"I THINK A WOMAN CAN TAKE IT": WIDOWED MEN'S VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BEREAVEMENT

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Do the views and experiences of older widowed men regarding widowhood agree, and can they be explained in terms of notions of masculinity? Older widowed men were asked whether they believed men or women coped better. They were also asked about their own experiences. The paper discusses the similarities and differences between the views and experiences of these widowed men within a framework of masculinity. Men believe that women are better equipped to deal with widowhood. They explain this in terms of women's domestic abilities and social skills, and men's inability to talk about their emotions. These views can be understood in terms of masculinity. However, analysis of their experiences suggests that the picture is more complex. Men were found to be as socially engaged as women. Men showed a range of domestic abilities: some were keen cooks and houseproud, while others relied on ready meals and family support. Women believed that men received more support than they did; this was confirmed. Unexpectedly, men reported more depressive experiences than women. It is argued that the experiences of widowed men may be understood in a masculinity framework, if one incorporates notions of diversity and social change.

Introduction

Widowhood among older men is often overlooked, both empirically and theoretically. This stems in part from the numerical superiority of older widowed women, but also in part from an emphasis on women's studies. Although there are more women, the numbers of widowed older men are not insignificant: in the United Kingdom 24% of men aged between 75 and 84 years are widowed, as are 45% of men aged 85 years and over (Grundy, 1996). In addition, while the effects of widowhood on morbidity, mortality,

Ageing International, Fall 2003, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 408-424.

and depression are marked for both women and men, there is a widely held view that men fare worse (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1983; Stroebe, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001). This raises a number of questions. First, where does the view come from? Second, is it supported empirically? Third, what explanations can account for it? And finally, do theories of masculinity offer additional explanatory power?

The popular view that men fare worse following the loss of their spouse comes from at least two sources. The first is from a long tradition in literature. In Greek myth, Orpheus goes to the underworld to beg Pluto for the return of Eurydice. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), when his wife dies, Mr. Barton turns (at least for a while) to opium for solace. The second source is anecdotes from popular culture. One example is the death of the football legend Sir Stanley Matthews, aged 85, in 2000. He was playing professional football well into his 40s and remained physically fit. However, his death followed barely a year after his wife died, and many suggested that he died of a broken heart.

While men may believe that they fare worse, is this supported empirically? Researchers have argued so for the last 40 years at least (Kraus & Lilienfeld, 1959; Parkes, 1972). Parkes (1972) discusses the issue of mortality and the broken heart, particularly among men. He suggests that the excess of mortality among widowers can be explained by increases in heart-related deaths–literally "broken hearts." Stroebe and Stroebe (1983), in a classic review, argue that the proposition that men fare worse is on balance sustainable, even if the evidence for it is not strong. In a more recent review, these authors found that when methodologically sophisticated studies alone are considered, widowers fare substantially worse then their female counterparts (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001). They point, for instance, to the work of Umberson, Wortman, and Kessler (1992), who found that when widows and widowers were compared with married controls of the same gender, the widowers fared much worse than widows.

What explanations are there for men's inability to survive their wives? One approach would be to examine whether work on the concept of masculinity provides a useful framework. Brannon (1976, p.12) suggested four components to the male role which he dubbed: "No Sissy Stuff," "The Big Wheel," "The Sturdy Oak," and "Give 'em Hell." Brannon defines No Sissy Stuff as "The stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability." The Big Wheel is "Success, status, and the need to be looked up to." The Sturdy Oak is defined as "A manly air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance." Finally, Give 'Em Hell is "The aura of aggression, violence, and daring." Becoming a widower challenges at least three of these components. Experiencing and, more importantly, expressing grief and loss would be regarded in Brannon's formulation as Sissy Stuff. This view is supported by researchers who have suggested that emotional suppression contributes to men's poorer widowhood experiences (Pickard, 1994;

