

EXPLORING MASCULINITY & MALE SUICIDE.

Understanding
cultural norms
of masculinity

part 1





Suicide rates among men are
consistently higher across many
parts of the world.



**WE URGENTLY NEED
TO UNDERSTAND:**

**WHAT PUTS MEN
AT ELEVATED
RISK?**



MALE PSYCHOLOGY

My work focuses on the risk factors that shape men's psychology - how men think, feel, and behave.

Work Sex Housing Relationships Money

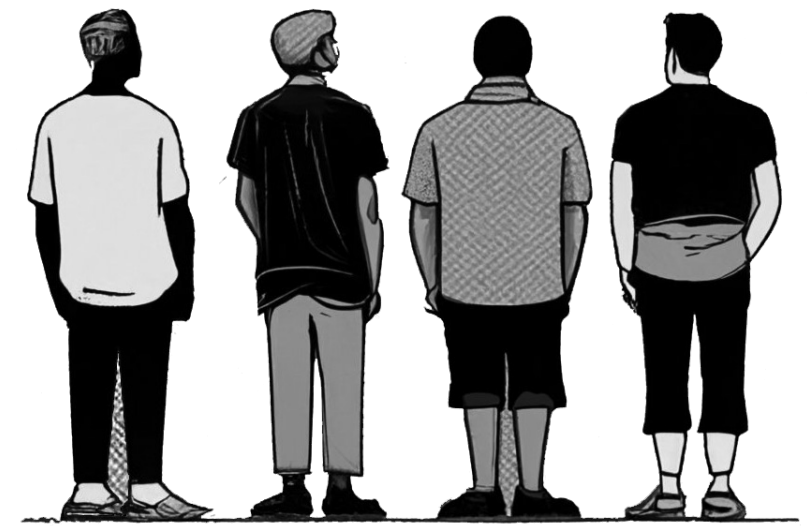
Love Family Addiction Divorce Bullying

Abuse Isolation Trauma Childhood



CULTURAL NORMS OF MASCULINITY.

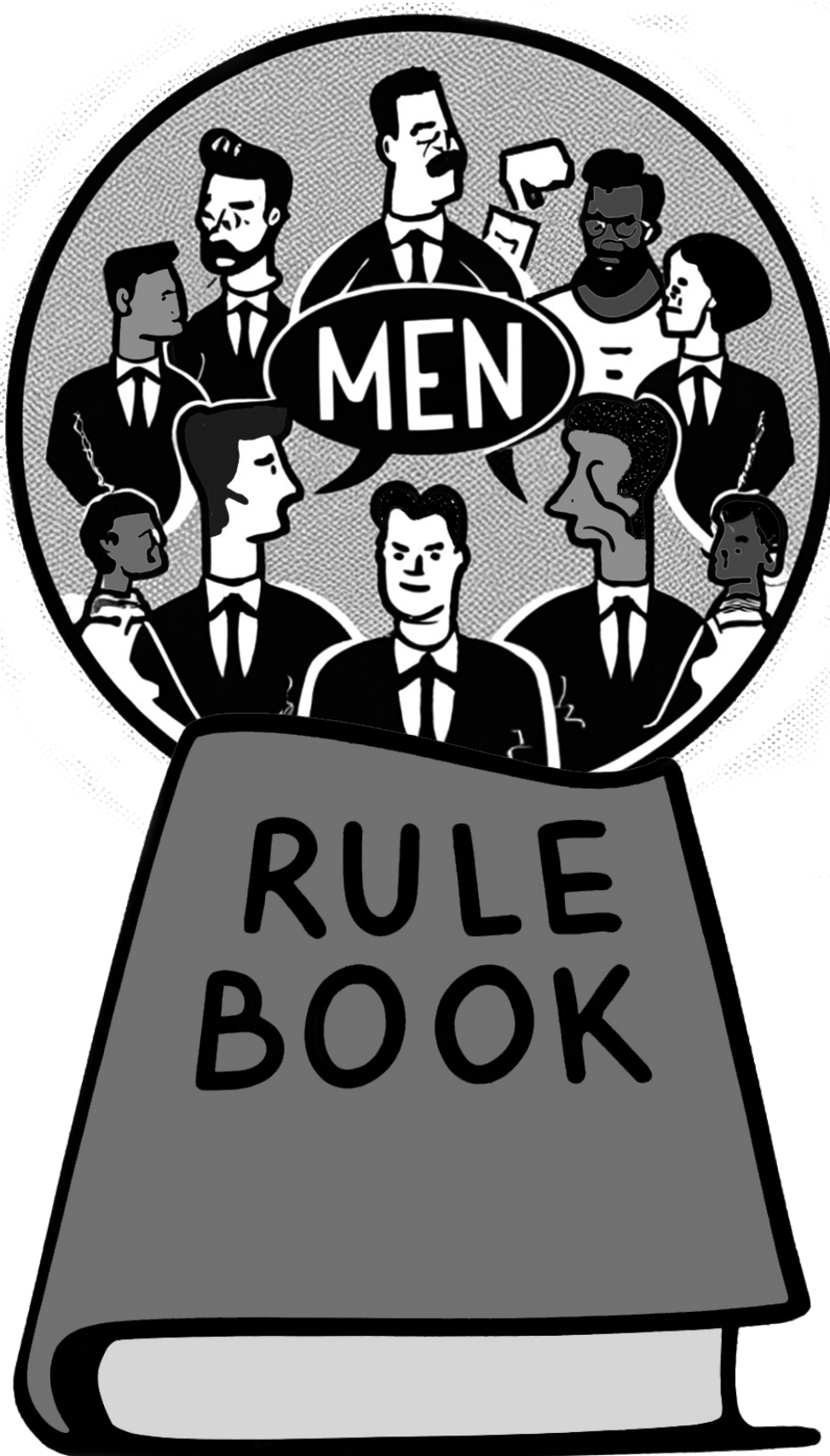
Part of this work involves understanding how **cultural norms of masculinity** shape people's psychology.



Cultural norms of masculinity are the ideas and expectations that society associates with being a man.

These norms can include beliefs about how men should think, feel, and behave. These ideas vary across cultures and time periods.

Think of cultural norms like an unwritten rule book about what it means to be a man.



Rules such as:

- **What makes a man valuable to others?**
- **What jobs should men do?**
- **What should men be ambitious for?**
- **What makes a man attractive?**
- **What emotions should men express?**

**Masculine norms don't just impact men -
they influence everyone in society.**

From a young age, we're all exposed to ideas about how we are told men should behave. These cultural ideas shape our expectations of men, and can influence how friends, family, and even healthcare providers perceive and respond to men's pain.



“Lack of support for males suffering domestic abuse is shocking and hurtful.”

A Portuguese man with thoughts of suicide.

“(...) couldn’t express my troubles to the family without some form of stigma being attached and being told to ‘man up’ or ‘I’m too sensitive.’”

A UK man who has attempted suicide.

We inherit cultural ideas of masculinity from the generations that lived before us.

So, when we're born, we often enter a society with a long history of certain traditions and ideas about what it means to be a man. These ideas aren't fixed - they can change over time. A behaviour once encouraged in men might later be rejected or stigmatised by mainstream society.



“There is a pronounced sense here of what a man should be. It’s a very industrial area and there are lots of old school attitudes around, a lot of aspirations for young men to be hard and tough.”

A UK man who has attempted suicide, talking about growing up in the North-East of England.

