



Male psychology - is the case closed?

Reading time 10 minutes

This is a brain candy for which one could issue a trigger warning, as it does depart somewhat from the current dominant media narrative.

Recently I read an interview between the English psychologist Dr John Barry, an expert in male psychology, and the psychologist you are probably already familiar with, Rob Henderson, who runs a successful substack on psychology and is the inventor of the concept of 'Luxury Beliefs' ([BrainCandy 79](#)).

I have extracted the most surprising points for me and would like to motivate you to simply keep these hypotheses in mind as additional aspects. If you are interested, read the [interview](#) or even visit the [website of](#) John Barry and the researcher Louise Liddon.



Men's Psychology: A Mined Territory

Barry asks Henderson what he learned about male psychology at Yale and Cambridge.

Henderson makes the point that there is not much specifically about men. He feels that if you want to highlight the challenges for men and the controversies around male behaviour, you have to do it in a politically correct way.

If men were to be portrayed as victims in any way, he believes it would currently be classified as simply unserious. He does not believe that male psychology is currently taken particularly seriously.

This is also my impression when one perceives the tone of voice of the discussion in Germany, which quickly turns to toxic masculinity, patriarchy and, of course, Old White Men. I have a fundamental problem when complex issues are 'explained' with simple definitions. Just like in Germany now, everything that is not woke-left is stigmatised as far right-wing.

Socially overinfluenced male sensitivity?

Henderson shows another facet: research on developmental psychology has shown that boys are surprisingly more sensitive (!) to environmental and parental influences than girls. Boys who grow up in a single parent home or in a particularly unstable or harsh environment are much more likely to experience poverty and unemployment, addiction, crime, etc. later on. He thinks it is worth addressing these issues, especially as more and more boys and young men are losing interest in education and employment.

Barry confirms this: in poor families, a father is less likely to provide stability in the household. He wonders if boys are raised to be tougher because we instinctively know they will be more sensitive if we don't raise them to be tough?

Henderson finds this hypothesis interesting. So we have this social pressure on men to be tough to compensate for their intrinsic sensitivity. Joyce Benenson has done research showing that boys are immunologically weaker than girls, that they get sick more often and die of diseases. At the height of the Covid pandemic, it was a big surprise that boys and men were more likely to get sick and die from the disease. In the popular imagination, men are more robust, partly because they are usually physically stronger.



So perhaps men are not quite as resilient in other respects as we thought. It is well known that the life expectancy of men is about 5 years lower than that of women. Exceptions are said to exist in protected environments, such as monasteries, where men live to a similar age as women.

Our image of men - shaped by extreme outliers?

Henderson notes that the most unpleasant, hostile, aggressive and resistant people are probably men, so everyone thinks that men in general behave like this, when in fact we only think of the top 5% or even just 1% of men behaving like this, whereas most men do not.

Barry supports this observation: From a psychological point of view, some strikingly aggressive men defend themselves against people who might hurt them because they may have been badly hurt or abused in their past. They adopt a rough personality so that they cannot be broken again.

The investigative journalist Nora Vincent slipped into the role of a man for over a year. She experienced that men wear an armour around themselves that signals strength and toughness to the world, because they know that other men sense and take advantage when they appear weak or vulnerable.

Men learn to take off their armour. Psychologist Martin Seager has described that there is a different dynamic in group therapy with men than in mixed-gender groups because there is a lot of laughing in men's groups. But quite quickly the dynamic moves from banter to sharing serious experiences and comforting each other, and just as quickly the dynamic can return to banter.

Personally, Barry and Henderson's hypotheses have confirmed me because in our psychodramatic research we can observe how men shed this 'armour' in our group dynamic processes, displaying unaware their many insecurities. Even when we work with the gods in white in the medical field, we manage to get the luminaries to lift the armour.

Is PATRIARCHY a Luxury Belief?

Barry observes that there are some debatable ideas circulating in social science departments today, such as strongly negative perceptions of masculinity, ideas about male privilege and theories of patriarchy. He wonders if patriarchy theory is an example of Henderson's "luxury beliefs"?

Luxury beliefs are defined as ideas and opinions that confer status on the upper class, while often imposing costs on the lower class. The idea of patriarchy could be a luxury belief. Many things fall under the term patriarchy, for example many people believe that marriage and monogamy are an outgrowth of patriarchy. Many highly educated and wealthy people publicly denigrate marriage, patriarchy, masculinity.... all these things fall into the same category in their eyes. And yet these people are the most likely to marry, the least likely to divorce. But they have, by spreading this belief, inadvertently created a situation where low-income people are less likely to marry - there are more single mothers, more children growing up without a father.

It is interesting that when you speak publicly about the problems of children growing up fatherless, many anti-patriarchy people eye you suspiciously: "Why should that be a problem?", "What is so special about fathers? The real problem is that single mothers don't have enough financial support, and if only they had enough money.... a pile of money can replace a father," and all of this, Henderson thinks, is tied to an anti-patriarchy ideology, and yes, it could be considered a luxury belief.



If you were to ask the question "Are men a problem?" on a scale of one to ten, more highly educated and wealthier people would probably be at the top end of the scale.

I know many examples of Henderson's observation. Feel the News' is the name of the podcast by Sasha Lobo and his wife Jule Lobo. A podcast that I would rather classify as belonging to the Luxury Beliefs spectrum.

There, the terms 'toxic masculinity', 'patriarchy' and 'old white men' come up with high frequency from both of them. The two are at the same time a prime example of the criticised patriarchal life stereotype: very well educated, married (with a large age gap) with two small children, the third on the way.

Military service - a stabiliser for young men?

Barry was surprised by the finding that the military can be good for young men's mental health. Henderson supports this from his own experience. The military, he says, is very good at building communities out of strangers. So there is a community, camaraderie, structure, predictability. All these clear guidelines make life easier, especially for young men. In the outside world, there are all these questions like "Who am I? What am I actually doing? All these anxieties around identity. But in the military, identity is very clear. Henderson joined the Airforce because he grew up in foster care and wanted to escape as quickly as possible, to get away from the complete chaos and disorder around him.

18, 19, 20 are the most volatile years in a young man's life, when he is most likely to commit crimes, act aggressively, be impulsive, take drugs, drive too fast.

The military stabilises the shaky phase of life, and then when you finish your military service in your early 20s, you've cooled off, you've matured, you're not as impulsive and you're full of anger and hormones. So even if you didn't learn anything at all, that was a phase of life you couldn't screw up too badly.

Henderson was subsequently even able to study at the absolute top university Yale through the army's sponsorship programme. Through military service, Henderson had literally pulled himself out of the swamp by his own hair.

Conclusion

At first I didn't want to write a conclusion because I was mainly interested in making people aware of the current often negatively coloured framing of male psychology.

Of course, everyone knows men with toxic behaviour, may know a real patriarch and also petulant old men. The hypotheses of Barry and Henderson show additional perspectives and one can only hope that science has not yet slammed the book of male psychology shut. To the boys I wish that they may experience good education and much self-efficacy, the best chance for a life without need for imposed harshness.



Book recommendation

By Ralph Ohnemus, Uwe H. Lebok, Florian Klaus:

Context marketing

The key to consumer behaviour to [order](#).



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