Tudiver et al., 1995). Pickard (1994), in a study of bereavement in older adults, reported a tendency for men to "bottle it up." Moynihan (1998), writing on masculinity and health, suggests that men believe it is important to maintain emotional self-control in public (defined as all situations where they are not alone). Emotionally and culturally, mourning requires withdrawal, at least temporarily, from The Big Wheel. Men in work may have to withdraw from the workplace to care for dying wives, to care for children, or to care for themselves, or, if not working, withdraw from other activities and participation. It has been suggested that the loss of social contacts, and in particular confiding relationships, accounts for increased depression in widowhood (Murphy, 1982). While this is not exactly what Brannon meant by The Big Wheel (success, status, and the need to be looked up to), it is possible to argue that it may approximate to the social aspects of men's lives. The third of Brannon's components that is relevant here is The Sturdy Oak. Widowhood threatens this component in more than one way. First, losing one's wife suggests the ultimate failure at being The Sturdy Oak, as men are expected to protect their families, and wives should not die. Indeed, there is an expectation that wives will outlive their husbands, so this failure may seem doubly unbearable. Second, being The Sturdy Oak suggests calmness and emotional passivity and, as we have seen above, this poses many problems for widowers.

Of course, this view of masculinity is too simplistic and idealized (Kimmel, 1994). More recently, writers have emphasized diversity within sexes (Harrison, Chin, & Ficarrotto, 1995), and that is clearly the case in terms of male widowhood—not all widowed men die soon after their wives (Bowling & Windsor, 1995). Kimmel (1994) suggests a more flexible view of manhood equated with strength, capability, success, reliability, and control. He suggests that men's feelings are of powerlessness, not powerfulness, principally because the way masculinity is constructed implies that few men can succeed. If most men feel powerless, widowed men may feel even more powerless. Widowhood challenges notions of strength, capability, and control. It could be argued that widowed men were not strong enough (their wives died); being capable under the pressure of extreme stress is difficult; and in the aftermath of bereavement, control is often lost to others (family, undertakers, solicitors).

If widowhood takes away some masculine roles, permanently or temporarily, it also gives men some feminine ones. Men have to find ways of tackling domestic work, whether by doing it themselves or negotiating for someone else to do it—both of which are women's work (Bennett & Morgan, 1993). Men often rely on women to organize their healthcare, and the death of their wives means either adopting this feminine role or neglecting it to the detriment of their own health. Courtney (2002) suggests that it is the construction of masculinity which threaten men's health—the wish to suffer in silence and not report feelings. Men may need social support, both formal and informal. However, there is evidence to suggest that women receive more support (Fabero, Gallagher-Thompson, Gilewski, & Thompson, 1992; Thuen, Reime,

& Skrautvoll, 1997). Two complementary explanations in terms of masculinity may account for this. Men may not request help, since it would threaten the ideals of capability and control. Or men may not be offered help, since they are viewed as strong, capable, and in control. Indeed, increased dependency may be seen as a threat to the male role and masculinity, and may lead to earlier institutionalization than with women (Pringle, 1995).

The picture painted so far of widowhood is bleak and represents a constant challenge to masculinity. However, there is some evidence that suggests the picture is more promising. Hayslip and Allen (2001) found that men were resilient and self-sufficient. Similarly, Moore and Stratton (2001) entitled their study of older widowers *Resilient Widowers*, since it characterized their participants. Lund and Caserta (2001) found that widowed men consistently reported their coping abilities to be greater than they (the widowers themselves) would have expected for men in a similar situation. These findings demonstrate that widowhood and the challenges to masculinity that it poses are met with diverse responses and with fortitude.

One way of restoring masculine equilibrium may be to re-partner. There is substantial evidence to show that widowed men often re-partner (OPCS, 1999, see also the special issue on this theme of *Ageing International*, 27(4)). Davidson (2001) argues that men who do not re-partner are more likely to be constrained by extrinsic factors such as old age and poor health. Women are less likely to wish to form a new partnership as a result of intrinsic factors, such as reluctance to give up their newfound freedom to look after someone again. She argues that there is a paradox. Men are socialized to be self-reliant, women to seek interpersonal relationships, and yet the reverse happens in widowhood: men look for interpersonal relationships, and women seek independence. It is possible to argue, however, that for men, re-partnering enables them to resume being The Sturdy Oak and to reject the feminine roles of domesticity and family health-carer.

