned with conflict between work and family responsibilities, motivation for success, power and competition, restrictive emotionality and restrictive affectionate behaviour between men. Indicators of male depression comprised depression, hopelessness, aggression and alcohol use. Data was collected from 89 Rotarian men of mean age 58 years, using self-report measures. Hierarchical regression procedures were employed investigating the variance accounted for by both main and interaction effects. Findings are largely consistent with hypothesised associations.

Findings indicate that while gender expectations concerning restrictive emotionality are associated with poor help-seeking attitudes, those expectations concerned with motivation for achievement are associated with openness to seeking help. Associations between gender expectations and indicators of male depression varied somewhat. Expectations indicating conflict between work and family responsibilities, as well as motivation for achievement, were associated with hopeless depression. Expectations concerning restrictive affectionate behaviour between men were associated with increased aggression. Expectations concerning motivation for success, power and competition were associated with increased alcohol use. Additionally, expectations concerning restrictive emotionality were associated with the interaction between indicators of male depression comprising depression, hopelessness and aggression.

This research extends upon previous research that has predominantly investigated the associations between hegemonic male gender expectations, help seeking attitudes and the mental health of younger populations of men. Findings are discussed with a focus on identifying those associations that appear to be broadly relevant to men of various ages and those that appear to be exclusively relevant to older men.