Gender Responsive Care-Gender and Coping

**David Stanley** 00:00

So gender expectations, all of these gender expectations can affect a man's coping skill repertoire or what's available for, for that man, when he's feeling unbalanced because of the traumas that he's experienced. So for men, there's a sense that sense of powerlessness that always often comes with trauma. A man might try to counteract that feeling of powerlessness by becoming powerful. So using steroids, using guns, using controlling behavior, trying to micromanage everybody in their life, that is deeply rooted in a feelings of powerlessness, because what he's basically saying is, I can't control what happens in me, or what happened to me, therefore, I need to control everyone and everything around me and I need to be powerful, so no one will mess with me. Oftentimes, people can feel dead inside or disconnected from their emotions and it can leave you with a sense of feeling dead inside. And I know there's a million bands out there, like Nine Inch Nails, and all these other popular bands that sing about the sense of like, being in a place where you can't feel anything, so you do something to yourself to make yourself just feel something. And this is kind of what it's like. So in some ways, this is a, the feeling dead can be counteracted with self injurious behaviors, non suicidal self injury, risk taking, they might engage in serial sexual encounters, they might engage in violence and self harm. You know, you hear this from men who, who are in a warzone and come back injured, and say, I want to jump back into the violence again, I want to be there, you know, back in, because that's the only place I feel really alive. And it could be because of the symptoms of trauma, leave that person feeling dead. So the only time they really feel alive is when they're in that violence, where they're back in that situation where they're being traumatized. It also leaves you with a sense of being, feeling disconnected from yourself and others. And often men try to connect your disconnection. So they might connect through alcohol use connect through competition, jokes, they might try to connect with their opposite partner by using sex but not being emotionally available. So they try to get that emotional need for connection, so met by having multiple sex partners, but never having an emotional contact or emotional connection to the people they're having sex with. So oftentimes, that's, you know, I kind of say that it's sort of like a person who's really thirsty for water but keeps going and drinking water out of the ocean. It's like it's not going to do the trick. But the more you start drinking that saltwater, the thirstier you feel. So you keep going back. And I think a lot of men with their sexual behaviors are kind of like that, it's like, you're really looking for something else, you're looking for a meaningful connection, but you're trying to find it through serial sexual encounters that don't have any emotional component to them. Lastly, feeling overwhelmed. A man might try to disconnect or intellectualize or suppress. I often see this with the men that I'm working with, I know when we kind of hit a spot that's real tender for that person, because I'll ask them, you know, what were you feeling when this happens, and immediately they start going into that thinking brain, and you know that they're in their head, and they're not in their heart. And what I want them to do is kind of bring those, the head and the heart together. So the thinking brain is working along with the emotional brain. But for a lot of men stepping into that emotional ground feels really unsafe, because a lot of men don't feel that they have the skills necessary to navigate the emotional realm. So roles, roles and relationships and trauma. Some people I apologize as you're seeing this for like the 100th time, but I do love this slide because it illustrates what can happen to our relationships and when we experience trauma in our relationships. So you have the big bad villain, he says you must pay the rent, he's the perpetrator, he's usually a male, then you have the victim who said I can't pay the rent.

This was a skit on Zoom. I'm aging, dating myself by saying that I used to watch zoom on channel two. And they had a skit which actually played this out, but I'm sparing you the playing out the skit. So the female who's a victim that's usually portrayed as, as a female, the victim is almost always a female. I can't pay the rent, and then the male who's the hero comes in and says, I'll pay the rent. So you notice a genderized pattern and a lot of these stories that we tell about perpetrators, rescuers and victims. It's not okay to be the victim because that brings shame but it is, and shame that will eventually go into anger. And then you've got to do something that changed the equation. So you've got to become a perpetrator or another rescuer in response to your experiencing victimhood. So quickly I think a lot of gang violence is rooted in this because if someone does something to your gang, you can't just let it go, you've got to do something, in order to prove that you're not the victim here, you've got to keep that going. And so when a man finds himself in the role of a victim, it often results in shame and that man will try to do something so that he can either be the, the rescuer, the perpetrator, or be perceived as a rescuer or perpetrator. Where this leaves men is that relationship, connection and healing are kind of far off in the distance. I see that that's over there, I can see that it's possible but there's this big, giant concrete wall in front of me. And those are the gender norms and expectations that I operate under. And it's that overarching theme of shame in the shamehood of being a victim and having those vulnerability. So a lot of men want to reach for relationships, connection and healing, but find themselves stuck with this big giant wall that keeps them from moving forward, and they end up getting stuck. So that all leads also to a sense of disconnection and imbalance. And men oftentimes, what men often reach for is they reach for substances, in our culture, in our society. That's why we see, that's one of the reasons why maybe I can't, I didn't do the research on that, so I can't say definitively, but I theorize in my own sort of experiences that I think a lot of the reason why there's so many men in treatment for substance use disorder more so, more men than women, in every single program I've gone to is because of some of these cultural norms and expectations, and how they interact with trauma. The norms and expectations for men, what a man can reach out to, to bring himself back to balance are actually limited. And a lot of those things that we expect men to reach for, actually don't help, actually hurt in the long run. So a lot of men when they're feeling that sense of imbalance, like most of us, you reach for something to try to grab on to, to bring yourself back to balance, a lot of men pick up drugs and alcohol. Some men person may perceive it as more culturally appropriate to go and drown yourself in a little bit of Scotch than it is to go cry to your best friend's and pour your feelings out and eat a little bit ice cream together. So think about some of those gender norms and expectations and how men and women are expected to cope when bad things happen. A lot more men, I think in sort of my experience have reached for those drugs and alcohol because relationships seems so far away to them.