So far the discussion has concerned whether a masculinity framework can aid an understanding of male widowhood. The specific interest of this paper is in late-life widowhood. Hearn (1995) argues that very little has been written on masculinity in late life, and that when gender is brought in to discussions of older people, the focus is on women. He argues that a focus on older men may problematise conceptions of masculinity. If one takes the same approaches to ageing as in the previous discussion of masculinity and widowhood–Brannon's 1976 view and Kimmel's 1994 view—and adds ageing, the threats to masculinity increase. Briefly, using Brannon's formulation, increased age at widowhood may further challenge No Sissy Stuff, The Big Wheel, and The Sturdy Oak. For example, older widowed men may experience increased personal losses (wives, friends, family)—threats to No Sissy Stuff; they may retire from work and have less wealth—withdrawal from The Big Wheel; and they may experience greater physical frailty and poor health—threats to The Sturdy Oak. Taking Kimmel's view, increased age and widowhood may threaten

strength (increased frailty), capability (increased dependence), success (retirement), and control (loss of financial, physical, and social control). It could be argued that that late-life widowhood represents double jeopardy for masculinity. Taking the body of evidence together, it may not be surprising, therefore, to find that both society at large and the academic community view later-life widowhood as problematic for men.

Little research has examined the views and experiences of men widowed in later life. Specifically, no research to date has examined the views and experiences of these men in the light of views of masculinity. This study aims to examine both what men believe the gender differences (if any) to be and their actual experiences of widowhood. In doing so, this study aims to gain a more detailed understanding of the challenges faced by older widowed men, and to place them in the context of masculinity.

Method

Participants

The participants were 46 widowed men (only 45 of whom were interviewed) and 46 women, all between 55 and 95 years of age, who were socioeconomically representative of the UK population. The data from the men are the principal focus of this report, but data from the women are included where comparisons seem appropriate. The mean age of the men was 75.02 years (range 55-93); the length of time widowed varied from 0.25 to 25 years, mean 7.88.

Recruitment

The aims of the Older Widow(er)s Project were communicated to a diverse range of formal and informal groups of older people in one northern conurbation in the United Kingdom. By using these approaches it was possible to make the study known to a large number of older widowed people. The subjects were self-selected, responding to personal contacts at talks to local organizations, to posters in luncheon clubs and similar venues, and to requests from other participants or interested organizations; as such, we make no claim for generalization. However, several common themes emerged from the data which help to illuminate the questions we wished to explore.

The Interview

The interviews were conducted by one of three female interviewers. Each interview took place at a location of the respondent's choice and lasted between one and two hours. Informed consent was gained and confidentiality assured. The interviews were semi-structured and designed to elicit informa-

tion on lifestyle and affect by asking what the participants did and how they felt at specific times. We acknowledge that the gender and age of the interviewer may influence the content and direction of the interview. The majority of interviews were conducted by women aged over 50, thus reducing the potential for generational bias. With respect to gender, there is no ideal solution. Men interviewing men and women interviewing women might lead to divergent interviewing styles. Women interviewing men might lead to an interviewee giving an interview tailored for a woman interviewer. A man interviewing a woman might also lead to a tailored interview, and run the additional risk of reduced sample size, since some women would feel uncomfortable being interviewed by a man. However, in reading the interviews there is no obvious or consistent gender bias; rather, they reveal genuine differences in the participants' experiences.

