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Bad Boys, Bad Boys: Masculinity, Performance Theory, and Prisoner Re-Entry

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Abstract

Men and boys commit more crime, are more violent, and are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system than women and girls (Cohen & Harvey, 2006; Carson, 2018; Zimmerman & Messner, 2010). Within the past two decades, criminal studies have begun to consider masculinity as a social construct to explain the gender gap in crime rates. However, more research is needed to understand its relationship to reentry and recidivism. The lens of masculinity as a performance is valuable and has a proud scholarly history, including the works of Judith Butler and Erving Goffman. This paper conceptualizes prisoner reentry through the lens of masculinity as theater and offers some considerations about psychotherapy and reintegration for individuals who have been released from prison.

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Bad Boys, Bad Boys: Masculinity, Performance Theory, and Prisoner Re-Entry

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DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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Abstract

Men and boys commit more crime, are more violent, and are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system than women and girls (Cohen & Harvey, 2006; Carson, 2018; Zimmerman & Messner, 2010). Within the past two decades, criminal studies have begun to consider masculinity as a social construct to explain the gender gap in crime rates. However, more research is needed to understand its relationship to reentry and recidivism. The lens of masculinity as a performance is valuable and has a proud scholarly history, including the works of Judith Butler and Erving Goffman. This paper conceptualizes prisoner reentry through the lens of masculinity as theater and offers some considerations about psychotherapy and reintegration for individuals who have been released from prison.

Keywords: Reentry, Masculinity, Performance Theory

The United States prison population skyrocketed after deinstitutionalization and reached a peak of approximately 1,615,487 inmates in 2009 (Carson, 2018). While there has been some stabilization in the last few years, the prison population remains historically unmatched. The criminal justice system is often referred to as a revolving door, with prisoners' lives spent cycled back and forth between incarceration and release. In one year, more than 600,000 prisoners re-enter society (Carson, 2018). Additionally, 93 percent of prisoners will be released in their lifetime (Luther, Reichert, Holloway, Roth, & Aalsma, 2011), facing various obstacles to maintaining their freedom. These barriers to reentry are not unheard of (Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005), including difficulties finding employment (Jung, 2015; Haslewood-Pócsik, Brown, & Spencer, 2008), maintaining relationships with friends and family (Braman, 2004), forming new relationships (Lopoo & Western, 2005), and resuming life in the community (Harding et al., 2013; Leverentz, 2012). Furthermore, prisoners are often released with little education and work experience, and suffer from mental illness and addiction (Jung, 2015; Spjeldnes, Jung, & Yamatani, 2014; Baillargeon, Hoge, & Penn, 2010; Western, Braga, Davis, & Sirois, 2015).

Research on Masculinity in Criminal Justice Settings

Masculinity is a key concept in criminal studies. It is well established that men and boys commit more crime, are more violent, and are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system than women and girls (Cohen & Harvey, 2006). Bureau of Justice statistics (Carson, 2018) recently detailed that females made up only seven percent of the national prison population at the end of 2016, which represented an increase from 2015. Men are also more likely to abuse substances and be referred to substance abuse treatment programs (SAMSHA, 2018). Further, biological sex is considered the highest risk factor for juvenile delinquency (Zimmerman & Messner, 2010). Crime is something that men do.

Leading up to the past couple decades, gender was primarily included in criminal studies as a biological construct. By biological construct, I mean that many studies used biological sex as a correlate of crime without considering the social aspects of masculinity. This is demonstrated by Cohen and Harvey's (2006) content analysis of criminal studies involving the term "gender," which found that only one out of 137 studies included a social definition of gender.

Recently, however, criminal studies have begun to consider masculinity as a social construct to explain the gender gap in crime rates. Masculine norms have been associated with physical and sexual violence among both adults and adolescents. This is not to say that all manliness results in crime, but that the ideas one has about what it means to be a man can lead to either persistence or desistance from crime in one's lifetime (Carlsson, 2013). One study showed that a sample of teenage boys believed their violent behaviors were necessary acts of revenge or preservation of identity (Lopez & Emmer, 2002). They considered use of violence to be the best option to display their manhood. This was mirrored in a New England study in which adherence to masculine norms was predictive of using violence to resolve conflict in a sample of prisoners (Amato, 2012). Some research on male-on-male homicide depicts lethal violence as a form of masculine conflict resolution (Polk, 1995). Regarding sexual violence, Javaid (2015) conceptualizes rape as an enforcement of power and domination that feminizes the victim, regardless of biological sex. Additionally, success in masculine culture and drug culture have been noted to bear significant overlap for adults and juveniles (Greif, 2009; Sanders, 2011; Iwamoto & Smiler, 2013; Stanistreet, 2005; Zamboanga, Iwamoto, Pesigan, & Tomaso, 2015; Fugitt & Ham, 2018).