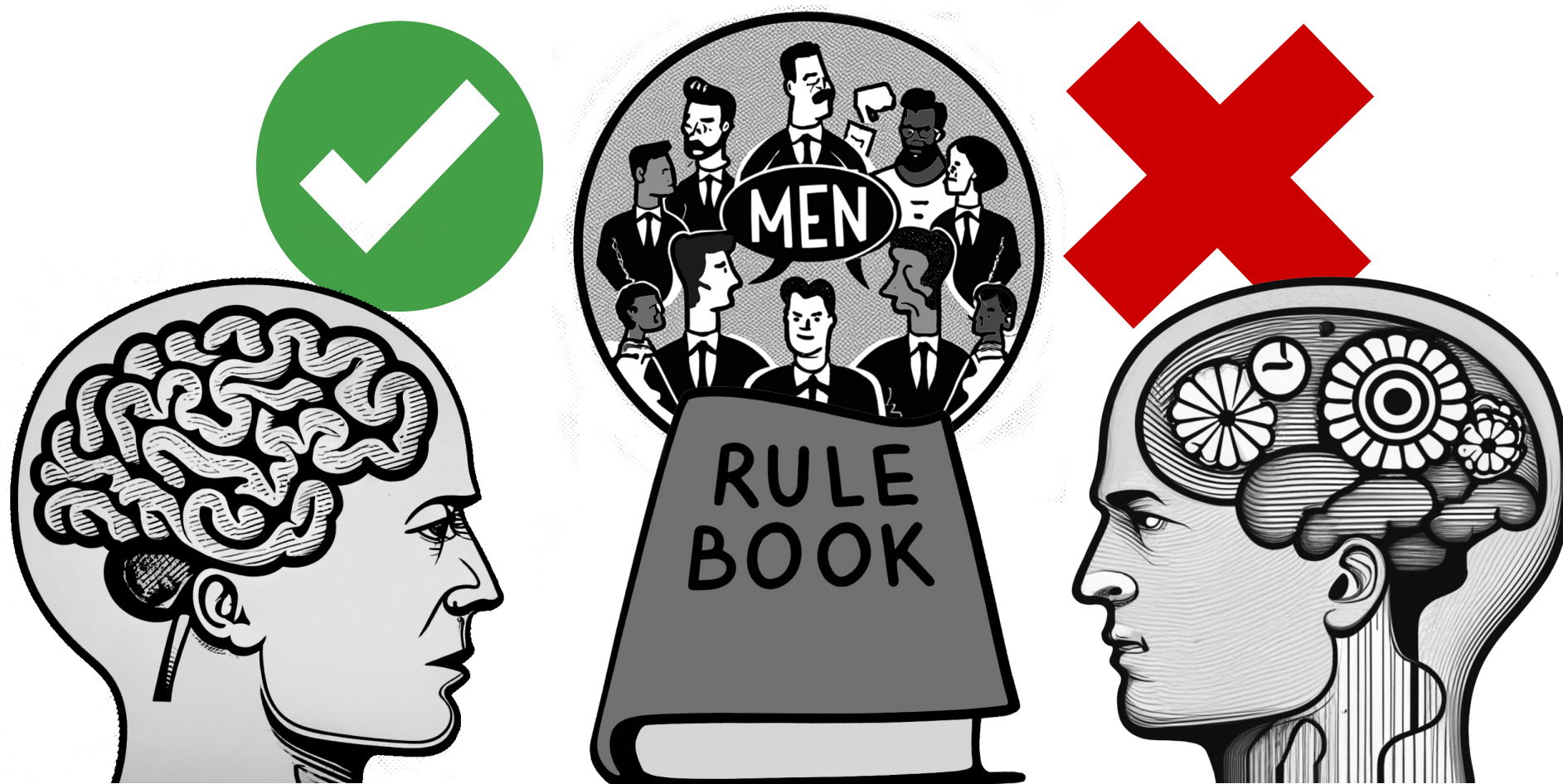
“Local refrains such as “*barima nsu*” (a man doesn’t cry), “*barima nsuro owo*” (a man does not fear death), and “*barima na nom aduro a y nnwono*” (it’s a real man who takes bitter medicine) encapsulate the social expectation that men must be daring and demonstrate fortitude and invincibility.”

Johnny Andoh-Arthur, suicide researcher, Ghana.

Every man is different.

Some men may feel a strong need to live up to cultural expectations of men, while other men may reject those ideas.

Whether we agree or disagree with these cultural norms they can have a powerful influence on our psychology - how we think, feel, behave, and interact with one another.




Men are not toxic.

malesuicideresearch.com

Over the coming weeks, we will explore how certain cultural ideas of masculinity may harm some men and increase suicide risk.

It's important to remember that cultural norms are not about men being “toxic” – they're about some of the harmful societal expectations placed on men. These norms shape how everyone behaves towards men, and sometimes, they create overwhelming pressures.

Exploring the influence of these norms can help us better understand each other, challenge dangerous stereotypes, and build more supportive relationships.



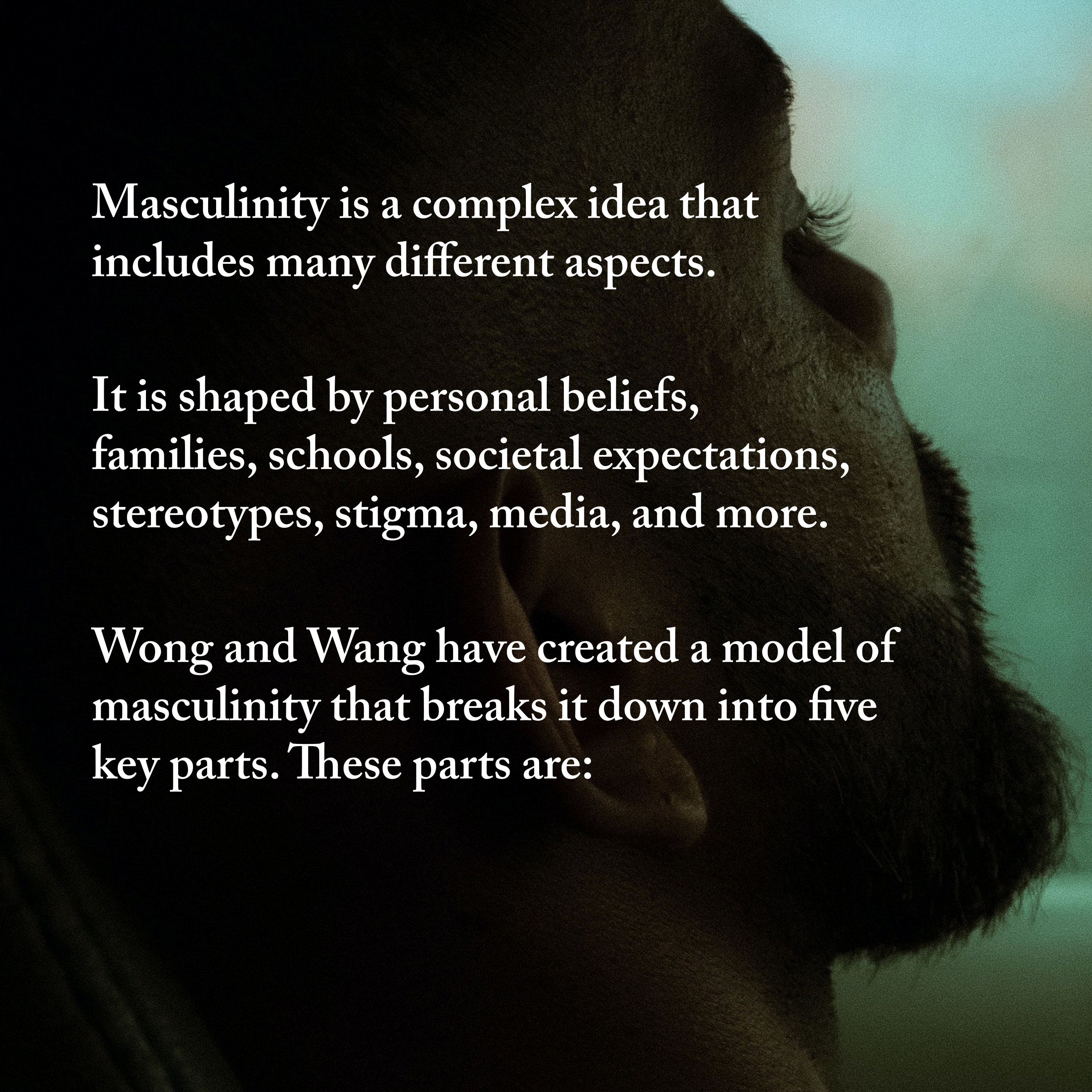
Exploring cultural norms of masculinity means understanding the societal ideas and expectations about men - held by people of all genders - that can contribute to some men's suicide risk.

“The vast majority of thoughts of suicide come from feelings of unworthiness and failure relating to lack of job/career and romantic success. My parents, especially my mother, promoted the idea that men are only useful for their ability to provide for a woman and make her happy, and that’s been a tough albatross to bear.”

An American man with thoughts of suicide in the past week.

