

**SPECIAL FOCUS SECTION****Taking an International Perspective on Men and Masculinity**

Jim Mahalik

Special Focus Section Editor

It is startling to think about the advances that have been made in the areas of technology, communication, and engineering allowing us to establish and maintain connections to persons and groups around the world. Psychology has participated in this increasingly global focus through the growing international work of its members as well as the inclusion of organizational structures in APA such as International Psychology—Division 52. As persons interested in issues related to the psychological study of men and masculinity, it strengthens our work to take an international perspective for several reasons. First, as culture and gender are inextricably linked, our study of masculinity must take into account the unique historical, economic, political, and racial contexts that shape the masculinity norms and experiences of men in every country. Second, as communication and technology bring men around the world into increased contact with other cultures, changes are likely to occur related to masculine norms, including the nature of work and roles in the family. Finally, I would like to suggest that our members can help men around the world examine critically the constraining definitions of masculinity that arise from their unique national experience. My hope would be that we might help men to discard those definitions of masculinity that are harmful to them, their families, and communities while preserving the adaptive parts of traditional masculinity born from their unique national experiences.

This Special Focus Section has assembled six contributions from our members who are very familiar with issues related to men and masculinity in six different countries. Each piece explores the unique national influences that have shaped men and masculinity in each country and offers insights related to the psychology of men and masculinity applied to their respective countries.

**Exploring the New Psychology of Men With Russian Psychologists**

James M. O'Neil

School of Family Studies  
University of Connecticut  
Storrs, CT 06269

E-mail: Jimoneil1@aol.com

This paper provides information on Russian men's views of changing gender roles in the former Soviet Union. In 1992, as part of my Fulbright teaching and research in Russia (O'Neil, 1993; O'Neil, Owen, Holmes, Dolgoplov, & Stastenin, 1994), I

created a men's studies intervention with five psychologists, an educator, and a political scientist. The purpose of the intervention was to explore Russian men's views of their gender roles. Specifically, I wanted to ascertain whether the new psychology of men had any relevance to Russian psychologists and the clients they serve.

**The Societal and Historical Context of the Men's Study Intervention**

The men's studies intervention occurred only six months after the failed 1991 coup d'etat and the end of Soviet Communism. At this time, there was much uncertainty, hope, fear, and change everywhere in Russia. The former Soviet Union had lost its name, flag, political ideology, leaders, much of its land, a stable currency, and in a profound sense its national identity. From my perspective, this social, political, economic change produced a society "living on the edge." One of my Russian colleagues described my time in Moscow as "James in Wonderland" (O'Neil, 1993). The term "wonderland" conveyed my Russian colleagues' deep fears about the chaos in their lives and the unknown future of their country. Russia was then, and still is today, a wonderland with so much rapid change and uncertainty. Like Alice in Wonderland, I was in awe of what I observed and moved by the spirit of the Russian people.

Personal and intellectual openness emerged in Russia during this time, as freedom and individuality became living realities in many people's lives. Although the KGB was still in existence, the fear of personal reprisals for personal and political expression was significantly decreased. What I proposed to my Russian colleagues was a dialogue on the state of Russian men's lives using Western gender role concepts. During the 70 years of Communism, this kind of discussion on men's gender role issues was prohibited. All of us participating knew that we were breaking new ground with our dialogues on Russian men's lives. All of the men participating were professional educators, in their early to late 30s, living in Moscow. Five of these men were practicing psychologists with private practices in Moscow and consequently had special insights into Russian men's and women's lives.

**Method of Intervention**

The intervention process was systematic and included five different assessment procedures. Each man completed a 20-item, free response questionnaire on Russian men's issues and was individually interviewed on his answers. Simultaneous translation was used in the interviews and each session was audiotaped. Each participant also completed the Gender Role Conflict Scale (O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995) and then participated in a 3-hour, audiotaped men's studies seminar focused on Russian men. The seminar was a roundtable discussion between the Russian men based on a series of questions that I posed during

Readers may obtain the references for this Special Focus Section from Jim Mahalik, PhD, Campion Hall 312, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467, E-mail: Mahalik@bc.edu.

the individual interviews. One week later, an 11-item follow-up questionnaire was completed evaluating the entire men's studies intervention. The audiotaped interviews and the seminar dialogue were translated into English and studied to find common themes and issues. Only a small portion of what I learned will be reported below.