Overall, it seems that the formation and protection of masculine identity is growing as an explanation for criminal behavior, which the criminal justice system is not inherently designed to resolve. An Australian article presents both crime and incarceration as masculine in nature (Seymour, 2003). The author acknowledges that crime may be a means for men to "accomplish" masculinity and indicates that prisons exacerbate these performances to make men more resentful, dangerous, and marginalized. (Culturally, the ratio of men to women who are incarcerated in Australia is comparable to the American justice system.) Prisons are oriented in a manner consistent with military traditions, involving hierarchy and dominance (Seymour, 2003). They were built to be institutions of custody and control, utilizing confrontational means of communication and dehumanization.

Physical violence is ubiquitous in the male prison environment, as men compete for status between and within both prisoner and officer groups. Masculine performance on part of the staff is equally as prevalent as the masculine performance of the inmates. In a study by Levy and Hartocollis (1976), rates of violent incidents in an all-female staffed hospital unit dropped to zero. This was compared to a traditionally staffed unit with 13 violent incidents in the same time period. In my opinion, the competitive nature of masculinity gets in the way of reducing violent incidents to zero. While women are only concerned with preventing violence during a conflict, men might also have a stake in winning the interaction.

While abiding by masculine norms in prison may be adaptive, some may be associated with poor outcomes. For example, one study demonstrated that increased loyalty to masculine norms, combined with decreased peer support (which is not inherently manly), was correlated with a longer length of incarceration for African American males (Gordon et al., 2013). Despite growth in research, criminal studies that include masculinity as a social construct stress that more

research is needed to understand this topic, including its relationship to employment and recidivism after release (Spjeldnes, Jung, & Yamatani, 2014; Gordon et al., 2013; Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009). Carrington and Scott (2008) argue that it is "overly simplistic to explain violence as an activity involving abnormal or pathological individuals." They add that a contextualized approach to understanding violence is necessary, including structural, political, and ideological frameworks. There are no current studies that explore masculinity as a performance in the context of prisoner reentry.

Masculinity as a Performance

The lens of masculinity as a performance is valuable and has a proud scholarly history. Performance theory is a lens in which social life is likened to theater; it supposes that people behave as though they are being watched (Karson, 2008). For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on works by performance theorists Judith Butler and Erving Goffman.

Butler (1990) describes gender identity as a "stylized repetition of acts" (p. 270). She asserts that gender is a performance encompassed by bodily gestures, movements, and enactments that are intended to be believed by both a social audience as well as the performer. This is not to disregard the existence of biological differences between men and women, but to distinguish biological sex from a socially constructed cultural meaning that has been connected to one's body. Butler highlights the social and political ties between masculinity and being biologically male. Politically, for example, men are afforded unique rights or employment opportunities. Socially, masculine identity occurs in relationships with others, where deeply entrenched expectations of masculinity are applied.

Goffman (1959) illustrates that the performance of the self is "not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited." In his book *Stigma* (1963), he draws attention to the manner in which individuals perform to manage the attributes they possess that are "deeply discrediting" (p. 3). Masculinity, then, can be viewed as a social performance that is often credited or discredited based on biological sex. For example, when a boy is told not to cry, his performance has been discredited upon the basis of his sex and the cultural expectations the audience holds of how he should perform.

Goffman (1959) stresses the importance of a third party in social performance. He states, "the part one individual plays is tailored to the parts played by the others present, and yet these others also constitute the audience" (preface). The audience's expectations can be grossly affected by systemic, cultural, and political norms and relationships. The concept of masculinity and femininity, for example, is longstanding and engrained in American culture. The most sought-after information during a pregnancy is whether the child is biologically male or female; this is often followed by a celebration boasting either pink or blue décor. For the purposes of this paper, Karson (2008) provides a useful definition for masculinity based on Butler and Goffman's ideas about performance: "*Masculinity* is the set of performed acts under specific conditions that society accepts in males…" (p. 88). It is possible to alter the ideas one has about what it takes to be a "real man" in society. This is demonstrated in the "real men wear pink" epidemic, in which something originally considered to be culturally stigmatizing was reframed, resulting in men proudly wearing the color pink. In this paper, I will conceptualize prisoner reentry through the lens of masculinity as theater and offer some general considerations about psychotherapy and

reintegration for individuals who have been released from prison. The heart of this paper is to propose that masculinity can be reframed to prevent recidivism, rather than undermine masculinity.

