



BOOK REVIEW

PERSPECTIVES IN MALE PSYCHOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

LOUISE LIDDON AND JOHN BARRY

Rick Bradford



Keywords: male psychology, book review

This is an important book.

It is important, not only because it provides a much-needed primer on male psychology, but because it presents an opportunity to begin a new era in psychology. There is no point in dissembling, and the book itself does not do so. Psychology is intrinsically personal, so when the personal was made political, so was psychology. The ethos the authors promote is that science, as an empirically grounded discipline, is not politics, and so male psychology, if it is to be a science, is not gender politics. That the book will be controversial is inevitable, but the reason does not lie in the book itself but in the prevailing academic environment. The authors are to be congratulated on facing this prospect bravely.

The book is male psychology 101 – or it would be if undergraduate courses on male psychology were the norm. They are not. In the UK there is currently only one such course, at Sunderland under Dr Rebecca Owens. But *Perspectives* provides ideal material for similar introductory courses to be included within psychology degrees.

The book is intended to be the first in a series, the remainder concentrating on more specialist areas. *Perspectives*, however, is extremely broad in scope. After an elucidation of the aims and orientation of male psychology, the scene is set with a brief discussion on the hazards of researching sex differences. The bulk of the book systematically addresses a wide range of issues in terms of their impact on male psychology – or the impact of male psychology on them – including child development, education, sport, work, criminality, the armed forces, and physical and mental health. These are followed by a chapter on masculinity (thankfully expressed in the singular not the plural).

The book is well structured, being divided into relatively short sections and so is easy to assimilate rapidly. The use of text boxes to highlight certain issues is also an aid to accessibility. Similarly, technical terms are generally defined where they arise. Throughout, at key points, the authors refer forwards to the final chapter which draws out some good advice and common themes distilled from the topics overall. In short, the book is ideal as an introduction; undergraduates and the general public will find it easy to read.

I was particularly pleased to see a discussion of the impact on boys of growing up in a culture of pervasive negative portrayal of masculinity. That the same sources of opinion who are

so sensitive to the harms of gender stereotyping in one context have themselves created and promoted negative stereotyping in another context is one of the reasons why this book is so badly needed.

Perhaps as a hallmark of a successful book, one is stimulated to think of additional topics which might have been included. However, virtually every sub-section could be expanded to the length of a major academic publication, with the addition of fifty references where just one or two are used. But to burden individual topics with too much detail would defeat the purpose of the book which, in the approach actually taken, it successfully achieves. Hence, I struggle to have grounds for criticism, which is an uncomfortable position for a reviewer. In that spirit I offer a few observations, none of which greatly detract from the book.

In the context of education, the book mentions assessment bias against boys, citing evidence from Israel and France. Actually, there is similar evidence in the UK, though I doubt it has been published in the academic journals. That fact is, in itself, a concern. The UK data showing teachers' assessment bias at Key Stage 2 SATS (age 10/11) can be found in [The Empathy Gap, Male Disadvantages and the Mechanisms of Their Neglect](#), Section 2.1, which also discusses similar data from the USA based on [Cornwell et al \(2013\)](#). More recently in the UK, the debacle of the examless A Level awards during the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 has provided definitive evidence of teachers' assessment bias (see The Illustrated Empathy Gap's article [State Education, Dying, Dying...Dead?](#)).

In the chapter on criminality, one causal factor which is not discussed is IQ. Our prisons are not packed with people of high intelligence. In an increasingly technology-driven world, gainful employment has become increasingly difficult for the less intellectually gifted. And men have a larger IQ variance than women, so there are more men with especially low IQ. The preponderance in prisons of men with a history of exclusion from school is undoubtedly related. Add to this the importance to men of being providers, and the frustration of being unable to do so by the legal means of gaining employment is likely (one surmises) to encourage criminality.

It was good to see veterans discussed. But I would point out that is not only mental ill-health issues from which they commonly suffer. Important though PTSD is, it can be addressed if the man seeks help. What proves more intractable in practice is veterans' contact with their

children, because partner separation is disproportionately common amongst veterans – perhaps as a result of their mental state. So, one problem creates another even more virulent.

Perhaps the most important issue that the book mentions is that, in the context of gender, women tend to have in-group preference whereas men have stronger out-group than in-group preference, here the authors quote [Rudman and Goodwin \(2004\)](#). Liddon and Barry conclude that, “*This means that men favour women relatively more than they favour other men, which undermines the idea that misogyny is a core part of masculinity*”. Arguably this absence of in-group preference amongst men is a cause of much misunderstanding (such as the idea that men’s dominance in politics means that political policy favours men).

The implications for our changing society of women’s stronger in-group preference, and men’s relative out-group preference, have not yet been grasped. Women dominate as students and lecturers in tertiary education as regards all people-oriented subjects. Consequently, women dominate as professionals in areas such as teaching, mental and physical health, social work and domestic abuse services, the latter two being of central importance after parental separation and hence impacting fathers as much as mothers. The implications of skewed gender-group preference should be of concern, but currently fail to be so precisely because this skew is perceived as right and proper. This is exactly where academic psychology has a crucial role in exposing the true basis of our perspectives, behaviours and ultimately political policy.

That the book encourages thoughts like those above is a measure of its success, for surely that is one of its key aims. The book is an excellent entry point to the literature across a very broad range of issues. But more importantly it provokes the reader into thinking more deeply about what lies behind the many phenomena involving male psychology whose treatment at present is either neglected or unconvincing. As such it will make an ideal undergraduate text in psychology as well as being suitable for a general audience.

You can buy *Perspectives in Male Psychology: An Introduction* [here](#) or other usual suppliers.

An earlier version of this review appeared on the www.psychreg.org website.

AUTHOR PROFILE



Back in the mists of time **Rick Bradford** obtained his degree in theoretical physics from Cambridge University and a PhD from University College London. He worked as a professional mechanical engineer in the power generation industry for nearly 40 years and is now semi-retired. Since retiring he has been a Visiting Professor and an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, Engineering Department, teaching at MSc level and supervising PhD students. He has been married since the world was a very different place and has two sons in their mid-30s. To convince himself he is still a physicist he published a book on quantum mechanics in 2020 (*The Unweirding*). In 2019 he published a book on male disadvantages, *The Empathy Gap: Male Disadvantages and the Mechanisms of Their Neglect*, under the pen name William Collins. He blogs under that name on men's issues on *The Illustrated Empathy Gap*.

Contact details: RickatMerlinHaven@hotmail.com

NEW MALE STUDIES: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL (NMS) IS AN OPEN ACCESS ONLINE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES FACING BOYS AND MEN WORLDWIDE.

THIS JOURNAL USES OPEN JOURNAL SYSTEMS 2.3.4.0, WHICH IS OPEN SOURCE JOURNAL MANAGEMENT AND PUBLISHING SOFTWARE DEVELOPED, SUPPORTED, AND FREELY DISTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT UNDER THE GNU GENERAL PUBLIC LICENSE.

THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN DOWNLOADED FROM [HTTP://NEWMALESTUDIES.COM](http://newmalestudies.com)