“there is no help for young boys in school
I was told from day one that I was a
rapist, misogynist, evil because I was
a boy and told to feel that I should be
ashamed of myself because of my gender
so I started to hate myself because of it”

A young UK man who has attempted
suicide.



Masculinity is a complex idea that includes many different aspects.

It is shaped by personal beliefs, families, schools, societal expectations, stereotypes, stigma, media, and more.

Wong and Wang have created a model of masculinity that breaks it down into five key parts. These parts are:

1. *Self-Ascribed Masculinities*: How a man defines and sees himself.
2. *Other-Ascribed Masculinities*: How we believe other people view and define men.
3. *Situational Masculinities*: How expectations of men change depending on the situation.
4. *Performative Masculinities*: How men may feel pressure to act in certain ways.
5. *Macro Masculinities*: How culture, media, and society shape ideas about masculinity.





In this bookley, we will explore each aspect of masculinity to better understand how it might affect men's suicidal pain.

EXPLORING MASCULINITY & MALE SUICIDE.

Self-ascribed
masculinity

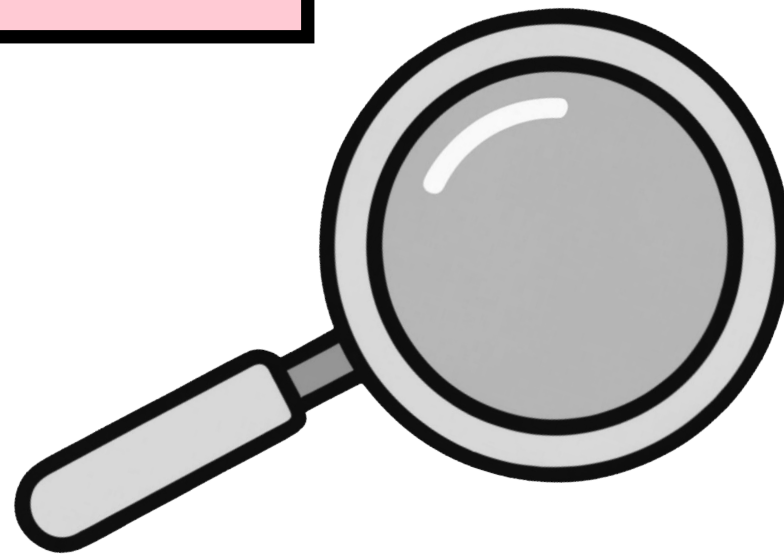
part 2



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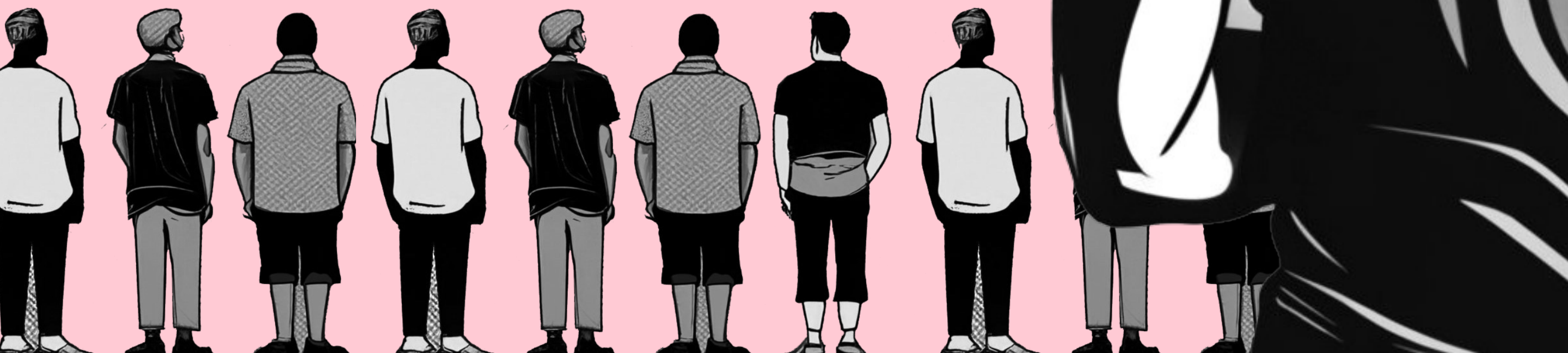
Let's explore:




SELF-ASCRIBED MASCULINITIES

‘Self-ascribed masculinities’
refers to a man’s personal
understanding of masculinity.

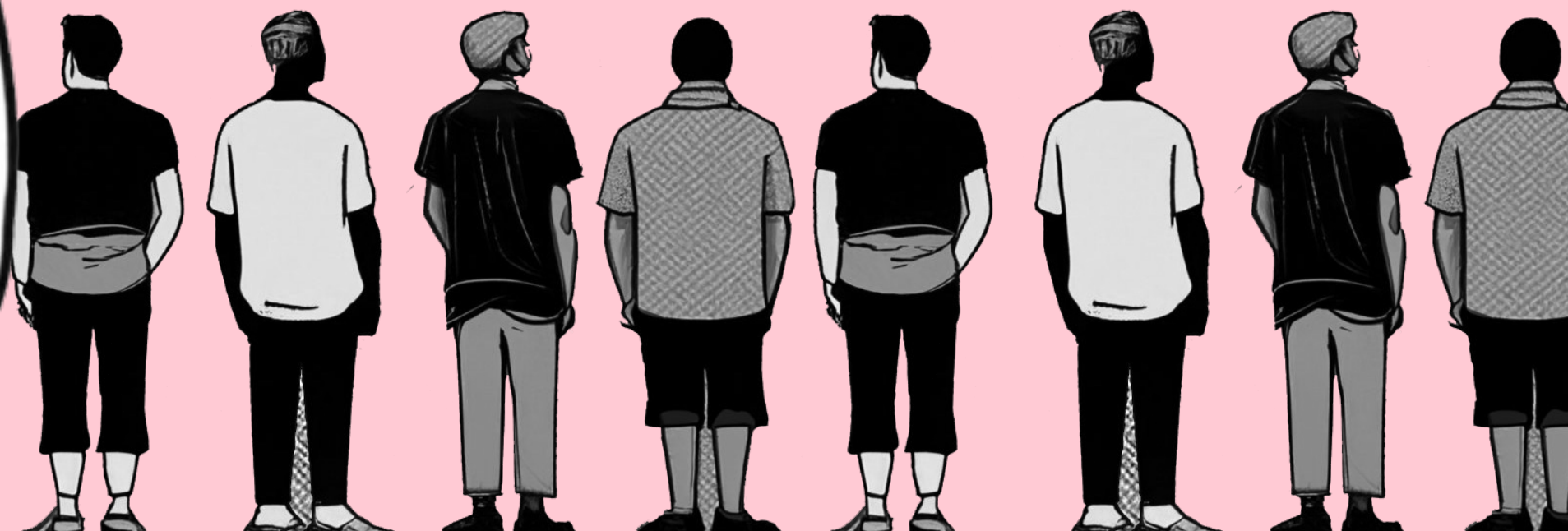
It means how he sees himself in
terms of masculinity - what he
thinks it means to be a man and
how he wants to show those
qualities in himself.



A large, stylized illustration of a person's back and shoulder, rendered in black and white with grey shading. The person is wearing a t-shirt, and the illustration is positioned on the left side of the image, partially overlapping the orange text box.

These beliefs about masculinity often develop during childhood and adolescence, shaped by family, peers, and cultural messages, though they can change over time.

Wong & Wang describe three parts to self-ascribed masculinities:



1. MASCULINE ATTRIBUTES

This is about the personal traits a person thinks they have that they associate with being a man.

For example: A man might see himself as very self-reliant because he believes that as a man he needs to get through situations of crisis by himself.



“I don’t want anyone’s help. If I can’t get through my problems on my own, I’m not worth anything”

An American man who has attempted suicide.

B. MASCULINE IDENTITIES

This is about whether someone identifies strongly with being a man or feels like they don't fit the typical idea of masculinity.

For example: A man might think he doesn't fit in with other men because he's never had a sexual partner. This may leave him feeling disconnected from commonly held expectations of masculinity.



“On the outside I’m a shy quiet guy, but inside I feel in prison. (...) Growing up I realised it is heavily expected from us guys to be the fearless initiators, that I fail to be because of the resulting anxiety.”