Re-Entry and Masculinity as a Performance

Employment. It is undeniably considered a blow to one's masculinity to be without work, or in the process of applying for a job. Men are still overwhelmingly the ones who commit mass shootings in the workplace after being fired. This is an extraordinary example of how being fired can damage a man's sense of identity or security in his masculinity. While not every man would do something so extreme, this example captures the relevance of work in the social definition of manliness. The status of every prisoner when they reenter society is "unemployed," which is one aspect of reentry that might get in the way of a successful masculine performance. Based on his book *Stigma* (1963)*,* I believe Goffman would consider unemployment discrediting to a masculine performance. Culturally, American men are the breadwinners of the family. Traditionally, the American family equates not working with being the woman. Unemployment can be considered a mark against any man's credibility in this context.

A well-known obstacle when a parolee is faced with unemployment is navigating the stigma of being a felon in the application process. Although being labeled as a felon does not seem to be discrediting to masculinity on its own, an individual's experiences with potential employers might create a conflict. One illustration of this occurred while a parolee was in an employment interview. The parolee perceived the interviewer as treating him as "less than" due to his criminal record. This made the parolee angry, and he responded by verbally lashing out at the interviewer. The consequence of the interaction to the parolee was continued unemployment. I suggest exploring the parolee's perceptions of potential employers in similar situations. During

an individual session, we tested the rationality of his perception by examining the evidence of its accuracy. This opened a discussion about his feeling as though his masculine performance was being challenged while he was in a vulnerable scenario. Additionally, we discussed how to manage his anger productively if he were to be treated unfairly due to his criminal history. For example, he could file a complaint rather than scold the interviewer. He might also perform his masculinity through self-control with the belief that "real men have self-control."

During reentry, prisoners leave with a sense of being behind their peers in terms of employment. This feeling of inadequacy might interfere with their success. For example, a former prisoner might sooner return to selling drugs than face the stigmatization of unemployment or starting at the bottom with younger men. One way to manage this feeling of being behind might be to encourage men to look forward. In my own work conducting psychotherapy with parolees, allowing them to become stuck in the past often leads to bolstering evidence of their being discredited. When guided to look forward, considering their goals for the future, they tend to demonstrate more hope for their life. Imagining themselves where they would like to be, and considering how they can get there, is more crediting than comparing their past to their peers. A parolee in individual psychotherapy explained how frustrated he was at work due to feeling that he had to start at the bottom of the totem pole, despite years of previous experience. He struggled with maintaining employment because he switched jobs frequently, finding himself unhappy with the pay or the elementary tasks he was asked to perform. We often returned to a discussion about his future, and how to make decisions based on his goals, rather than his feeling behind. This helped him maintain one job and work past the anxiety of feeling behind.

The feeling of being behind might also show up in therapy by resulting in a conflict between the therapist and parolee. A natural conflict might occur from the therapist being an individual to whom the parolee compares himself. For example, I had a client who would make comments about how close he and I were in age, yet how disparate our lives were. He would become angered by the idea that he was stuck with his own life, having spent a fair amount of it incarcerated. I used this opportunity to explore the conflict in the moment. I acknowledged the reality that we had different lives and experiences. Then, we discussed his tendency to be unhappy with the situation he had been given, which prevented him from looking forward to the future. I worked with him on using his anger productively by setting goals for himself. We also worked on gratitude for the present and being able to give himself credit for the progress he had made. I would have him compare his current self to his former self by asking, "Where were you a few years ago?" In response, he took a more affectionate stance toward his current circumstances. I would also look for moments in which he was impatient with himself in therapy. We would take those moments to pause and reflect on the bigger picture and find the present aspects of the journey of which he was proud.

Often included in one's definition of being a man is the ability to provide financially for one's group, whether the group includes solely oneself or a family. Masculine success seems to correlate with income. Money is a symbol of status. As such, another situation that might interfere with a man's success in reintegration is a perceived, or actual, insufficient income. This could include taking a job that does not pay as much as he might have made before he was incarcerated, making less money than his partner, or not making enough money to cover rent. A commonly held belief is that "a real man is a financial backbone for his family." For example, a client found himself in and out of prison because he would continue to sell drugs each time he

returned to the community. I have heard from many men that the amount of money one would make legally does not come close to the money they would make selling drugs. For this particular individual, the masculine success he felt in giving his sons all the latest video games was too great a reinforcer to turn away from. Making minimum wage meant a demotion, which was discrediting to his performance as a man in his family. Reframing to prevent recidivism might look something like this: "A real man chooses the hard route if it means staying out of prison to be present for his family."

