

Acting Tough: Young men, Masculinity and Lessons from Practice in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Ken Harland
University of Ulster
2008

Key Questions for young men....

When do I become a man?

What does it mean to be a man?

Am I man enough?

Alpha Male

Beta Male

Metrosexual Male

Traditional Male

Dominant Male

Subordinate Male

Macho male

New Male

Confused?

Masculinity and the legacy of the 'Troubles'

- Over 3500 deaths (the equivalent of 600,000 in the US during past 3 decades)
- 34000 Shootings
- 14000 Bombings
- 91% of deaths were male
- 32% of deaths were Young males 17 -24 yrs

Work with Young Men: 3 Key Areas

Research

Development of Practical Resources

Lessons from Practice



CENTRE FOR YOUNG
MEN'S STUDIES

Partnership between YouthAction NI and University of Ulster

Primary aim - To promote a centre of learning, development and excellence relating to issues impacting upon the lives young men in Northern Ireland

2006 – 2011 – (5 year longitudinal study mapping over 300 young men aged 11-16 in schools across NI.)

Four key Themes: Masculinity, Violence, Educational Experiences and Male Transitions.



Centre for Young Men's Studies: Some initial findings

- Localised Masculinity
- 3 Dimensions of Masculinity
 - *Externalised - idealised - tough / rich/ smart / aggressive*
 - *Internalised - Realistic - Ethical - is responsible / stands up for himself*
 - *Ambiguous - has boyfriend / hugs a man (dissonance)*

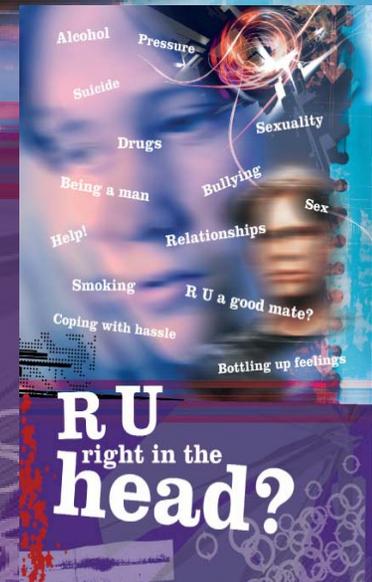
“RU right in the head?”

A Practitioner’s resource for those working with young men

Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland



**Health
Promotion
Agency**



Learning from Practice

- Many young men believe that it is by '**acting tough**' that they will gain status and respect.
- Young men report getting a '**buzz**' from engaging in risk-taking activities and certain forms of **violence** with little consideration for consequences.
- The **contradictory nature of masculinity** and its association with risk taking behaviour are key reasons why young men refuse to seek emotional support

- Young men can feel enormous pressure to *prove* that they are 'real men' and not boys
- Dichotomy of *Power and Powerlessness* (protest masculinity)
- Young men report they are rarely given opportunities to *reflect* upon their behaviour
- Lack of access to *mentors / role models* (gap between adults and young people)

Barriers to Developing Practice

- Young men not actively seeking support
- Practitioners believing they do not have the necessary skills to engage young men
- Demonisation
- Paramilitary influences
- Absence of focus on 'emotion' within male research / policy

Successful factors in work with young men

- A proactive approach that focuses on developing young men's ***self-confidence***
- An ***appreciation of masculinity*** and how this impacts upon young men's behaviour
- Identification of issues affecting young men and using ***creative*** ways to address these
- Programmes that offer a combination of ***reflection, activity*** and ***emotion***

Successful factors in work with young men

- The ***practitioner's skills***, knowledge and empathy towards young men
- Appreciation of the ***qualities*** that young men look for in a practitioner – trust, genuineness, respect, humour, support, non judgemental, acceptance
- Acknowledging that ***strengths and resilience*** exist in individuals, families, peer groups and communities and multi agency / disciplinary partnerships

References

Hargie, Dickson and Nelson (2003) Working together in a divided society. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. 17, P285.

Harland, K. (2008) Masculinity and Mental Health

www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/Resources/mental/pdfs/masculinity%20and%20mental%20health.pdf

Harland, K. (1997) *Young Men Talking: Voices from Belfast*. Working with Men, London / YouthAction Publications.

YouthAction Northern Ireland. (2002) *Everyday life: Young men, violence and developing youth work practice in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: YouthAction Northern Ireland.

Working with Men. Young men, risk-taking and health [Online]. Available at: www.workingwithmen.org/projects/boys.aspx
Accessed 9 September 2008

Harland, K., Barclay, L., McNamee, D. (2006) RU Right in the Head? *International Journal of Men's Health and Gender*. Vol. 3, Issue 2. pp 204-209

Working with Young Men. (2008) *International Encyclopaedia of Men and Masculinities*. Routledge Publications

Inaugural Paper. Centre for Young Men's Studies. University of Ulster. www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/cyms/

McCreight, B, S. (2004) A Grief Ignored: narratives of pregnancy loss from a male perspective. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, Vol. 26, No 3. p326-350.

Muldoon, O., Schmid, K., Downes, C., Kremer, J. and Trew, K. (2008) *The Legacy of the Troubles: Experiences of the troubles, Mental Health and Social Attitudes*. <http://www.legacyofthetroubles.qub.ac.uk/LegacyOfTheTroublesFinalReport.pdf> (Accessed 8th February 2008).

Smyth, M and Hamilton, J. (2003) *The Human Costs of the Troubles*. In Hargie, O. and Dickson, D. (Eds) *Researching the Troubles: Social Science Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict*. London: Mainstream Publishing.