Promoting emotional well-being in African and Caribbean males

The importance of mentors, fathers and role models in males emotional health and well being

Melvyn Davis
Director of The Male Development Service - boyztoMEN
Understanding the black male / man

- Genetic implications
- Cultural expectations
- Masculine definitions
- Social transitions
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The Aspire Project

- Honorary contract
- Joint assessments - joint care plan
- Social care model within a clinical setting
- Male Mentors / Cultural competency
- Assessment of father / male absence
- Strengths - Life style assessment
- Life skills training
- Life Coaching
- Relationship mediation

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- GENETIC LIMITATIONS

- GENETIC STRENGTHS
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- Detail
- Linear
- Language
- Logic
- Sequence
- Order
- Pattern
- Lists
- Numbers

LEFT SIDE

- Big Picture
- Global
- Music
- Imagination
- Creativity
- Colour
- Movement
- Space
- Dreams

RIGHT SIDE

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- The region at the front of the brain associated with social development develops faster in girls than boys, girls have more confidence interacting socially.

- Boys need to be the alpha male (an innate desire to be top dog) the fear of failure can create intense avoidance to ‘win lose’ situations.

- Parental hostility has a greater impact on boys, causing them to be more withdrawn or aggressive.

- Observational tests show that boys receive more negative and -toughening up- responses.

- More boys naturally display the behaviours associated with personal, behavioural and emotional conduct disorders.

- Mothers tail off their verbal encouragements to boys between four and eight months but continue on with girls for much longer.
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Differences in emotional processing

- Girls process more emotional information than boys
- Boys have fewer brain functions to process emotional content
- Girls who have emotional crisis's will process it more quickly learn from it and move on
- Boys will as a result have higher (cortisol) stress-hormones levels from same emotional trauma
- PET & MRI scans show that girls process emotional content upward into the four lobes where thinking occurs whilst boys process downwards towards physical responses.
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Impact

- men's relative reluctance to seek help for medical and psychological problems;
- avoidance of the expression of emotion;
- aggressive and unsafe sexual behaviours and attitudes;
- high rate of risky behaviours; relationships with family and work;
- and the negotiation of a diversity of masculinities within a diversity of cultures and sexualities.
Women cry, men deny; women check it out, men tough it out; women express, men repress.
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**CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS**

- Black males are perceived as strong, virile, athletic, well endowed, quick witted, cool, stylish, not to be messed with, masculine; they are expected to have loads of cash and protect and provide for his family - the classic archetypal male
On March 31 each year, a one-day census is carried out for all Britain's psychiatric inpatients, and the results of last year's census have just been published. Of the 32,000 people in hospital, those who defined themselves as black Caribbean and black African were over-represented by three- or fourfold. But one other group stood out - those who defined themselves as "black other". The vast majority of this group are young, British-born black people, and they were 18 times more likely to be hospitalised than the British average.

Being black in Britain is bad for your mental health. There is an epidemic of psychotic illness in those of African and Caribbean origin, so why are we doing nothing to stop it?

Kwame McKenzie
Monday April 2, 2007 / Guardian
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**Black Identity**

- What is a black identity?
- From where do we get our identities from?
- What are the main/defining ingredients of a black identity?
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A hyphenated abridged identity

- Black Afro Caribbean
- Black-British
- Black African
- Black Caribbean
- Black other
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Double Consciousness

*The Souls of Black Folk* by Du Bois introduces the internal conflict of the black negro.

“One forever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”
Is the concept of a black identity as racist as the notion of a white identity? Blacks are not of any less value or worth than whites in racial terms. The need to define ourselves is linked to the need to justify our existence and worth. Whites are not pre-occupied with racial identity in the same way or for the same reasons as blacks. We live in a society in which we are not measured, valued or judged by the same considerations. The basic premise for most discussions on race assumes that Whites represent normality or modernity and are at the top of the evolutionary chain. In order to justify slavery whites had to be taught that it was acceptable to dehumanise blacks and denigrate our status to that of animals. In order for black to find liberation from the aftermath of international and institutional racism, blacks today, still have to learn and convince themselves and whites of our equality.
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**MASCULINE DEFINITIONS**

- To be a man is to be in control.
  ‘we run tings, tings don’t run we.’

- Traditional affirmations of masculinity have been challenged and undermined.
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Who Am I?