In another example, a client was self-deprecating for making less money than his significant other and covering a smaller portion of their shared rent. His idea of a real man was one that provides the most financially, though he could deal with providing half. As an intervention, I would ask him, "What other ways do you provide for your partner as a man?" This allowed him to be reminded of his success in providing for his partner emotionally. In considering the areas in which he felt adequate in his masculine performance, he no longer felt so discredited by the percentage he was able to provide financially. His belief about being a real man expanded to include other forms of support.

Mating. Masculinity is a huge aspect of mating. A masculine performance can be shaped by a man's success in finding a mate. This becomes problematic when the performance results in justice system involvement. In American culture, the image of an attractive man is one who is muscular, successful in his career or athletics, and makes good money. This is visible in any magazine's list of "top" attractive men. Many males base their own attractiveness on these characteristics. I had a client who believed a real man should look something like Brad Pitt, which resulted in low self-esteem and depression, fueling further alcohol abuse. I intervened by

exploring what it is like to feel average. We discussed men he saw as real men who were average in appearance. We reframed his belief to include, "real men are also average looking."

Low self-esteem might get in the way of a parolee's success by forcing him to seek out other forms of demonstrating his worth as a man. This becomes a problem when it results in violence against himself or others. For example, one man became so angry with himself for being weak that he attempted to shoot himself. When he was unsuccessful, he believed, "I can't even kill myself like a man." His anger escalated, resulting in property damage. I believed this client was caught in a cycle of feeling inadequate and managing his inadequacy with violent aggression. I had recommended that his therapist help him explore his ideas about what it means to be a real man. When he becomes angry with himself in therapy, a therapist could challenge him to reframe these ideas and manage his anger more productively.

Low self-esteem regarding masculinity is also a problem when men find masculine success in getting into physical fights. It is often said that "nice guys finish last" when it comes to finding a mate. In America, women are often drawn to "bad boys." Women want their men to be tough, which is an evolutionary advantage. For example, at a small college near Buffalo, New York, I noticed one too many men wearing shorts in January. I believed this to be a demonstration of their toughness in a context where eligible mates are more available. Being in prison or on parole does not seem to be discrediting to masculinity on its own. In fact, some incarcerated males maintain multiple partners at one time. Even female staff have sexual relations with male inmates more often than one might hope. However, mating might get in the way of parolees' success if their desire to look tough compromises their freedom. An example of this might include getting into a fight on a mate's behalf, or fighting to demonstrate one's toughness with a potential mate as the audience. One might believe that "a real man fights for

women." This becomes a problem when it results in justice system involvement, or results in a parolee being sent back to prison. A client on parole once described being approached by another man while walking with his significant other. He indicated that the other man had provoked him with a question similar to, "What are you going to do about it?" In this moment, he could not shake the thought of wanting to hit the man. He became angry and felt challenged in his role as the man in that scenario. Walking away might have been discrediting and humiliating, especially in the presence of his mate. Hitting the man would have resulted in his return to prison, but he refrained. I believe what made this possible was his concern for being unavailable to protect his mate if he were to be incarcerated. His masculinity was reframed to the idea that "a real man needs to be around for his partner," which took precedence over the other man's challenge. In therapy, I might engage the client in a conversation about what it means to walk away from a fight as a man and develop a reframe that does not come at the cost of his freedom.

Typically, it is beneficial for a parolee to have a partner. A masculine performance is bolstered by having sex, being appreciated by a partner, and engaging in gendered interactions (e.g., opening jars or changing light bulbs). It also seems that having someone to protect gives male clients a good reason to put in the effort to remain out of prison. I worked with parolees whose outlook and motivation changed entirely when they began a new relationship. Additionally, having a partner can assist a parolee with structure. For example, a parolee who has a partner with a nine to five job is likely to adjust to their partner's sleep and wake schedule. When I ask prisoners or parolees what their concerns are about being off paper, many of them say they are worried about not having the imposed structure. Having a partner with a full-time job might allow them to have some sense of structure provided by someone else.