A Polish man who has thoughts of suicide.

C. STRESSFUL EXPERIENCES RELATED TO MASCULINITY

These are the pressures men feel when they struggle to live up to masculine expectations or feel judged for not being “man enough.”

For example: A man might feel like a failure if he loses his job because he thinks, as a man, he must provide for his loved ones.



“Expectations I’ve had on myself in terms of what I consider to be successes in life – a good father, a good husband, a good provider, um, those are probably at the top of the list, and it’s my belief I failed at – at all of those three responsibilities.”

A Canadian man who is suicidal.

(Olfiffe et al., 2019, p. 324)

“Even as a boy at 5/6 years old I thought it was my role to protect my mum even though there was nothing I could do.”

A UK man who has attempted suicide, talking about witnessing domestic violence in childhood.

What does 'self-ascribed masculinity' have to do with male suicide?

Self-ascribed masculinities can shape how men feel about themselves, how they handle stress, and psychological pain.

If a man feels like he doesn't live up to his own idea of what a man should be, it can lead to feelings of shame, stress, or low self-worth.

Imagine a man who sees himself as the protector of his family.

Because of this self-view, he might hide his pain from his loved ones believing it's his responsibility to shield others from his struggles - even at the cost of his own well-being.

“I saw records and conversations he had with the doctors, and it’s always – pressures at home, he’s got a young family, doesn’t get on with his in-laws, he finds it all very stressful, he’s finding it difficult to cope – but he wouldn’t have told me any of those things.”

A UK woman bereaved by her husband’s suicide.

Imagine a man who sees himself as someone who should always be strong and in control.

This belief may guide how he understands his role in the world.

If he experienced sexual abuse as a child, he might feel a deep conflict between his pain and the strong, self-reliant identity he feels he needs to uphold.

This inner struggle may lead him to carry the weight of his experience alone, making it harder for him to find the support and care he deserves.

“Child sexual abuse of boys presents particular problems because the manner in which boys are socialized often isolates them from others, values sexual strength and discounts sexual trauma”

An American man who has attempted suicide.

Self-ascribed masculinity is not set in stone.
Our ideas of masculinity can change over time.

A man who once thought asking for help was a weakness might come to see it as a strength. Similarly, someone who saw emotional expression as “not what men do” might later feel it is a crucial part of authentic connection.

It is important for *every person* to consider whether their ideas about what it means to be a man are limiting men in crisis from accessing the support, understanding, and compassion they need.

“If I had not been able to speak out about what happened to me as a child I would have died from it. (...) However, this was such a difficult thing to happen, I never intended to tell anyone about what happened to me and I feel there are many males out there unable to speak about traumatic events they have endured.”

A UK man who has had thoughts of suicide.

SELF-ASCRIBED MASCULINITY AND MALE SUICIDE RISK.



What do you think?

- What messages about masculinity did you receive growing up, and how have they shaped who you are today?
- Have your ideas about what it means to be a man changed over time?
- What aspects of masculinity do you feel most connected to? Why?
- How do you think society's expectations of men influence the male suicide crisis?

EXPLORING MASCULINITY & MALE SUICIDE.

Other-ascribed
masculinity

part 3




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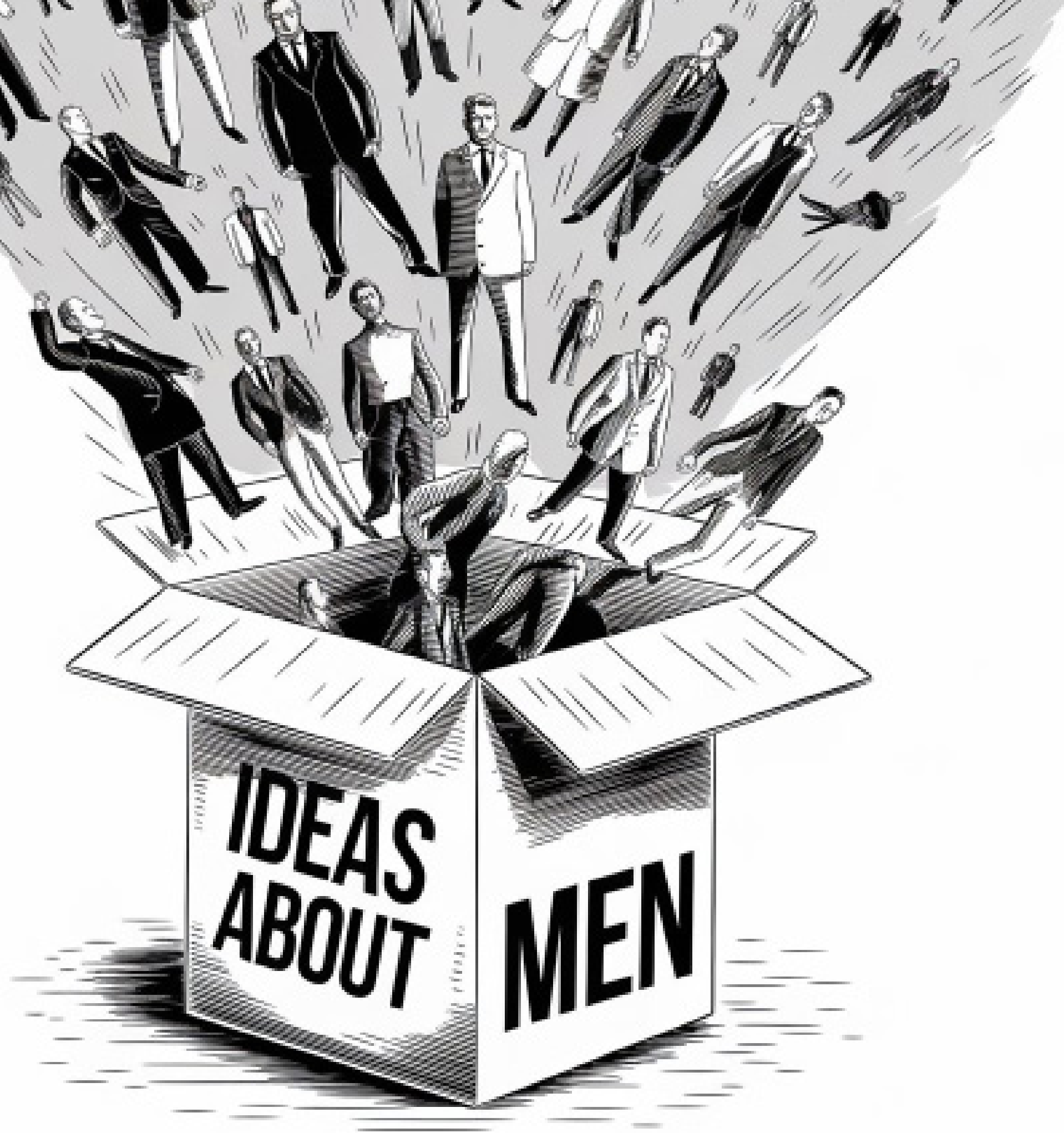
Let's explore:



OTHER-ASCRIBED MASCULINITIES



Other-ascribed masculinity refers to the ideas that we believe others – such as family, friends, or society – hold about how men should behave.



It's about other people's ideas of what men should be, and how men may feel judged and pressured by those expectations.

The difference between self-ascribed and other-ascribed masculinities is important.

For instance, self-ascribed masculinity is about how *a man sees himself*. For example, a man might feel proud and fulfilled as a stay-at-home dad.

Other-ascribed masculinity is about what *others* think men should be like. That same man might feel societal pressure to be the one who financially provides for his family and feel judged for choosing to focus on raising his children instead.

“A young woman (...) can just want something as simple as to be a mum (...) no one looks down on her for that. I feel, if I was to say that, then I know, for a fact, that I’d be looked down on by certain people - male friends, and a lot of women as well. They want that traditional, brutally aspirational, go-getter.”

A young UK man who has attempted suicide.

What does 'other-ascribed masculinity' have to do with male suicide?

‘Other-ascribed’ masculinity refers to the expectations, norms, and stereotypes we think others hold about what it means to be a man.

If a man feels he cannot meet other people’s standards and expectations of masculinity - or if rejects them - he may experience isolation, shame, or feelings of failure.

