

CLINICAL WEBINARS

FOR HEALTH SERVICE PSYCHOLOGISTS

TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Engaging Men in Psychotherapy

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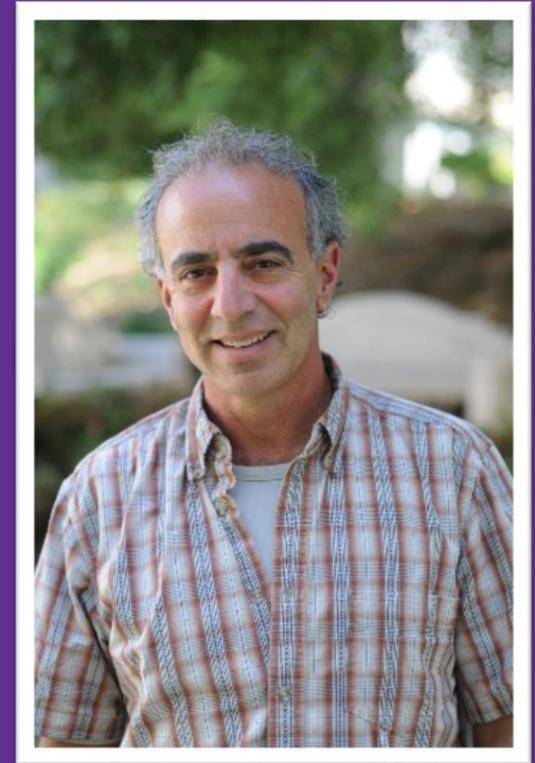
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About the Presenter

Fredric E. Rabinowitz, PhD, is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Redlands and in private practice specializing in psychotherapy with men in Redlands, CA. He has co-authored several articles, chapters, and books. His latest book *Deepening Group Psychotherapy with Men* will be coming out this March. Dr. Rabinowitz is the past president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinities of the American Psychological Association. He was also a co-author of the recently passed APA Guidelines for the Psychological Practice with Boys and Men.



Disclosures/Conflicts of Interest

The presenter does not have any conflicts of interest to disclose.

Learning Objectives

- Utilize masculine gender role models and research to make decisions about the best methods to engage men in psychotherapy.
- Apply specific strategies to enhance the probability that men will make the most of the therapeutic relationship.
- Demonstrate flexible approaches with male clients to enhance therapeutic outcomes.

Manhood from the Boss

“I learned a rough lesson from my father. The rigidity and blue-collar narcissism of “manhood” 1950’s style. An inner yearning for isolation, for the world on your terms of not at all. A deep attraction to silence, secrets, and secretiveness. You always withhold something, you do not lower your mask. The distorted idea that beautiful things in your life, the love itself you struggled to win, to create, will turn and possess you, robbing you of your imagined long-fought-for freedoms. The hard blues of constant disaffection. The rituals of the barroom. A misogyny grown from the fear of all the dangerous, beautiful, strong women in our lives crossed the

carrying of an underlying physical threat, a psychological bullying that is meant to frighten and communicate that the dark thing in you is barely restrained. You use it to intimidate those you love. And of course...the disappearing act: you’re there but not there, not really present; inaccessibility, its pleasures and its discontents. All leading ultimately to the black seductive fantasy of a wreck of a life, the maddening boil lanced, the masks dropped and long endless free fall into the chasm that certain moments can smell so sweet from a distance.”
Bruce Springsteen, 2016, p. 413 Born to Run



Why Men Don't Gravitate to Traditional Psychotherapy

Cultural Gender Role Scripts

- Strong and silent
- Tough guy
- Independent
- No sissy stuff
- Intimacy = Sexuality
- Vulnerable emotions = Weakness
- A real man doesn't need psychological help

This cluster of characteristics have served men in our culture who needed to portray strength, overcome adverse circumstances, and provide and protect families and communities.

Compared with women and men who are more flexible in their gender role orientation, rigid adherence to these scripts is linked with lower rates of help-seeking for medical and psychological problems, higher stress levels, higher rates of perpetrating and being the victims of violence, higher rates of cardiovascular disease, and higher rates of suicide.

Why Men Don't Gravitate to Traditional Psychotherapy

Developmental Psychodynamic Perspective

- Boys pushed out of early bonding with mother/caretaker before they are ready.
- The premature entry into the male world results in exposure to the “boy code” of being autonomous, tough, and hiding emotional vulnerability at a relatively young age.
- Boys experience this loss of intimacy, don't learn the vocabulary of the inner emotional world, and are channeled toward side by side interaction.
- This results in a diminished capacity for verbal intimacy as an adult, and ambivalence about closeness, since it also stirs up unconscious abandonment loss.
- Sexuality becomes a primary means for intimate connection.