Another aspect of mating that can get in the way of parolees' success might be the imposed expectations of the therapist or case worker. I taught an all-male cognitive behavioral therapy group that addressed criminal thinking and substance abuse. As a woman, I felt at odds with my clients when they spoke about other women in ways that were offensive to me. For example, I felt annoyed when they would talk about women using traditional ideas about hierarchy. In those moments, sessions could derail to become more competitive in nature. I might have felt inclined to intervene on their perspectives about male and female relationships. To maintain a collaborative environment in similar situations, it might be necessary for a therapist or caseworker to set aside their expectations for what a relationship should look like and let the goal be for the parolee be to simply have a relationship. I do not mean to set aside expectations for behaviors that are clearly problematic, such as physical or verbal abuse, but to improve collaboration by questioning one's expectations for the client's relationship and whether they ought to be imposed.

Domestic violence may be a problematic solution to a perceived failure in a man's success in mating. A man may use the cycle of violence (intimidation and aggression followed by being apologetic and doting) to control his partner. This has historically been effective for men at first, as women who are abused by their partners often stay devoted to the relationship. One way to reframe the masculine performance might be to get the client to believe, "real men do not hit women." At the very least, physical abuse might be prevented with this reframe. Even better would be to assist the client in reframing more of the ideas he holds about being a man in relation to women. This might include, "a real man can maintain a relationship with honesty," "a real man is respectful of women," or "a real man puts his partner first."

Adherence to Laws. Breaking the rules is manly. Women are usually expected to be on their best behavior, but "boys will be boys." A problematic masculine performance persists because it works until the individual finds himself in jail. Violence assists in delineating hierarchy, and financial success itself might be seen as more important than the method in which it was obtained. Physical and sexual dominance are achieved through force, and men become wealthy by selling drugs or women. When men do not have the resources to achieve masculine success through legal means, they might outsource other ways to perform. Eventually, these behaviors lead to involvement in the justice system, and clients are left feeling conflicted about changing behaviors that have landed them in jail or prison. Of course, some clients do not feel conflicted, but most would prefer to be free.

It might be manly to deny motivation to change, which is seen systemically across the United States. Some men who inspired the me-too movement, for example, do not show shame for a problematic masculine performance (e.g., being accused of sexual aggression against women). This is a stance that would interfere with an individual's success during reentry. A common intervention in this situation is motivational interviewing. It is used to amplify an individual's ambivalence and guide them toward opting to change. It puts the client in the driver's seat, which might make him feel more manly than being told he is wrong. This is not always successful, however. Motivational interviewing techniques do not always achieve the desired effect for men who would be considered pre-contemplative. In other words, they do not consider themselves to be engaging in any problematic behaviors. Ultimately, an individual must be willing to abandon the idea that his behavior is not problematic in order to change. This becomes difficult when the cultural expectation for manliness in America includes never apologizing for one's behavior. My suggestion is to direct the conversation toward masculinity,

rather than fighting it. Perhaps instead of believing "a real man shows no shame," the client's perception of manhood can be reframed to include "a real man takes responsibility for his actions."

When men are released from prison, one ubiquitous obstacle to preventing recidivism is community involvement, or networking. In order to change their behaviors, parolees are often faced with the challenge of changing their friendships. A notable obstacle to building new friendships upon release from prison is the stigmatization of ex-offenders. While it is not necessarily stigmatizing to a masculine performance to have a criminal record, parolees may struggle to build a masculine community with the goal of adherence to laws. Often, ex-offenders associate with other ex-offenders, and perceive that they are judged harshly by individuals in the community with no criminal record. Networking, itself, can be considered unmanly in United States culture, where men are supposed to be able to manage everything on their own. Men are expected by others to focus on competition, rather than relationships. A masculine performance can get in the way of success on parole when it prevents the parolee from forming new relationships. In prison, a therapeutic community is one way to submerge an individual in treatment where everyone has the same focus. However, once an inmate is released on parole, the easiest (and most masculine-adjacent) options are to return to the same, negative relationships he had previously, or isolate himself. Neither of these options are conducive to remaining out of jail or prison.

Networking can be reframed by considering strength in numbers, as opposed to individual strength. For example, the United States Navy teaches men that they are stronger together, not on their own. The military frames community as highly masculine. While each individual is expected to pull his own weight, strength is achieved through a group effort. The

same frame can be used to encourage parolees to network and involve themselves with other men who have the same goals (e.g., sobriety, obeying laws). One proposed solution to associating with a new community is through religious affiliation. Some parolees who attend religious services view that group as a form of support in maintaining their freedom. As these groups typically value doing what is "right," groups of men in religious environments are useful in holding each other accountable to adhering to laws. For men who are not religious, it may be beneficial to explore other networking options. This might include Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, group psychotherapy, or team sports.