Imagine a young man surrounded by a peer group that believes men need to be tough.

To fit in, he might feel pressured to hide his tender or gentle nature.

This inner conflict - living in a way that doesn't match who he truly is - may lead to feelings of isolation.

“He was a tough man, a hard man, because of the people he was hanging around with, but really he was a softie underneath. He was too kind. He wanted people to think he was the tough man but he wasn’t at all.”

A UK father whose son died by suicide.

Imagine a man who has experienced sexual abuse.

He may desperately want help but fears that social stereotypes mean men are often only seen as perpetrators of abuse and not victims.

He may fear being dismissed, judged, or not believed.

This could prevent him from sharing his pain and isolate him from support.

“Being sexually abused by adult females that my family trusted and not being able to talk to anyone about it, or worse no-one saw them as sexual abusers because they were females and I am a male”

An Iranian man who has attempted suicide.


Imagine a man who struggles with his physical appearance.

He might want to open up about his anxiety and how it affects his confidence but fears being mocked or judged by his friends.


As a result, he may bottle up his emotions, isolating himself from meaningful support and connection.

“The real lasting painful experiences were many of my best friends (some still my friends to this day) making fun of my unfortunate (facial) appearance, a fact that I would be more accepting of if it weren't so painfully obvious how much it affects my social standing and sexual interest from the opposite sex.”

A young UK man who has attempted suicide.

An aerial photograph of a city at dusk. The sky is a mix of dark blue and orange, with scattered clouds. The city below is densely packed with buildings, many of which have their lights on, creating a warm glow. A prominent feature is a large, curved railway or transit line that winds through the city. The overall atmosphere is one of a bustling urban environment transitioning from day to night.

Cultural norms of masculinity
are constantly evolving,
meaning expectations about
how men should behave shift
and change over time.

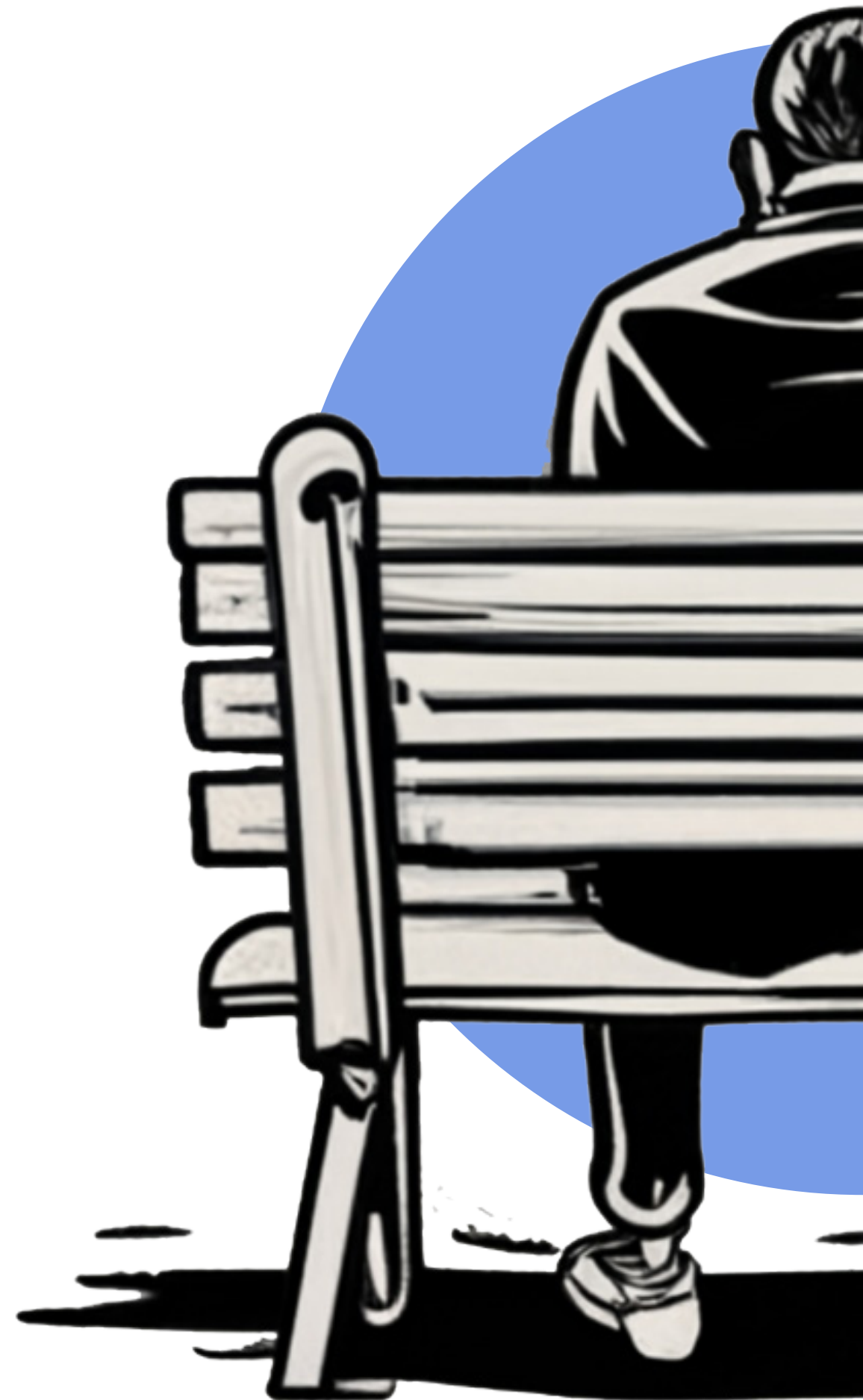
An aerial photograph of a city at sunset. The sky is filled with vibrant orange and yellow clouds, with the sun low on the horizon. The city below is illuminated by the warm light of the setting sun, with some buildings already showing interior lights. A large, semi-transparent pink rectangular box is centered over the middle of the image, containing text.

These changes can create tensions between self-ascribed masculinity - the internalised beliefs a man holds about what it means to be masculine - and other-ascribed masculinity - the ideas and expectations that others or society place on him.

Imagine a man who grew up being told that asking for help is a sign of weakness - an idea he's internalised after hearing it repeatedly.

Now, as societal ideas on masculinity shift, he's exposed to messages encouraging men to talk about their struggles.

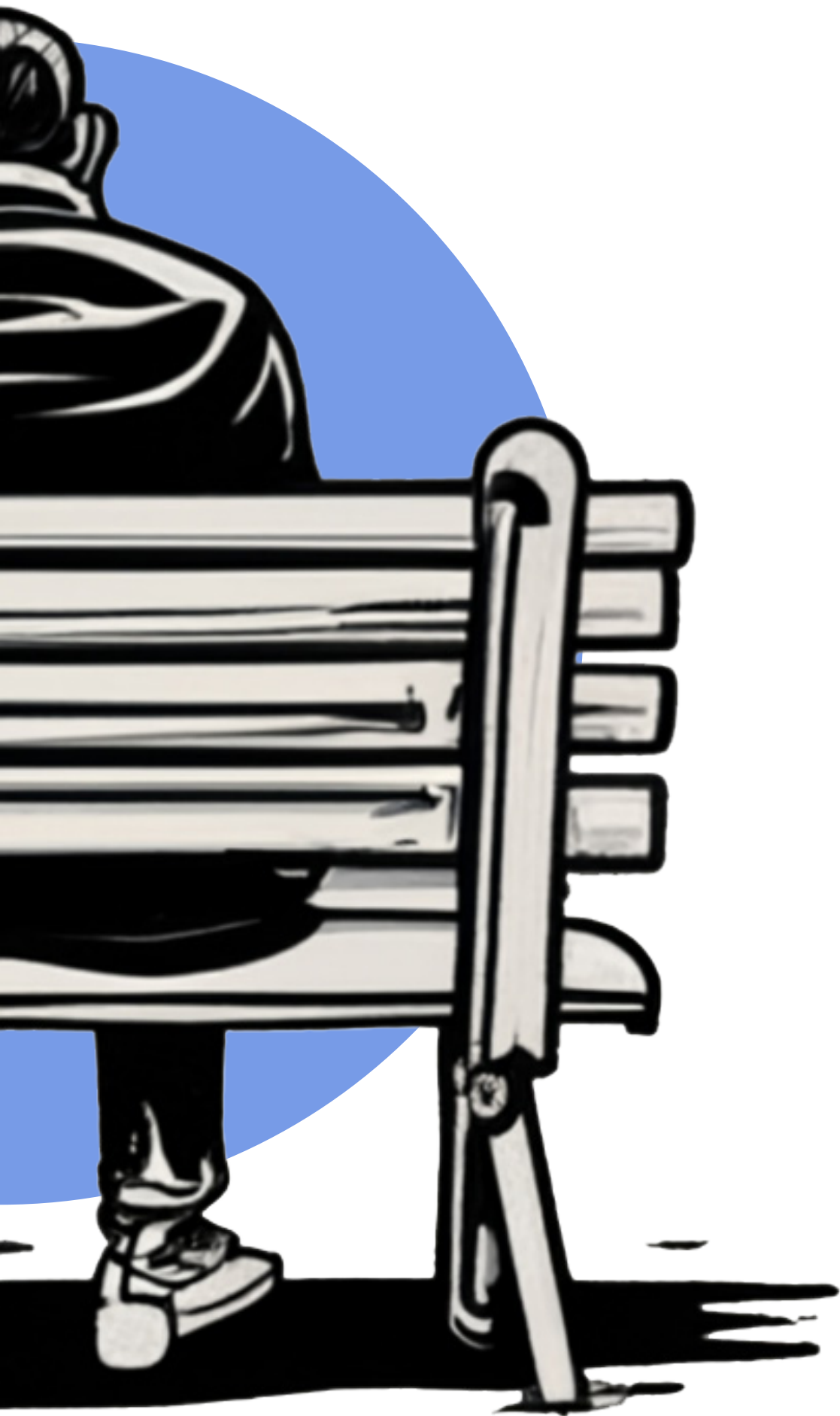
He might feel conflicted between his internalised ideas about masculinity and these new ideas.



