

Mental Health

'If I'm not a warrior, I'm weak'

by Alex Iga Golabek BSc (Hons) MNCP

Why focus on men?

Statistics show that 75% of all suicides registered in 2017 were male, with nearly 4,400 deaths (Office for National Statistics, 2018). This is an alarming number of incidents, yet men tend to seek psychological help much less than women.

I work with men of different ages and circumstances. Their common denominator? Initial resistance to reaching out for support. When asked why, I hear a myriad of reasons, but the most common are: shame, shame, lack of self-acceptance in situations where admitting to having an issue is central to feeling better. My male clients easily recognise that other people around them may need help but won't consider themselves to be those people. They carry their troubles daily alone, protecting the world from knowing they may need something else; something outside of themselves. I started wondering about the moment defining men's perceptions of roles they take on so readily; one that creates

obligation to remain separate from their partners, friends and families when confronted with a painful occurrence or emotion. Both literature and my clinical experience point towards the early years, when we first learn to experience our feelings; how they occur, how they are translated by our physical bodies and how to communicate them. It seems apparent that boys and girls are taught the entire spectrum very differently; positive situations demand a poised response from younger females and older men, while painful circumstances force males to remain stoic while allowing women to release their feelings through tears or to search comfort. This seems unfair yet shapes our further behaviours so that we continue reacting the way we become accustomed to. Easily, effortlessly, painfully.

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One of my male clients told me he avoids sharing his feelings with the person closest to him; his partner, in case she finds him unattractive because

he appears vulnerable. The standard which he judges himself against is often echoed by most of my male clients at the beginning of their therapeutic journeys. By the time they reach me, they're so ashamed of participating that I can almost feel the crushing sense of guilt dissipate across the room. Conversations reveal the western archetype of masculinity (or 'hegemonic masculinity'): uninterrupted competitiveness, autonomy, antagonism and logicity. The men I see place themselves firmly against these roles and fail because it's impossible to fulfil them. No one's ever entirely autonomous or always logical, are they? Somehow, society has managed to equate emotional restraint to strength and experience of own feelings to weakness. We've fallen for this. Why have we agreed to uphold this epitome and why do we continue to measure ourselves against it? Most paradigms carry a degree of impossibility, unfairness or agenda. Let's consider 'no sex before marriage'; how many people in the Western world



I practice Effective Psychotherapy at the Lifeways Therapy Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon, incorporating a range of a variety of approaches tailored specifically to each individual client. I'm a passionate advocate of mental well-being and mental health awareness and believe that each condition and circumstance matters.

If you feel like your life is a little out of control, please get in touch to see how I can help you in person or on Skype.

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continue to follow this ideology? But they used to. And we've shifted it. Maybe because we've realised that practicality and freedom of human nature in this regard deserved to win over an artificial order of things. The masculine archetype can, too, become a thing of the past.

During treatment, the men I work with discover the lack of external expectations for them to always be strong through their conversations with those closest to them. What's more, they learn that their emotional distance can

feel rejecting which tends to lead to conflict. We work towards opening a dialogue where they can become reassured that sharing thoughts and feelings can reinforce their relationships through trust built upon vulnerability which actually means strength. In the words by John Krakauer (1996): 'it's important in life not necessarily to be strong but to feel strong.' The core aim of therapy is for my client to become empowered; this is when they make their best choices.

If you need to talk to anyone about any issues raised in this article you can contact Alex Golabek: (alexgolabek@egotherapy.org), GTC Welfare Officer Chris Yacoubian: (chris.yacoubian@gtc.org.uk), or ring the new 24/7 helpline run by The Film and Television Charity (formerly the CTBF): 0800 054 00 00. A copy of the GTC Zerb Mental Health supplement may found at <http://bit.ly/2BOy8Jz>

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