### **The Individual Interviews With Russian Psychologists and Educators**

The men indicated that there were both positive and negative stereotypes of Russian masculinity and femininity that existed in Russia. They agreed that gender role stereotypes were powerful forces in Russian society. They indicated that numerous societal structures inhibited men from expressing the positive aspects of being a man. The societal and family structures most often mentioned were limited opportunities to increase one's income; limited options to choose, change, or expand one's career; and child rearing practices that promoted passivity, non-initiative, and irresponsibility in Russian boys and men. Most of the men indicated that only recently had they developed a clearer understanding of how societal structures had inhibited men's and women's growth and development. They indicated that life under Soviet Communism was a primary barrier to healthy masculinity. The primary barriers mentioned were restricted freedom and personal expression, limited career possibilities, no sex education, low salaries, and gender-role restricted family socialization processes. Most of the men indicated that the Communist Party prohibited personal discussion of men's issues including male sexual problems. One man indicated that this type of gender role socialization produced "a type of man who loses his bearings by age 40."

The men indicated there were negative consequences when Russian men both endorsed and deviated from the stereotypes of masculinity. These negative consequences included family violence, rape, alcohol and drug abuses, anxiety, depression, and the devaluation of the masculine stereotype. Most all of the men indicated that recent political and social changes had increased Russian men's problems with their masculinity. Two of the participants indicated that social/economic shocks had increased the number of "male failures." As one man indicated, "You have got freedom but you do not use it; then you're not a man!" After defining sexism (the word was not found in the Russian language), all the men indicated that they thought Russian men had been victims of sexism in a variety of ways. Their experiences of sexism included (1) discrimination in families where the mother's roles are valued and the father's role devalued, (2) excessive demands to meet masculine stereotypes in a society that restricts personal freedom and individuality, and (3) men's obligatory service in the Army.

The men were presented with six patterns of gender role conflict that had been theorized in the United States (O'Neil et al., 1995). I asked them whether Russian men experienced these patterns of gender role conflict. There was unanimous agreement that Russian men experienced most of the patterns of gender role conflict. They particularly mentioned restrictive emotionality, control and power problems, health care problems, and restrictive and affectionate behavior between men. There was unanimous agreement that gender role conflict caused communication problems with Russian women. The men indicated that restrictive emotionality, lack of information on how to date and relate to

women, and threats of female emancipation were all relevant to understanding male/female communication problems. I asked how much violence against Russian women existed in Russia. Three of the participants indicated it was great, one did not know, and one indicated that psychological violence between partners was critical in understanding Russian men's violence. At the end of the interview, I asked whether they thought that Men's Studies had a future place in Russian higher education. All agreed that they thought Men's Studies had a place, but were unsure when it would happen. One interviewee thought the future of Russian Men's Studies depended on exchanges with Americans since we have a Men's Movement and experience in liberating both men and women.

### **Men's Studies Seminar: Russian Men Discussing Western Gender Role Concepts**

The seminar brought together all of the interviewed men to discuss Russian men's problems with their masculinity. It was a dynamic, free, and provocative discussion lasting more than 3 hours. I first gave an overview of Western gender role concepts including definitions of sexism, gender role stereotypes, gender role conflict, and the phases of the gender role journey.

The first question raised by my Russian colleagues in the seminar was "What do we mean when we say 'Russian men'?" It was an important question because there are over 100 different ethnic groups and languages in Russia. Furthermore, differences in social class and urban versus rural men were identified as important. It was immediately apparent that diversity issues were critical to our discussion. The group agreed that generalities about Russian men should be made cautiously because of the great diversity that exists in the country.

### **In This Special Focus Section**

- Exploring the New Psychology of Men  
with Russian Psychologists ..... 12  
*James M. O'Neil*
- Where Lions Do Not Cry ..... 15  
*Hugh Lagan*
- Austrian Men: Private, Strong, and Alone ..... 17  
*Fredric E. Rabinowitz*
- Aussie Men and the Search  
for a New Masculinity ..... 19  
*Gordon Walker*
- Men and Masculinity in Norway ..... 23  
*Charity Van Delft*
- Pakistani Males: An Example of  
Traditional Masculine Socialization ..... 25  
*Neil A. Massoth, Tayyab Rashid,  
and Mahmmod Yasin*

I used the gender role journey phases (O'Neil & Egan, 1992; O'Neil, Egan, Owen, & Murry, 1993) to ask the question "How do Russian men feel about their gender roles?" The discussion centered on Russian men's ambivalence about their gender role (Phase 2 of the gender role journey). As with American men, ambivalence was defined as being conflicted about learning stereotypic masculinity, avoiding femininity, and then becoming uncomfortable with both. Ambivalence results in not being sure how to reconcile paradoxical feelings about masculinity and femininity. The men indicated that gender role ambivalence was typical in Russian men's lives. In trying to understand gender role ambivalence, the men discussed Russian masculine ideology as being primarily rooted in Russian folklore and fairy tales. Folklore and fairy tales learned in childhood were explained as essential to understanding Russian man's masculine consciousness. There were numerous examples of how Russian fairy tales instill ambivalence about gender roles and affect consciousness about masculinity and femininity. For example, there was long debate about the masculinity of Ivan the Fool and whether he was passive, a self-made man, or a victim. Cinderella's gender role dynamics were also discussed and compared with the Ivan the Fool. This discussion, which appeared at first to be irrelevant, provided me with a deeper understanding of how masculine ideology had evolved in the Russian culture through fairy tales.

