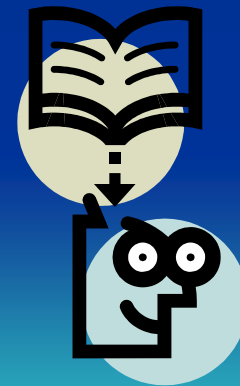


# Normative Male Alexithymia and Attachment Difficulties in Men: Exclusions through Language

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# Learning Goals

1. Distinguish alexithymia from normative male alexithymia (NMA).
2. Identify the role of shame in the shaping of male identity and help seeking behaviors.
3. Learn about the interconnection between alexithymia, attachment issues, and emotional intelligence in men.
4. Identify key components for treating NMA as proposed by Levant (2001).



# What is alexithymia?

- Alexithymia, a term coined by Sifneos (1973), refers to the difficulty to verbalize emotions.
- From the Greek:
  - *a* meaning *lack*
  - *lexis* meaning *word*
  - *thymos* meaning *emotion*



# Salient features of alexithymia

(Taylor & Bagby, 2000, pg 41-42)

1. Difficulty identifying feelings and distinguishing between feelings and the bodily sensations of emotional arousal.
2. Difficulty describing feelings to other people.
3. Constricted imaginal processes (paucity of fantasy).
4. Externally oriented cognitive style.



# Additional features of alexithymia

(Taylor & Bagby, 2000, pg 42)

1. Tendency to social conformity.
2. Tendency toward action to express emotion or to avoid conflicts.
3. Poor dream recall.
4. A somewhat stiff, wooden posture, and a paucity of facial expressions.



# Alexithymia is associated with:

- Substance use disorders
- Eating disorders
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Tendency to somatization
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Essential hypertension
- Functional gastrointestinal disorders



# What is normative male alexithymia?

- Normative male alexithymia (Levant, 2001) results from a long socialization process in which boys are taught to suppress and deny their feelings of vulnerability.

PREMISE: Many behavioral and emotional differences between males and females are rooted in early socialization practices. Social constructivism.



# What is normative male alexithymia?

- NMA represents a socially sanctioned, shame-based deprivation process, through which boys grow up to be men with relational difficulties and problems with their emotional intelligence.
- NMA is a subclinical form of alexithymia, that is why it is normative.



# The role of shame in male identity development

- Girls will become women through relational activities but boys will become men through oppositional behaviors (Badinter, 1993, 1989).
- Equation: MAN=NOT WOMAN
- Boys will learn that becoming men means staying as far away from the feminine as possible AND not getting too close to other boys due to their learned restrictive emotionality. This results in an isolated individual.



# The role of shame in male identity development

- Many men will use shame-based responses, denial, minimization, and silence as their tools to emotionally relate to others. Some men find asking for help as shameful.
- The demands of the male gender role tend to exclude anything that could be perceived as feminine (Brannon, 1985).



# The role of shame in male identity development

- The essential components of masculinity involve the endorsement of male role norms that prescribe toughness, status, and antifemininity (Kilianski, 2003).
- A study found that higher scores on the Restrictive Emotionality scale and higher scores on the Antifemininity scale associated with alcohol problems in men (Monk & Ricciardelli, 2003).



# The role of shame in male help-seeking behaviors

- Men who score higher on measures of gender role conflict and traditional masculinity ideology tend to have negative attitudes towards psychological help seeking (Berger et al., 2005).



# The role of shame in male help-seeking behaviors

- Men who deviate from dysfunctional and unhealthy gender role expectations and norms are often ostracized and experience a sense of shame (Krugman, 1995).
- There is a positive relationship between gender role conflict and shame in college men (Thompkins & Rando, 2003).



# Attachment and Alexithymia

- My hypothesis: NMA alienates men from the community of language and increases the likelihood of long lasting relational deficits in men.
- Alexithymia positively correlates with dismissing (avoiding) attachment and negatively with secure attachment (Scheidt et al., 1999).



# Attachment and Emotional Intelligence (EI) in men

- EI, in general terms, is the ability to effectively deal with daily environmental demands and pressures.
- “Women are more aware of emotions, demonstrate more empathy, relate better interpersonally, and act more responsible than men...” (Bar-On, 2000, pp. 367).



# Treatment of NMA (Levant 2001)

There are five basic steps:

1. Psychoeducation about normative alexithymia.
2. Develop a vocabulary of emotions.
3. Learn to read the emotions of others.
4. Keep an emotional response log.
5. Practice.



# Discussion & Questions



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