Respondents first were asked factual questions concerning age, length of marriage, widowhood, and family relations, followed by four sections inquiring about the widow/er's life at various times. The first of these sections addressed married life before the death of the spouse, asking questions about hobbies, division of labor in the house, and the quality of the marriage. The second section asked about the time around the death of the spouse, again asking what they did and how they felt. Similar questions were asked about life one year after bereavement and at present. Finally, the participants were asked four general questions: whether they thought widowhood was different for men and women; what advice they would give someone in the same situation as themselves; if anything would make life easier for them; and whether they thought the government or local authority could do anything to help widowed people.

Analysis

The interviews were coded using grounded theory and content analysis methods by three members of the team [see Bennett & Vidal-Hall (2000) for a detailed description of the analytical technique]. Reliability was assessed and agreement between coders was found to be 80%. In the data presented here, the analysis was developed from the responses to "Who fares better, men or women?" and from the main body of the men's interviews. While men's and women's views were compared in the initial analysis, attention is paid thereafter only to the men's experiences.

Findings

In the first instance, the views of men and women with regard to the question, "Who fares better, men or women?" were compared. Table 1 shows that both men and women believe that bereavement is harder for men. Moreover, the men expressed themselves emphatically on this point. When interviewees were asked to elaborate their views, both men and women suggested that it

Table 1

"Who Fares Better?": ***Men's and Women's Views (percentages)***

	Men	Women
Men Worse	60	52
Women Worse	16	4
Mixed Views	24	44

was women's superior domestic skills that enabled them to deal more effectively with their bereavement and subsequent widowhood than men. Men and women also agreed that it was men's inability to express their emotions openly that hindered men's ability to cope, or as the widowed people often expressed it, "Men bottle it up." Men also believed that women's perceived ability to talk and socialize better equipped them for widowhood. These views do reflect the notions of masculinity discussed earlier. They are talking about No Sissy Stuff, about being unable to be The Sturdy Oak, and about not being capable. They are also expressing the view that domestic and interpersonal skills more often associated with the feminine role are valuable in this situation; and they do not believe they are skills men possess. These views are summed up by Tom:

> Tom: ... now if you reverse it, when a man loses a woman, he not only loses his soul mate, his friend, his best friend, his lover in earlier days and all that, but he's also lost the person that's been carrying the burden for the best part of their married life.

However, not only is he expressing widowers' current inadequacy; he is also expressing a longer-term view of the inadequacy of masculinity and a realization of the burden that wives, and the feminine role, have carried.

The views of men about widowhood reflect the social constructions regarding both masculinity and widowhood. How far, though, are these views reflections of the experiences of widowed older men?

Men believed that women were able to socialize more and talk more to other people. It was this ability, they argued, that explained why women coped better with bereavement. Although neither Brannon's nor Kimmel's previously noted conceptualizations discuss interpersonal skills specifically, others have suggested that these skills are often associated with "woman's work" and the feminine role (Bennett, 1998; Newson & Newson, 1986). One would expect, in terms of men's views and theory, that men would have less interpersonal engagement than women. Experiences were analyzed in terms of three categories. First, did women confide and talk to others about their loss more than men? Second, were women more sociable than men? Third, were women more socially engaged than men?

Analysis of the data showed that most men confided and talked to others (n = 38). These two men express this most clearly.

> Bill: I find—it was no use just being on your own ignoring other people, and I think I've spoke to more people than ever since she's gone.
>
> Fred: I just wanted to talk about her to everybody.

Other men are perhaps less direct, but it is clear that they did talk to other people. In some cases they were not talking about their most intimate thoughts, but nevertheless they were communicating with other people about their dead spouses.

Men were also found to report feeling or being sociable almost as often as women (men = 20, women = 26). Finally, although men argued that women were more socially engaged than men, social participation and interaction were found to be almost universal (n = 39). In particular, we were surprised to find that a substantial minority of men attended a well-known concert hall:

> Ken: I get myself down to the Philharmonic now and again ... no, it's a new thing, really.

Clearly, in the case of both socializing generally and interpersonal communication more specifically, men's views do not reflect their experiences. Nor do their experiences confirm the theoretical prediction. Nor is there any indication that these behaviors are newly learned or difficult to execute. This discrepancy between belief and experience emerges elsewhere and is discussed in more detail later.