Work ➔ Family

Friend ➔ Partner

Father ➔ Man

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SOCIAL TRANSITIONS

*A boy…
*A male…
*A man are not the same.
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- Need for control
- Need for justice
- Need for acceptance
- Need to belong
- The need for privacy
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What Stereotypes have you had to face or contend with?

- What was the stereotype?
- How did it make you feel?
- How did you behave?
- Compensatory behaviours...
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Behind Every Stereotype...

- Is a person seeking liberty
- Is a man wanting to cry
- Is a woman seeking equality
- Is a naughty child needing a hug
- Is a black man seeking justice...
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- Social and environmental factors
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- Absent fathers
- Gun and knife crime
- ‘bad boy’ image
- Drug and music culture
- Image conscious
- 75% of BME live in areas of deprivation
- Educational underachievers (racism & discrimination)
- Stop & search
- Autocratic parenting styles
- Victim and perpetrators of crime

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40 - 60% of black children growing up without their fathers
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Father Absence:
- Effects the quality of mothering/fathering
- Male affirmation
- Male violence
- Machismo
- Risk taking
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Consequences

- Surrogate fathers
- Males raising children that are not theirs
- Feminisation of boys
- Male hunger
- Crisis of identity
- Rise of the mentor and role model
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Animal trainers have long known that immature elephants remain closely attached to their mothers until about 8 to 10 years of age. Soon, after the males leave to join an all male group and the females enter into the matriarchal network, many people don’t realise that elephant groups are a matriarchal society - managed by the females. However it is the older males that teach restraint and keep the younger elephants in check.

Young animals also learn vital social skills in mixed groups and play groups since naughty behaviour or too much roughhousing drives others way. They learn to limit their strength during interactions because the reward is more playtime with peers and acceptance by others.
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Consequences

- Surviving v Thriving
- Functioning v Nurturing
- External v Internal
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- What fathers can do?
- What mentors can do?
- What role models can do?
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- Inability to give and receive unconditional love
- Risk taking behaviour
- Development of a ‘masked’ identity (Mask-u-linity)
- Dependency on external (materialistic) values
- Easily influenced by peer pressure
- Low sense of expectation, motivation & aspiration
- Emotional barriers – depression – anger - silence
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- Redefine and broaden our definition of masculinity
- Value and celebrate males who are different
- Provide acceptance and on-going support
- Challenge the popular stereotypes - early years
- Appropriate support systems - social care model
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Risk factors are accumulative

• 1 RF is equal to a 1-2% chance of developing mental illness
• 3 RF is equal to 8% chance of developing mental illness
• 4+ RF the likelihood increases to 20% chance of developing a mental illness
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- At least one good parent child relationship (*for boys this was more likely to be a male role model*)
- Affection
- Supervision, authoritative discipline
- Support for education
- Supportive relationship / absence of severe discord
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ROLE MODELS CAN:
- Raise aspirations
- Raise self esteem
- Challenge stereotypes
- Motivation

MENTORS CAN:
- Improve behaviour in the classroom
- Lessen the need to join gangs
- Teach how to manage the aggression and violence
- Develop new skills, hobbies
- Improve educational outcomes

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FATHERS:
- Intrinsic values
- Emotional stability
- Acceptance
- Values
- Counselling
- Identity formation
- Cultural heritage

- Relationship formation/roles
- Parenting roles
- Educational outcomes
- Gang membership and offending behaviour
- Character building / emotional resilience
- Boundaries and behaviour
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Major Stress Factors

• Social economic disadvantage / unemployment
• Homelessness
• Relationship instability
• Discrimination
• Disappointment with life
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*Resilience seems to involve several related elements.*

1. A sense of self-esteem and self confidence
2. A belief in one’s own self-efficacy and ability to deal with change and adaptation
3. A repertoire of social problem-solving skills

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Risk factors

- Those with relatives with similar problems
- Those living in an unhappy family environment
- Those who drink excessive amounts of alcohol or drugs
- Boys who are aggressive or impulsive
- Boys who are loners
- Boys who are high achievers – feel the need to be perfect.
- Boys who feel victimised or bullied

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Resilience factors

- Being Female
- Higher intelligence
- Easy temperament when an infant
- Secure attachments
- Positive attitude, problem-solving approach

- Good communication skills
- Planner, belief in control
- Humour
- Religious faith
- Capacity to reflect
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- Wider supportive network
- Good housing
- Good standard of living
- High morale school with positive policies for behaviour, attitudes and anti-bullying
- Schools with strong academic and non academic opportunities
- Range of positive sport/leisure activities
- Good drug education