Substance Abuse. Substance abuse fits a masculine performance. Men outnumber women in the amount and frequency in which alcohol is consumed and are more likely to become addicted to alcohol (Sanders, 2011). Alcohol is a well-known lubricant for sexual encounters, an effective numbing agent for emotions, comes with an element of risk, and is often a means of competition. It is not manly to turn down a drink. In this sense, peer pressure is awfully compelling for boys. Some men on parole have recalled never liking the taste of alcohol, but abusing it nonetheless. Saying no to alcohol can be stigmatizing for men who are expected to be out-drinking their friends. Parolees are typically not permitted to drink alcohol and might find themselves in situations where they have to say no to a drink to remain in compliance. This can be extremely difficult when it comes at the cost of one's conformity to masculine norms. Continuing to use alcohol in excess, and sometimes at all, will jeopardize a parolee's freedom. The belief that "real men out-drink their friends" can be reframed to "real men don't get tipsy." With this belief, the competition is won by maintaining sobriety. One way for a man to "handle" his alcohol can be to drink less, rather than becoming accustomed to drinking more. With increased sobriety, comes

better decision making, decreased propensity for violence, and increased monetary savings—all useful in preventing recidivism.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) are useful interventions with respect to a masculine performance. One masculine quality that could fuel increased alcohol intake is competition. Men might continue to drink to triumph over the alcohol, which would include the ability to drink as much as he wanted (or more than everyone else) without appearing intoxicated. I have observed this to be the case for some men who state that they have difficulty controlling the amount they drink, once they have started. The twelve steps and twelve traditions require men to stop competing. For example, in AA, surrender to the bottle is the first step to recovery. This admission of powerlessness puts alcohol at the top of the podium, as well as a higher power for those who believe in one. In a therapeutic community, this is reflected in the value of humility in recovery. The masculine ideal that, "a real man handles his alcohol," might look like not getting tipsy, instead of increased tolerance. Some men find that avoidance of the competition (i.e., never having one drink) works best for them in staying sober. However, when faced with the option to drink, humility appears to be what prevents them from competing.

Men are also more likely to abuse illicit substances (Sanders, 2011). Using masculine performance as a framework, one explanation for this phenomenon is that men with injured masculinities may seek substance use to bolster their masculine performance. Injured masculinity can result from low socioeconomic status, reduced opportunities for employment, reduced opportunities for mating, and other forms of stigmatization to a masculine ideal. Abusing substances is a form of risk-taking behavior that can serve as an outlet for masculine success. Drug abuse has become its own culture where men risk overdose and criminal involvement to maintain masculine accomplishment within the community. Drugs are expensive, and men often

need to commit crimes to obtain more drugs. This includes theft and burglary, as well as drug manufacture and sale. These behaviors become part of the community in which a man can find success in his performance. In order to reframe their masculinity, these individuals may need to find success in other ways. For example, success in fatherhood may prevent drug abuse and criminal behaviors that are prevalent in drug culture. Many men find their primary motivation to change is their children, if they are fathers. I have also observed this to be one of the most effective motivators in treatment. For men who are not fathers, they may find masculine success in adapting to another culture, such as team sports. For example, martial arts provide an environment in which a man could find success in winning competitions or demonstrating mastery in his physical strength and self-control. In order to perform in martial arts, a man would need to make his health a priority, which would reduce or eliminate drug use. He would have social support in a community with a similar goal of maintaining sobriety and freedom. Additionally, he would need to maintain employment to afford the cost.

Both alcohol and drugs are an effective means to escape one's emotions. This might be alluring for men who feel stigmatized in their expression of emotions. Typically, this is any emotion other than satisfaction and anger. While working with parolees in substance abuse treatment, a common trigger for substance use was emotional distress (e.g., anxiety, depression). In a relapse prevention group, I used a bucket filling with water as a metaphor for the consequences of not addressing one's emotions and stress. The idea was that many of them carry around a full bucket and do not have much room left before it overflows. In this way, something seemingly small can tip them over the edge, often resulting in cravings for substances. A lot of parolees lacked an outlet to manage emotions and stress before their buckets overflowed. For some, masculine performances were an obstacle. Once, an all-male group asked me to write

"Home Depot" on the front of the bucket. I believed this demonstrated their commitment to appearing masculine. One suggestion for reframing emotional expression is discussing the evolutionary advantage to each emotion, altering the perception of emotions as a weakness to a strength. "Big boys do not cry," and "rub some dirt in it," can be reframed to, "real men manage their emotions," and "emotions are an asset."