One social area that men talked about more often than women was remarriage and re-partnering. Twenty-two of them discussed these issues and the majority were interested in having, or already had, another relationship. On the whole, men's expectations of these new relationships were pragmatic rather than idealistic. Dave illustrates this poetically:

> I mean, I don't know if I'll get married again. I mean, at my age, you get married, you're not getting married for the moon and the stars. So to speak. But I probably will do.

It is also clear that men are meeting women quite soon after their wives died—not necessarily with a relationship in mind. For example,

> Bert: Hoping to get married again. Third time lucky ...Yes. As I say, um, I've known (...) for 10 years—about two months after my wife died I met her.

Len expresses somewhat conflicting views. He believes that his first wife was very special but nonetheless is interested in other relationships:

> Len: I mean, I wouldn't marry again now because I think there's an old saying that when she was made they broke the mould.

Interviewer: That's how you feel?

Len: Well, yes. I mean—I've just, er, I've just finished a long-term, six years relationship–although I've been with another couple of women anyway. In the last six years I've had....

This experience confirms the findings of Davidson (2001) that re-partnering is an important male consideration. One can hypothesize that re-partnering restores equilibrium to widowers' sense of masculinity. It enables men once more to become The Sturdy Oak, to put away that Sissy Stuff, and to be seen to be capable, reliable, successful (in the "mating game"), and in control.

One man expressed a contrary view which would surprise most of the women we interviewed (who were uninterested in remarriage):

Roy: See, women—nearly all women get on to a second marriage—any woman I've known that's widowed has nearly all got married. And men—it applies to meself—never get married.

Interviewer: That's interesting, because very often people think it's the other way round.

Roy: No. No. A woman's the one that does the flirting. You know what I'm talking about.

Interviewer: But maybe—do you think they do get married again as well?

Roy: Oh yes, I think a woman—quite a few widows have married twice.

This view reflects masculine ideals as opposition to feminine roles. It expresses the idea that women are helpless without men but also implies, paradoxically, that women are predatory. Van den Hoonaard (2002) also reports that some widowers feel that women put pressure on them to enter into a more committed relationship.

What these interviews show is that while men are socially active and do talk to other people, they feel that they are less competent at doing so than women. It is also interesting that almost half of the men talk about the issues of remarriage, and most of them would consider or already have a significant friendship. This evidence supports the research of Moore and Stratton (2003), who found that most of the widowers in their sample had a significant female relationship. Taking these two issues together suggests that men believe women to be a necessary part of their social world. This provides support for the idea that women organize and mediate men's social lives (Bennett, 1998). It is proposed that men seek new relationships to maintain their social worlds and to relieve the anxiety they feel because of their perceived lack of social skills, thus restoring equilibrium to their sense of

masculinity. It is difficult to determine this from the current interviews, but it is worthy of further exploration.

One issue where men and women do agree is that women have superior domestic skills. Both argue that it is men's inability to look after themselves, whether in terms of cooking or housework, that contributes to men faring less well in widowhood than women. This is perhaps the clearest expression of traditional divisions of labor and views of the feminine role. However, the experiences of men are much more complex.

Looking first at cooking, the men have three types of experience: enjoying cooking, using ready meals, and not cooking at all. Both Barney and Bill clearly enjoy cooking. Indeed, Barney is so busy he struggles to find the time.

> Barney: I like to cook actually ... it's getting the time.

> Bill: Cooking—well I do most of the cooking.

While these men are undertaking traditional feminine roles, it is also possible to argue that they are incorporating aspects of the male role identified by Kimmel (1994), such as capability and control.

However, other men retain more traditional attitudes. For a number of men, convenience food such as tins and microwave meals are an essential means of survival. Indeed, one wonders how widowed men managed before the microwave. These men exemplify this approach to cooking.

> George: I eat an awful lot out of tins.