The men indicated that gender role ambivalence also existed when Russian women made contradictory demands on men to *both* embrace and reject the masculine gender role stereotypes. I asked how men who deviate from stereotypic masculinity are viewed. The consensus was that these men are thought to be feminine, devalued, and stupid and have "chicken minds" (meaning small brains). Most of the men agreed that when gender role ambivalence is worked through, great developmental growth could occur. As one man indicated, "Some people break through to a new life. Some stay behind and become more rigid."

I asked whether the Socialist/Communist system promoted sexism against men. Some of the men agreed that the Communist system was a large part of the problem. Others indicated that Russian men's problems have a long history that predates the 1917 Communist Revolution. There was agreement that sexism against men has been part of overall Russian culture and family structure passed down through the centuries.

There was also a discussion of rape and how this relates to men's problems. All the men indicated that rape is widespread and a result of dysfunctional relationships between men and women. The lack of sex education, misdirected anger, and men's power/control problems were given as the main reason for rape in Russia. On another issue, the men reported that there were only a few men's advocate groups in Russia. One of these newly formed groups advocated for father's rights with child custody cases, and another focused on the rights of gays and lesbians. The men agreed that no Men's Movement existed in Russia. One participant indicated that the public would currently be against such a movement and consider it a "fag group." This comment and others convinced me that, similar to the United States, homophobia is quite widespread in Russia. Near the end of the seminar, the group cautioned me on making too much of their comments. They reminded me that because of the diversity of Russian men generalizations are difficult to make.

### Follow-up Evaluations of the Men's Studies Intervention

Overall, the men reported the men's studies interviews and discussions interesting, provocative, and opening up new horizons. The follow-up evaluations were very positive with all the men indicating that the workshop was personally valuable to them. Eighty percent of the men indicated that the workshop brought up emotions about their masculinity. Nearly all the men indicated that this was the first time in their life that they had focused on their personal masculinity issues.

### Reflections on My Russian Experience: Recommendations to Internationalize the New Psychology of Men

What did I learn from my Russian experience and what do I recommend for future cross-cultural work in the new psychology of men? Seven years have passed since implementing this intervention, and much has happened in Russia during this time. More current investigation of Russian men's experiences with their gender roles is critically needed. How would my Russian colleagues respond to the interview questions given the changes over the last 7 years? Only future research and international exchanges can answer this question. So, my first recommendation is for accelerated efforts by SPSMM members to do research on men from other parts of the world. When traveling abroad, we can build into our trips a couple of days of consultation, data gathering, or interviews focused on understanding men in other countries. Now with the Internet and other technologies, contact with international colleagues can more easily be accomplished.

Second, Division 51 should better collaborate/network with Division 52 (International Psychology) in advancing men's issues internationally. I encourage SPSMM members to join Division 52 to foster better networking and proactive approaches to disseminating information internationally about the new psychology of men.

Third, I learned that the new psychology of men does have relevance in Russia, but *only* in the context of their social, political, religious, economic, and cultural history. I learned that there are many similarities and differences in how Russian and American men view gender role socialization and conflict.

The differences helped me understand American men's gender role conflict more fully. This occurred when a provocative cross-cultural difference developed in our dialogue. I would ask myself, "How would American men respond to this issue?" The best example is when my Russian colleagues discussed how Communism/Socialism had contributed to their gender role conflict. Listening to how Communism/Socialism had affected these men prompted the question "How has patriarchal capitalism negatively affected American men's lives?" This is a political question and one that is rarely discussed in SPSMM. Avoiding the political and economic realities of men's lives limits our understanding of how men become conflicted with their gender roles. Just like my Russian colleagues were aware of how Socialism and Communism contributed to their personal problems as men, we need to evaluate critically how destructive capitalism contributes to American men's problems. More discussion of these political and economic issues is needed in SPSMM to better understand American men's problems and men around the world who live under oppressive ideologies.

I left Moscow with a strong bond with the Russian people and a deep respect for their rich culture. What amazed me were the strength of their spirits and the depth of their souls. Their good and generous spirits moved me as they talked about their history and daily lives. As I reflect back on these interviews with my Russian colleagues, I am filled with admiration for how they face changing gender roles and how much we can learn from each other in the future.