He might believe it's okay for other men to ask for help, but struggle to apply this to himself.

This tension between his self-ascribed masculinity (*seeing help-seeking as weakness*) and new societal norms (*encouraging men to talk*) can lead to confusion and feelings of isolation.

He may feel uncertain about what it means to be a man in today's world, increasing his sense of disconnection.



“I strongly sympathise with men who are depressed. I would encourage men to go to therapy or get any other help because I would never judge them for that but I could never go myself.”

A young Australian man who has attempted suicide multiple times.

OTHER-ASCRIBED MASCULINITY AND MALE SUICIDE RISK.



What do you think?

- How do you think society's ideas about what it means to be a man affect how we see and treat men?
- Are there times when you've felt judged for not fitting in with society's expectations of men?
- Do you think other men in your life feel the same pressure?

EXPLORING MASCULINITY & MALE SUICIDE.

Situational
Masculinity

part 4



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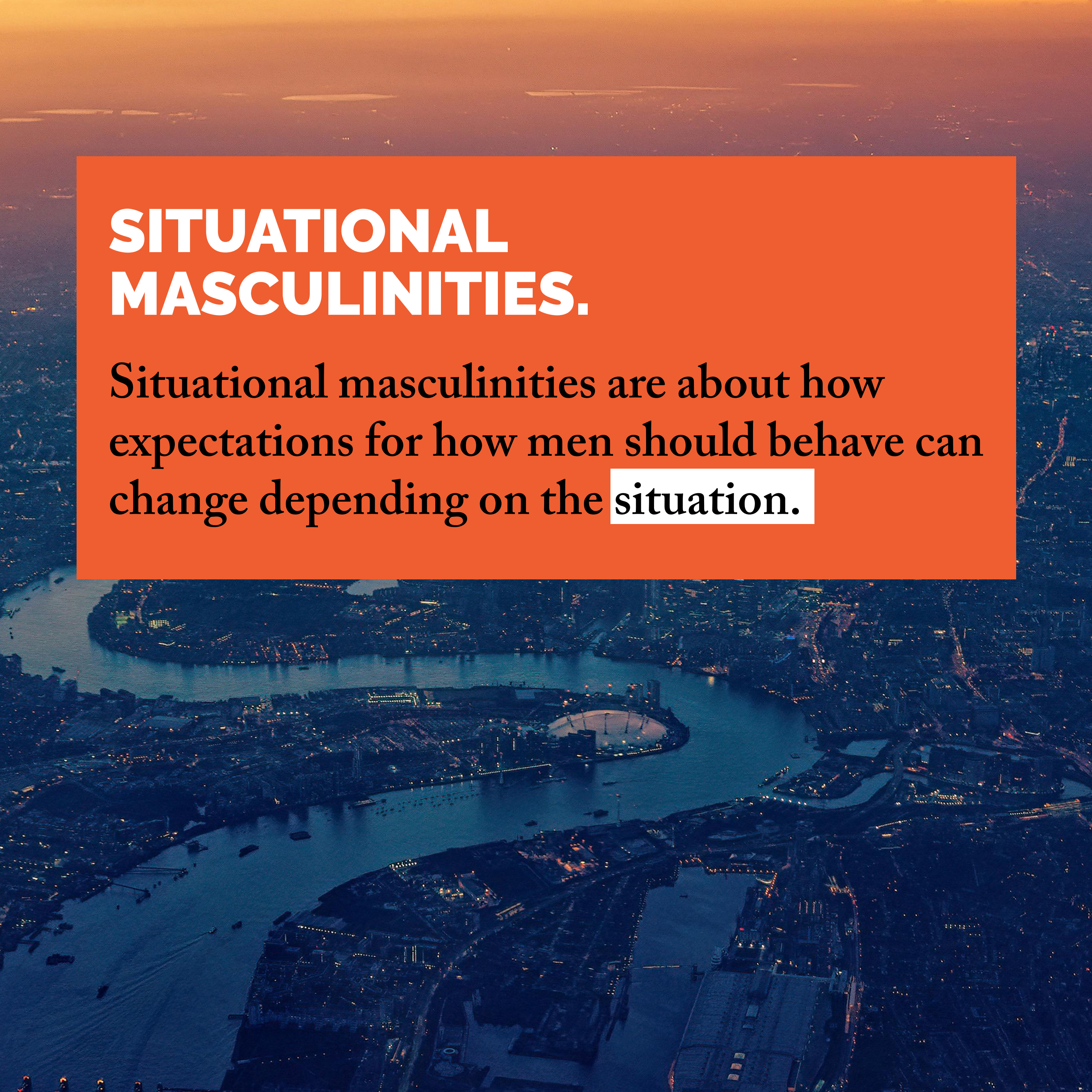
Let's explore:




SITUATIONAL MASCULINITIES


SITUATIONAL MASCULINITIES.

Situational masculinities are about how expectations for how men should behave can change depending on the situation.





Situational
masculinities can
help us understand
how a man might
be expected to act
differently at work

A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark blue t-shirt, is smiling broadly and waving his right hand towards the camera. He is sitting at a table in an outdoor cafe or restaurant. In the background, other people are visible, and there are large windows looking out onto a green landscape. A purple text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

than he does
out with his
friends

A close-up shot of a person's hands cutting a red apple into small pieces on a green cutting board. The apple pieces are being placed into a black tray that already contains many other apple pieces. The background shows a kitchen counter with various items, including a white container and a metal pot. A purple text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

or, at home with
his family.

Different settings and contexts allow or encourage different behaviours.

For example,
watching or playing
football can create a
unique environment.





When celebrating a goal, male players may be much more physical and tactile with each other than they might be in other situations.



Similarly, male fans may openly show strong emotions because the setting permits it.

What does 'situational masculinity' have to do with male suicide?

Situational masculinity means that the expectations for how men should act can change depending on the situation.

These different situations can sometimes add pressure onto men who are suicidal, isolating them, or limiting space for connection.

Imagine a man who is feeling overwhelmed by pressures at work.

He has big deadlines and a demanding boss who is bullying and belittling him.

He dreads going into work and finds the high-stress environment and the abuse is really impacting his mental health.

However, he may feel unable to show his emotions because it's not seen as 'acceptable' for men to get upset at work.

“Expressing emotions in groups of girls seems normal. I’ve walked past girls crying at work, and there are people consoling her, and it isn’t a big drama, but if you see a man genuinely breaking down then its different.”

A UK man who has attempted suicide.

