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

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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)
- 34,000 Shootings
- 14,000 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
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
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


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


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