Trauma. It is becoming largely understood that trauma is part of the lives of most incarcerated males, and trauma-informed treatment is gaining footing among the incarcerated male population. Men process trauma through the framework of their masculine ideals. This becomes an issue when their ideals do not allow for changes in problematic behaviors that result in incarceration, such as physical and sexual violence or substance abuse. For example, men who witnessed their father abuse their mother might grow to treat women in the same manner. Men who believe their father hitting them was justified because of their misbehavior might do the same when their children misbehave. Men who struggle to manage the emotions that result from trauma might use substances to take the edge off. Sexual predation can be a means to control and dominate when a man's past has left him feeling defenseless.

Trauma affects self-esteem in a masculine performance, as it can threaten a man's sense of strength and power. When a man feels weak, and lacks productive resources to feel strong, he might turn to problematic methods of regaining his strength (e.g., sexual and physical violence). Parolees may have a history of childhood abuse or may endure abuse while in prison, where sexual and physical violence are common tools to enforce hierarchy. If trauma has not yet been addressed, parolees may benefit from doing so after their release to prevent recidivism. I suggest that this include aligning with the parolee's injured masculinity. For example, a parolee who sees himself as weak for being abused can reframe his perspective on his experience to look like a

man coming out of battle. His emotional wounds can be treated similarly to a gunshot wound, where the clinician discovers where the bullet is located and together they figure out how to remove it and clean out the wound so it can heal correctly.

One common side effect of trauma is a lack of trust and intimacy with others in order to increase personal safety. Navigating a masculine performance might exacerbate this side effect, as demonstrating strength to others becomes a greater focus. For example, it is commonly known that school bullies are typically young males with a difficult home life. Young women can bully as well; however, this looks different than the physical aggression seen in young males. In the same way, men who feel vulnerable through trauma might seek to use violence to perform their strength and keep others at a distance. I had a client who struggled to believe his parents had wanted him due to the experiences he had in childhood. He became verbally abusive with himself if he so much as tripped. He extended the same beliefs to others and imagined punching someone whenever he believed they were thinking poorly about him. In my opinion, it might be beneficial to use trauma-informed treatment while bringing the topic of masculinity into the room. For example, one exercise commonly used in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is the drama triangle. In sum, the triangle involves three roles, or performances: victim, rescuer, and persecutor. The idea of the triangle is that an individual can perform each of these roles in a problematic manner, and this forces others into the opposing roles. In treatment, each role can be explored with how they present in a masculine performance and how to reframe the performance to prevent problematic roles. For example, a man might find himself filling the role of persecutor when he fears being a victim. This might occur when a man sees these two roles as his only options; he can either choose to be an aggressor or be weak. Most men, to salvage their performance, would choose to be the persecutor. One possible intervention is to reveal that there

are other options. When a man believes he can appear strong without being physically

aggressive, he might be less likely to use the role of persecutor to get this need met.

Psychotherapy. During my graduate training, a colleague of mine shared a proclamation from

one of her group members at a correctional facility: "If I keep having to do stuff like this, I might

as well be wearing a dress." This was a sentiment shared by many of my own male clients. In

therapy, the client is expected to display vulnerability, reveal emotions, acknowledge and

explore personal shortcomings, and share personal information. Much of therapy is feminine and

requires the client to step outside of a masculine performance (or at least reframe it), a

performance that is reinforced in prison through protection and increased status. My suggestion

is to appeal to masculinity in therapy, rather than deny it space. A perfect example of this is

mantherapy.org (2019), a website that connects men with mental health information and

resources in a way that takes pride in masculinity. For example, the website states, "A man's

engine can occasionally overheat. Let's pop the hood." The title of a particular treatment can also

be reframed to appeal to men. For example, instead of "Seeking Safety," a trauma-focused group

for women, the male version of the group is titled "Seeking Strength." In my work with an all-

male group at an outpatient clinic for parolees, an intervention I have found useful is to begin by

inviting the group members to identify traits they believe to be masculine, or what makes

someone a "real man." Subsequently, the group is asked to identify traits that they think are

necessary to get the most out of treatment. These two lists can be compared to one another, and

the group can explore ideas for getting both needs met. This exercise can bring the feeling of

"wearing a dress" out in the open and allow for the potential to reframe masculinity to meet the

needs of treatment.