When Men Do Come to Therapy

- Relationship crisis
- Nagging negative affect (depression, anxiety)
- Addiction crisis
- Court-mandated (anger, abuse)
- Family/relationship mandated
- Post-traumatic stress reactions
- Existential life crisis often around loss
- Sexuality conflict
- Gender identity

Clinician Awareness of Intersecting Masculinities to Avoid Bias and Stereotypes

- Masculinity as a biological/evolutionary predisposition
- Masculinity as a socially constructed identity
- Masculinity defined by cultural and family norms
- Masculinity intersecting with race, ethnicity, and place of origin
- Masculinity intersecting with sexual orientation
- Masculinity intersecting with gender identity
- Masculinity intersecting with age and developmental stage of life
- Masculinity intersecting with socioeconomic, employment, and ability status

Reading Physical Cues as Outer Shell, Not Usually Indicative of Inner World

What you see on the outside is not always what is going on on the inside. Coming to therapy is a big deal, even when a man doesn't show his anxiety, worry, or shame on the outside.

- Tough/neutral exterior takes energy and effort to maintain.
- Tough/neutral exterior is a way to maintain control.
- Tough/neutral exterior keeps others away.
- Tough/neutral exterior protects against shameful feelings.

Build Relationship From a Strengths Position to Reduce Shame and Defensiveness

- See each man as unique.
- Recognize the strengths he has used to overcome adversity.
- Praise his willingness to make an effort to make his life better.
- Forgive him for past actions that were based on impulsiveness and faulty social learning, but hold him responsible for his current actions.
- Believe that he is capable of self-awareness and able to find better solutions to life's obstacles.
- Separate your own experiences with men in your life from the man sitting in front of you.
- Despite his “façade” of toughness, he wants connection.

Practical Tips on Talking to Men

- De-stigmatize the process ("Let's start with a conversation and see where it goes.")
- Give control whenever possible ("What do "you" make of this?")
- Show active interest in his experience ("How is it to work in that business?")
- Empathy for his role in this relationship ("Ask me anything. I know it's a little weird to find yourself here.")
- Appropriate humor ("It took you 45 years to get here. There is no rush to fix it all at once.")
- Be real, humble, and honest ("I know I was not given a rule book on how to be in relationships.")

Creating a Male-Friendly Therapy Environment

- Acknowledge courage it takes to come to therapy
- Small talk, humor, and socially appropriate self disclosure
- Physical environment not too alien
- Joining with language of the client
- Respecting client comfort level with disclosure
- “Start where you need to...”
- Let a man tell his story from his own perspective
- Assess while you listen

General Principles for Psychotherapy With Men

Sensitivity to Shame-Based Defenses

- Don't push too hard for emotional sharing early in treatment
- Empathize but let your male client go at his own pace
- Be willing to discuss man's ambivalence about being in therapy
- Be sensitive to loss of power and control in client role
- Use language that matches his
- Be patient and trust the relationship building process speed

General Principles for Psychotherapy With Men

Deepening Psychotherapy Conflict Zones to Explore

- Dependency conflicts and defensive autonomy
- Denied or minimized losses
- Adherence to restrictive gender roles that inhibit emotional expression and more adaptive behavior in life situations
- Tendency for automatic movement toward action in response to emotional distress (vs. being with the emotion)
- The emotional wounding that has brought a man to therapy (often experienced as inadequacy, rejection, or challenge to one's sense of self)
- (Rabinowitz & Cochran, 2002)

General Principles for Psychotherapy With Men

Deepening Dialogues With Men in Therapy

- “What has been your experience with being really open and honest in relationships?”
- “Sometimes what you don’t want to share is more important than that which comes easier to you. Is there anything you have been hesitant to share with me?”
- “We’ve addressed some strategies to manage stress in your life. Are there other things you might want to explore here?”
- “Everyone in your life seems to be giving you the feedback that you need to change. What is your take on this?”
- “I know you feel like everything has gone to hell. What’s been your way of handling it when you have felt this way before?”
- “It looks like it is hard to accept that you might still feel a lot of sadness about the divorce. Seems easier for you to be angry.”
- “What is that knot in your stomach trying to tell you?”
- “You are the main character in your story. Where do you want him to go next? What do you see as your options?”

General Principles for Psychotherapy With Men

Transference and Countertransference Awareness

- Utilize to bring therapy into the here and now. “I get the sense you are worried I might judge you.”
- Male therapist- Male client dynamics: competition, status, authority figure
- Female therapist- Male client dynamics: sexualizing intimacy, mothering
- Ethnicity of therapist
- Therapist age
- Socioeconomic and educational background differences
- Religious and spiritual differences
- Be aware of countertransference reactions based on one’s own history with men
- Political differences

General Principles for Psychotherapy With Men

Leaving the Door Open

- After initial issues have been addressed, broach what else might need work
- Not unusual for a man to be willing to face deeper, more long term issues if feeling like he has made some progress on what brought him in
- Be open to a man's desire to have a break from therapy but let him know the door is open for a return in the future
- Extend length between sessions
- Tune up model
- Referral to a men's group

Group Therapy With Men

- Focus of the men's group (e.g., growth, anger, depression, divorce)
- Ongoing vs. time-limited men's groups
- Overcoming the reluctance to share in a group of men
- Individual therapy as a precursor to participation in men's group
- Core benefits
 - Universality of experience
 - Emotional support and safe sharing of losses, shame, and trauma
 - Overcoming isolation
 - Interpersonal skill building
 - Open discussion of existential life concerns and choices

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Q&A

- Dr. Sammons will read select questions that were submitted via the Q&A feature throughout the presentation.
- Due to time constraints, we will not be able to address every question asked.