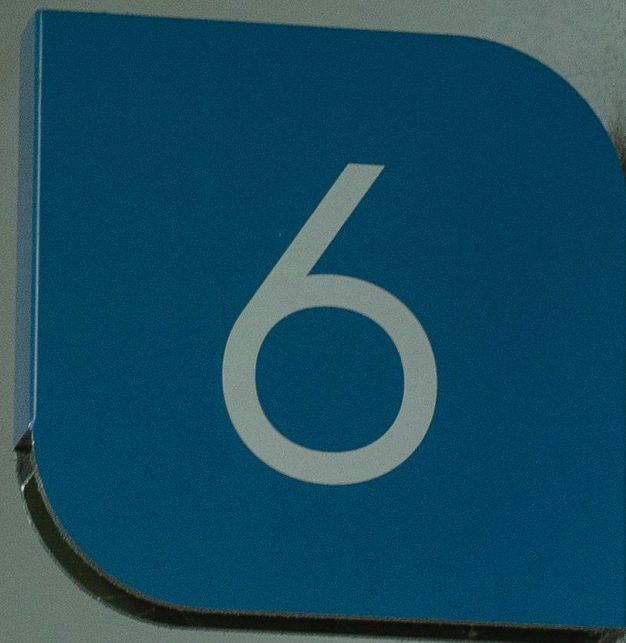
Imagine a man who feels overwhelmed by the weight of his problems.

He may want to share his struggles with his closest friends but finds in their day-to-day lives, the group sticks to joking around or discussing surface-level topics, making it hard for him to open up.

Alcohol or drugs might create a situational context where these unspoken rules of engagement are temporarily suspended, allowing space for deeper connections to emerge.

“With my friends the only time we talk about things that are genuinely hurting us is after a lot of drinks and/or drugs. Only then can you have those proper heart to hearts. In my experience, you can’t do that as part of your normal day-to-day, even with people you are really close to. It’s only when inhibitions are lower through whatever means.”

A UK man who attempted suicide.



Different situations also shape how men's behaviour is interpreted.

A calm and composed demeanour might be seen as strength in one context, but misread as a lack of emotion in another.

Imagine a man who has reached a point where he feels he needs professional support.

In the unfamiliar situation of seeking help, he might feel compelled to heighten his emotional restraint as a way to maintain a sense of control.

He may suppresses his emotions and deliver “just the facts” about his mental health.



However, in a healthcare context, where professionals might expect crisis to be accompanied by visible, heightened emotional expressions (like crying or a breakdown), his calm demeanour could be misread as a lack of urgency or risk.

Subsequently, his pain may be overlooked, reducing his access to effective care.

This mismatch between how masculinity is expressed and how it is perceived in situations can have serious consequences, including failure to provide the support the man needs.

“I don’t cry or jump up and down or break down; I just give them the facts. I can hold myself together long enough to give a person the facts, even though I would rather rip their heads off, or go running off into the streets or something to get away, but I’m there to get help.

“So I give them the facts. They see that

as just plain black and white. There's no emotion behind it, there's just nothing at all, therefore the person is faking the symptoms."

A Canadian man who has attempted suicide on his experiences trying to get help.

(Strike et al., 2006, p. 34)

SITUATIONAL MASCULINITY AND MALE SUICIDE RISK.



What do you think?

- Have you ever noticed that the way you express yourself changes depending on whether you're at work, with friends, or at home? Why do you think that is?
- Have you ever felt like the situation you were in made it harder for you to express your true self as a man?

EXPLORING MASCULINITY & MALE SUICIDE.

Performative
masculinity

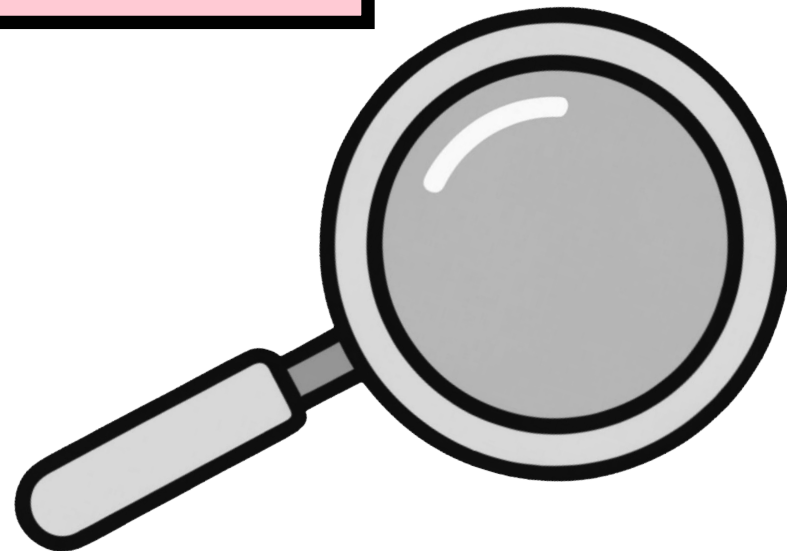
part 5



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Let's explore:



PERFORMATIVE MASCULINITIES

PERFORMATIVE MASCULINITIES

Performative masculinities are the things men might *do* to fit in with what they feel society expects of them.



It's different from other types of masculinity because it focuses on *what men do*, like how they act, dress, or talk.

These actions can reflect a desire to feel accepted within certain social environments.

“There’s definitely censorship in masculinity, a feeling that I can’t be my true self. There are certain things I enjoy doing, like sitting at work with my headphones on, listening to Destiny’s Child. But, I wouldn’t tell other men at work because I feel there would be a judgment there. That’s on a very micro-scale but, you know, I think it does mean you can’t be your authentic self.”

A UK man who has attempted suicide.

What does 'performative masculinity' have to do with male suicide?

Performative masculinity refers to the behaviours men may feel a pressure to “do” in order to fit in with societal expectations of what it means to be a man.

These behaviours might lead some men to suppress their true feelings because they feel a pressure to maintain an outward appearance that conforms to certain masculine ideals.

For example, a man might feel he needs to pretend he's "okay" and in control, even when he's struggling.

Hiding how bad you feel and pretending to be "okay" can be exhausting, draining both mental and emotional energy.

It can also make it harder to form authentic and meaningful relationships with others.

Over time, this isolation can lower self-esteem and leave some men feeling even more alone.

“I hate myself for trying to be somebody else. (...) I got so pissed off putting on a front - always putting a happy face on and always being a laugh, a joke”

A young Irish man who has attempted suicide

(Cleary, 2005, p. 163)

Imagine a man who feels happiest when he can take care of his partner.

If he's going through a tough time, he might pretend everything is fine because he doesn't want her to worry, and he feels like, as a man, he should have things under control.

Over time, he may feel overwhelmed by pretending everything is okay, while his stress continues to build inside.

The gap between what he shows to the outside world and his inner reality may leave him feeling even more exhausted and lonely.

“You put on a ‘front’ the entire time. You think, Christ, I’ve put on a front since I was a little kid. I don’t actually know who I am beyond that front.

“You start to think the real you is all these weak, negative traits.

“It’s this feeling that people think you’re strong enough to hack it but inside you’ve got all these doubts, all these anxieties, all this weakness.

“I’ve felt most comfortable and most happy when I can protect my girlfriend. That’s when you feel fulfilled and like you’re doing your job almost.

“And, so I think if you get to a point where you’re not fulfilling roles like that, then you feel like you’re pointless. In particular, if you’ve got people relying on you and feel like you’re not living up to what you should be providing for them.

“People won’t talk meaningfully about their emotions (...) They’ve been putting on this front that they are okay and that they can hack it for so long. But, they can’t hack it. And, there’s no one they can turn to, and, say, “I can’t hack it.” Either they literally are the person that needs to keep bringing in the money, or they feel they are the person that should be the rock.”

A young UK man who has attempted suicide.

Imagine a man who is deeply struggling with his mental health but goes out of his way to hide his struggles.

He might overcompensate by appearing overly confident, or making lots of jokes.

Behind closed doors, he could feel utterly isolated, but his performance of strength and control stops him from seeking support.

The pressure to maintain this image can lead to feelings of hopelessness and increase his risk of suicide.