One of the most important elements of good, individual psychotherapy is the working alliance. The working alliance is the idea that the two people involved in the therapeutic process are doing it together. In my own work, I believe this is achieved when I feel like my client and I are operating as team members to achieve the therapeutic goals. A masculine performance that places the therapist and client in the role of opposing competitors might hinder successful therapy. One way this can occur is when a parolee begins therapy and sees the therapist as an extension of his punishment through the justice system. This systemic issue places the client at odds with the therapist, which encourages the client to attempt to regain control and fight against therapy. This is a conflict I tackled frequently during intake sessions at an outpatient clinic for clients on parole. One recommendation is to articulate the situation, revealing the option that the therapist can be a teammate. For example, I might say, "I am in a difficult situation as a therapist. I am supposed to be on your team, but I know it's hard to feel that way when you are required to be here. Our options are to go through the motions to fulfill the requirements for parole, or we could use this time to talk about some of your own goals, since you have to be here anyway." Depending on how motivated the client is for change, the therapist can become a teammate when the client feels like he is still choosing the therapy for himself. This does not mean that the parole officer's goals for the client are cast aside, but the therapist might be in a better position to navigate any conflict between the client's goals and the goals brought on by the justice system (e.g., anger management or sobriety).

Another situation that might get in the way of successful treatment is the stigmatization of mental health in a masculine performance. A typical belief I have observed among clients is that "a real man does not need to ask for help." This belief is reflective of a larger, cultural climate. Recently, a quarterback in the National Football League (NFL) opted to retire early for

his mental health. He announced this in a televised interview where his decision was met with

booing. This notion might prevent a client on parole from being on the same team as the

therapist. One way to reframe might be, "A real man is not afraid to ask for help when he needs

it." A client of mine who believed he was setting aside his masculinity to engage in

psychotherapy spent many sessions alternating between two extremes of self-expression. During

some sessions, he was flooded with vulnerability and emotion. This was followed by sessions in

which he was stone faced and only told stories about how tough he was. After speaking openly

with him about what I had observed, we had a conversation about masculinity that allowed him

to reframe his ideas about its place in psychotherapy. We worked on his using masculinity as

protection without giving up vulnerability and allowing himself to be vulnerable without shutting

out his masculine strength. He began to believe that he could demonstrate strength in

vulnerability, rather than weakness. This changed his behavior in sessions to be more consistent

and open, without feeling overwhelmed or recoiling.

Due to the exacerbation of a problematic masculine performance in a prison setting, I

often found myself talking to clients on parole about how they are managing life in the

community with their "prison mindset." It was common that they continued to use the same map

in the real world with which they navigated prison. For example, one parolee became extremely

anxious at the thought of someone doing him a favor. In prison, accepting a favor would give

another inmate leverage. What might be considered a benign vulnerability in the community

would be used as a point of manipulation during incarceration. Prison is organized by a hierarchy

enforced through masculine performances (e.g., physical dominance). The "prison mindset"

might become a roadblock to success on parole when the individual is unable to adapt to life in

the community. Parolees might find life in prison easier. I have heard quite a few men say they

"know how to do time," and they are comfortable with it. This can result in behaviors of self-sabotage to reduce the anxiety of culture shock. My suggestion is to assist parolees with reframing masculine success in a new culture by exploring the maps they used in prison and identifying new ones. Additionally, I often try to normalize parolees' experiences of anxiety and encourage them to focus on their goals for the future, rather than making decisions based on their current discomfort. I might explain how psychotherapy can serve as practice for exploring these maps and changing them into ones that will help them achieve masculine success in the community. This might include exploring any of the aforementioned topics: employment, mating, adherence to laws, substance abuse, or trauma.

Summary

Males make up the majority of the United States criminal justice system. When men reenter society, they are expected to change the behaviors that resulted in their incarceration. A problematic masculine performance may go unnoticed until a man is incarcerated. Prisons are likely to exacerbate, rather than reform, these performances. In order for these individuals to be successful in their reentry, they may benefit from an exploration of their ideas about what a "real man" looks like. These can be reframed in a manner that prevents recidivism. Some of the contexts in which a problematic performance might become apparent and need to be reframed include employment, mating, adherence to laws, substance abuse, trauma, and psychotherapy. Masculinity, itself, is often undermined and blamed, as "toxic masculinity" has become a hot topic in American culture. This paper proposes that masculinity can be an asset for parolees when problematic performances are reframed to be productive. Recidivism can be prevented by aligning with injured masculinities, as opposed to rejecting them.

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