> Mark: I get a lot of it to freeze and microwave it.

Finally there are those men who do not cook or who rely almost entirely on their families. Indeed Tom is almost proud of the fact:

> Tom: I have never in 63 years, you know, arranged, like, in any sequence of meals or anything like that.

Do the interviews reveal any explanations as to why some men cook and others do not? One of the most important factors appears to be whether men have undertaken some caring role. Those who can and do cook are those who either had to care for a sick spouse, or those who were widowed when their children were still at home. In these cases men had little choice but to cook, because other people were depending on them. What starts out as necessity appears to have become a pleasure. Theoretically, one can argue that the adoption of the caring role in these circumstances is an extension or a necessary revision of The Sturdy Oak. These men are providing for their families, being reliable, capable, and staying in control.

In a similar vein, men who have had to care for a sick spouse or dependent children also seem more able to tackle housework.

> Charley: Well, in the last couple of years, yes, she—you could say—I started really the cooking, the washing, cleaning the house, and everything, you know.

Here is a good example of a "new man" before his time:

> Alan: And that was in the days when blokes didn't like to be seen doing things. You know, I used to do ironing, but sometimes I didn't like people to see me doing it in them days.

Alan illustrates effectively the changes in views of masculinity that have occurred over the last 30 years or so. He has now successfully incorporated his domestic abilities into his notions of masculinity.

There were also a number of men who were houseproud. Both Bob and Dave set themselves very high standards.

> Bob: Tuesday it'd be the bedrooms. The toilet out in the back. And if I felt like it, the brasses. Wednesday ... first in here—living room, front room.... Thursday would be shopping, ... put the shopping away, get the Hoover out.... And Friday I'd wash.

> Dave: I never leave the kitchen with the sink or a cup in the sink anything of that nature. It's done properly, domestically.

These men emphasize masculine traits within what might otherwise be seen as a feminine role—capability, reliability, control, success. This next man acknowledges what a difficult job housework is and others recognize the need for a domestic routine. He admires the feminine role:

> Stanley: Knowing what she used to do—knowing now that it was a very hard job—oh, knowing that I've got to do it myself now.

At the other end of the spectrum are those men who mainly rely on others to keep their houses clean or men who simply do not bother. For some of these men, it is lack of ability rather than any threat to their masculinity which hinders them. For example, these two men do try with some help:

> Alan: I take it in my stride. Even now with—I get a lot of help from my daughters, you know. I do most things, though.

> Eric: I had to do them myself—try and do them myself. Me daughter used to help me.

In contrast, Roy has no interest in the house or in domestic activities, because he felt that his work was outside the home, even after his wife died. He

is quite clear that housework does not fit into his ideas of masculinity. He epitomizes the idea of The Big Wheel—he works; he does not do housework.

> Roy: No. Housework and that, you know—I weren't idle like, you know ... Yeah. Well, I—my son kept me at work but I never bothered about the house. Didn't worry me.
>
> Interviewer: Do you mean you left it?
>
> Roy: Yes. Left it.

What is clear from all of these interviews is that it is not accurate to say that men are less well equipped to deal with their widowhood because of their limited domestic skills. While some men clearly are less skilled or less willing to learn, many men are capable and indeed take a pride in their domestic skills, whether it be cooking or cleaning. One of our respondents proposed that a useful support for widowed men would be the provision of life skills classes. The evidence suggests that for some men, but not all, such classes would be of some value. It is also the case that, as times change and traditional notions of masculinity evolve, more men will be better equipped to deal with domestic labor.

Life skills classes would be an example of formal support, an issue that was mentioned by women but not by men. Contrary to the literature but supporting the views of the women, men did receive more support, both formal and informal. Men received a variety of supports, formal, familial and informal supports (n=39). Formal support included the provision of palliative care nurses for their wives, and home helpers. In addition, many of the men attended luncheon clubs. Familial support was provided by daughters and also by sons and grandchildren. Other informal support came from friends and neighbors. These three men demonstrate the range of formal supports on offer following bereavement.