## Where Lions Do Not Cry

Hugh Lagan  
Amani Counseling and Training Institute  
PO Box 15116  
Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa  
E-mail: hdelagan@form-net.com

A middle-aged Kenyan Masai man shares his memories of the day he was ritually initiated from boyhood into adulthood. As he moved slowly forward towards the waiting circumciser, the words of his father, spoken to him earlier that same morning, echoed in his ears, "Remember son, lions do not cry." Traditional Masai culture insists that during the male circumcision ritual, in which no anesthesia is used, a boy is expected to show no physical or emotional response. Even a slight flinch of the eyebrow will bring laughter and derision from the watching crowd of fathers and male elders. The need for such a stoic response is understood as a sign that in his new role as an adult warrior, he will protect the village and must never turn to run or give up when injured or in pain. The man himself recalls the intense mixture of pain and joy within him following the circumcision ceremony and with it the realization that he had now made the clear break from his former childlike status to the much sought after sharply defined warrior status of manhood. Many years later, this same man now sits in a room with some 40 other men sharing about what it means for him to be a man. He now wonders out loud if he has ever been able to move beyond the "fictive male persona" of his initiation day, beyond the cultural stereotypes and social expectations of who a man should be.

This was just one sharing among many at our first workshop on "Understanding Men" that sought to create a forum for Kenyan men to look more closely at how they have been socialized to play certain roles and how this conditioning works to harm and limit both genders. This was to be the first such workshop of its kind in East and Central Africa and our response to date has been both encouraging and informative. To date, some 135 men have participated in six different workshops. Some of the groups were mixed in age and some were age-specific—young adults, middle-aged and senior men.

We initially opened the workshop to a mixed gender group, but through feedback from both male and female participants, it was felt best to target men only for the present. Many of the men in our first group reacted defensively to the anger expressed by the women in the group and while justified, this only worked to hinder open communication and honesty. The safer atmosphere of an exclusively male group is one which Kenyan men are much more open to, and our responses in later groups confirmed this more accepted cultural practice. Both women and men did recognize, however, that it would be important to bring both genders together at some later point to open up a fuller and more inclusive

discussion. Based on these workshops, I take this opportunity to share some insights on masculinity from an Afri-centric perspective based on the "personal stories" of the men and women who attended our workshops. I also wish to reflect on how colonization and recent rapid changes within Kenyan society may have contributed to what is being termed by some as a "crisis of masculinity" for the contemporary African male.

A sizable number of the middle-aged male participants who attended the workshops were socialized in more traditional rural environments outside of the urban centers. Their sharings spoke of a socialization experience that took place within very sharply defined gendered spaces. Birth rituals served to strengthen gender role stereotypes as noted in many of the group sharings. Speaking about his own indigenous group, one man said that the birth of a boy child is announced to the village by the mid-wife with five ululations (i.e., high-pitched cries of joy or excitement) while a girl would be announced with four. It was common in quite a few ethnic groups for the mother of a newly born boy-child to remain confined in her hut for four days while the requirement when a girl-child was born was only three days. One man spoke of how at his birth, a bull was slaughtered by his father as a sign of gratitude while the birth of his six sisters saw no such magnanimity. The slaughtering of the bull was a powerful symbol of the future role of this child to become the provider and protector of his own family.

Boys were after a certain age no longer expected to be found in the company of women or in the kitchen. Many of the participants spoke about being taught by both men and women to hate being associated in terms of character and temperament with anything feminine. The warrior cultures into which many of these men were born bestowed special privileges on boys and young men such as reserving the more nutritious parts of the slaughtered animal for boys and men as well as allowing boys much more freedom to move about socially.

Well over 90% of the fathers in the groups admitted to having a preference for sons, and this was reflected in the practice of giving priority to a son's education over that of a daughter where family resources are limited. The perceived advantages of sons over daughters included security in old age for parents (girls marry and go away to another clan), together with the fact that sons extend the family name and protect the home. Many believed that the power or influence of any household depends upon large numbers of males. It was also interesting to note that some of the female participants in the first workshop spoke of the belief in their tribes of origin, where a woman's status and her security in old age depended on having many sons.

Many of the more senior men who attended the workshops were anxious to share their own very personal accounts of how colonization has impacted their identities as African men. Colonization in Kenya saw tribal communities lose vast tracts of land, and the impact of taxation and forced labor left many men and women in abject poverty. Many of the men spoke of the relationship between white male colonizer and black male colonized as one which was based on servitude and a blatant refusal to acknowledge the intrinsic dignity of black male adulthood. One man recalled the communal shame experienced in his village when the chief was made to kneel before the British Governor who had come on visitation. Watching their ruler being forced to take on the role of a subject left all the men feeling in the words of this

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