“When he was able to put a disguise on - as this sociable, jokey fella - he had something he could cloak himself in. But, it was almost like it was some kind of extraordinary act. I guess after awhile there was a point where it starts to break down because it's not coming from here (*taps chest*).

“He hated the fact that he was depressed and anxious. He never appreciated the things about himself that other people did.

“There was two sides of himself, the one where he was able to be sociable - and it was such a shock to his friends because he made me promise not to tell anybody about how depressed and unhappy he was. A lot of them had no idea because he just wanted to hide it because he thought no one would like him.

“And, inside, he was struggling. And, I think, when he said, he was lonely, I think, he was talking about the fact that that little

person, that lost little boy inside of him, was slipping further and further away.

“When we went to the funeral it was shocking to hear how popular he was. And, I thought, if you were here listening to this... people loved you. And, he probably would have said to me, ‘people loved the persona I put on.’”

A UK woman whose husband died by suicide.

PERFORMATIVE MASCULINITY AND MALE SUICIDE RISK.



What do you think?

- Have you ever felt like you had to act a certain way to fit in with what people expect from men?
- Have you ever felt like you were “pretending” to be someone you’re not in order to be accepted?
- How do you think the pressure of pretending affects a man’s mental health or wellbeing?

EXPLORING MASCULINITY & MALE SUICIDE.

Macro
masculinities

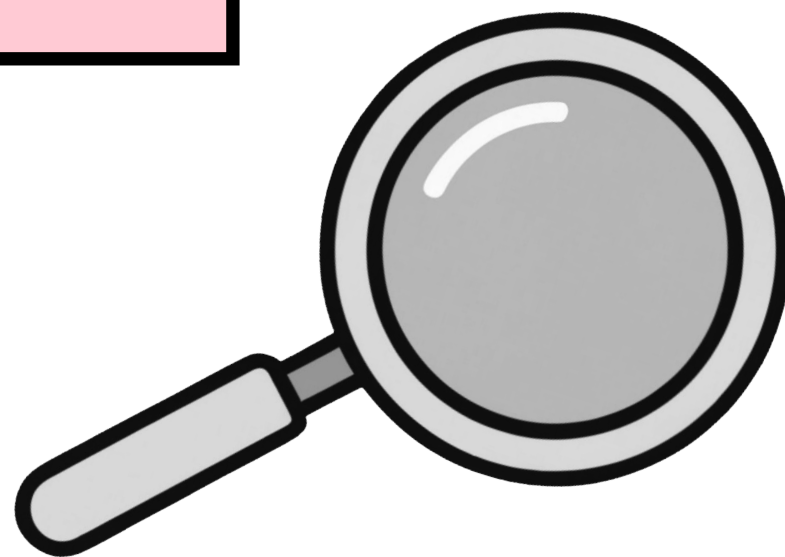
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Wong and Wang have created a model of masculinity that breaks it down into 5 key parts:

- 1. Self-Ascribed Masculinities:* How a man defines and sees himself.
- 2. Other-Ascribed Masculinities:* How other people view and define men.
- 3. Situational Masculinities:* How expectations of men change depending on the situation.
- 4. Performative Masculinities:* How men may feel pressure to act in certain ways.
- 5. Macro Masculinities:* How culture, media, and society shape ideas about masculinity.

Let's explore:



MACRO MASCULINITIES



MACRO MASCULINITIES

Macro masculinity is about how ideas of masculinity are shaped by large systems in society - like media, culture, and communities.

An aerial night photograph of a city, likely London, showing the River Thames and surrounding urban landscape with numerous illuminated buildings and bridges.

Macro masculinities are the big-societal ideas about what it means to be a man.

They are shaped by larger systems in society, like entertainment, social media, culture, schools, workplaces, and communities.

Macro masculinities represent collective norms, expectations, and stereotypes about masculinity that exist in groups, organisations, and even entire countries.

These broad, societal influences affect everyone's understanding of masculinity.

They shape how men see themselves, how other people expect men to act, and even how entire communities view gender roles.

Macro masculinities are important because they help us understand how ideas about manhood are created and spread across society.



Changing Masculinity Norms

Norms of masculinity are constantly evolving, influenced by shifts in culture, media, and societal values.

What was once seen as a hallmark of being a “real man” may no longer align with today’s expectations.

For some men, this can create confusion or uncertainty about what is expected of them.



Some men may feel caught between traditional ideas of masculinity, like being stoic and strong, and newer ideals that encourage emotional openness and vulnerability.

Navigating these changes can feel overwhelming, especially when these expectations vary across different social groups and situations.



“I think particularly now it’s so hard to know what you’re meant to be like as a man.

“On the one hand, you’re supposed to be in touch with your emotions and willing to talk about things.

“But, then at the same time - in my experience - if you try and do that, really try and talk about your emotions, not just the ones that make you a bit more endearing as a person, the stuff that really cuts to the bone, then people are like ‘*woooahhh i don’t know about this guy, he’s a bit much...*’”

“At the same time, you’re supposed to be the traditional, macho man in lots of situations, and a lot of my ex-girlfriends find elements of that attractive.

“It’s this weird sort of dichotomy for men at the moment where you’re told these things in public about how you should be and then in private you’re supposed to be something else.”

A UK man who has attempted suicide

What does 'macro masculinity' have to do with male suicide?

Macro masculinities are the big, societal ideas about what it means to be a man and how men are discussed in society.

These cultural expectations and conversations can have a powerful effect on how some men view themselves.

For some men, the pressure to live up to society's expectations of masculinity can be a heavy burden.

When life doesn't go as planned - like losing a job, or struggling to meet responsibilities - some men may feel like they've failed. This can lead to feelings of shame, isolation, and self-doubt.

At the same time, how men are talked about and treated in society plays a big role in how safe some men may feel opening up about their struggles.





If men feel judged, dismissed, or misunderstood by society or the people around them, they may hold back from seeking help.

Negative stereotypes or harsh criticism of men in broader culture can make it harder for them to believe that support and compassion are available to them when they need it.

“In general societal attitudes make me feel like men are bad or unneeded in society. This stuff is barely seen as problematic in society but it’s rife everywhere.”

A UK man with thoughts of suicide

“The sense of feeling expendable,
disregarded, even hated for my gender,
and the sense that when it comes to
men, quite frankly society gives less than
a fuck”

An Canadian man who has attempted
suicide

Imagine a man who has internalised the message that masculinity is inherently dangerous or harmful.

Repeated comments and media stories framing men as potential predators leave him feeling ashamed and alienated, as though there's something wrong with him simply because of his gender. He feels overwhelmed but doesn't know how to express these feelings without seeming dismissive of women's struggles.

Instead, he keeps everything inside, questioning his worth and feeling increasingly isolated, with no safe space to share his thoughts.

“Feel like I’m constantly being told I’m a potential rapist or violent criminal just because I’m a man.

“I know that this isn’t really the case but at times it can feel overwhelming.

“It’s probably because it’s not an area I feel I can openly talk about because I don’t want to take away from women’s issues (...)

“Just means that the ideas fester and can become a real weight at times.

“It makes me ashamed to be me which is something I already struggle with”

A UK man with thoughts of suicide

“School was hell, a constant nightmare of a popularity contest where my confidence was shattered and broken and I left not wanting to go to university due to social anxiety and there is no help for young boys in school. I was told from day one that I was a rapist, misogynist, evil because I was a boy and told to feel that I should be ashamed of myself because of my gender so I started to hate myself because of it”

A UK man who has attempted suicide

MACRO MASCULINITY AND MALE SUICIDE RISK.



What do you think?

- How do you think society's ideas about what it means to be a man affect how we see and treat men?
- What do you think needs to change in society to create more balanced and inclusive ideas of masculinity?

The creation of this guide was supported by generous funding from MANUP?

At MANUP? we recognise the growing trend of men starting to open up about their mental health challenges.

We aim to take this a step further by cultivating a culture of attentive and empathetic listening. We strive to equip individuals, be they partners, family members, or friends, with the understanding and tools necessary to support the men in their lives effectively.

Our focus lies in enlightening society about the importance of speaking up about mental health issues and ensuring an informed, compassionate audience ready to listen and respond.

MANUP? is leading the charge in transforming how mental health is discussed and addressed within communities, promoting a more supportive and proactive approach to male mental wellbeing.



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Your feedback is invaluable in helping me evaluate impact and improve future materials.

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