> Walter: I just let her [home help] get on with it, you know.
>
> Jack: I'm on Meals on Wheels, which is nice.
>
> Will: I did in the other place, I got stuck in the bath I couldn't get out and, er, I pulled the cord and the house manager was Caribbean and after he eventually ... he came and he used management of three and they lifted me out of the bath.

Here are two examples of familial support. In the first example, the daughter's support is offered in an indirect fashion (although she also offers it more directly):

> Interviewer: Do you think in the beginning when he [grandson] first started visiting you, he was keeping an eye on you?

George: Oh yes. Very much so.

Interviewer: Were you close?

George: For his mother.

In this second example, it is clear that the family support was most welcome:

John: Oh the family were marvelous. They still are.

There are at least three possible explanations which account for this provision of support to widowers. First, it could be the case that men simply report support more often than women, but that there are no gender differences in its provision. There is evidence, for example, that both women and men use luncheon clubs. However, there is less evidence that women are provided with palliative care nurses or home helpers. Although there may be a degree of under-reporting by women, this cannot be the whole explanation. Second, society believes that men require more support, and therefore offers more support to men. This may not reflect the actual needs of men and women, but rather reflect widely held stereotypes of widowhood and its social construction. Certainly the widowed women support this view—they believe that their own needs of both formal and informal support often are not met. Third, the provision of support for men is a true reflection of their specific needs over and above those of women. It is most likely, of course, that the real explanation is a combination of these three: women under-report and are provided with less support; but men have additional needs. Men may receive more support because widowhood is recognized as a threat to masculinity. In particular there may be threats to The Sturdy Oak, to men's capabilities and control. Men also may maintain their sense of masculinity by refusing (implicitly or explicitly) to undertake women's work. If that is the case, then at the same time they are also compromising the aspects of masculinity that are bound up with capability and control.

The final explanations given by both sexes to account for their views that men fare worse concern notions of emotional expression. Both groups believe that men's perceived tendency to "bottle up emotions" is a central feature of men's bereavement, a direct reflection of Brannon's ideas of No Sissy Stuff and The Sturdy Oak. The evidence, however, is more complex. In these interviews, men talk more often about feelings associated with depression than do women. In these first two examples, the men are admitting to depression.

John: ... being in a depression which I was conscious of and I knew it was going to lead nowhere.

Sidney: I said I'm suffering from depression. And the old chap says, 'There's only one way of getting rid of it ... Do some hard work!' ... He said, 'In about a month's time you'll feel it going out of your hair and your fingernails.' Which it did.

Not only do men talk about feeling depressed, but they also talk about suicide. This evidence supports that of Bennett (submitted), who found that men actively discuss whether their lives are worth living following bereavement. The first of the following quotations illustrates the consideration of suicide, while the following three illustrate the despair at being widowed.

> James: Oh extremely low. Some times I felt like ending it all, to be honest with you. I mean I don't think I would have done–I would never do that. Never do that. But I felt that.
>
> Brian: Life comes to an end.
>
> Edward:—the futility of life—
>
> Geoff: ... without it sounding melodramatic, but I just don't feel there's any point in my life now.

Another example illustrates the notion of being careless about one's life, again an issue highlighted by Bennett (submitted).

> Walter: I didn't really care whether I lived or died, you know.

Do these interviews contradict the view that men do not express their emotions, or is there something more complex at work? The evidence suggests that although men are expressing their emotions and their depression in the course of the interview, those views are expressed only (or mostly) within the safety of a confidential setting. It confirms Moynihan's view that men are not permitted to discuss their emotions in public (1998). James describes the attitude of the men he knows towards the sharing of emotions:

> James: I mean we got a new guy on the table some months back—he's not been back since–but he started spouting about how his sisters had let him down and a couple of guys said to him, 'We know how you feel but we're all here.' In other words, you know, 'I've got my load to carry—I can't carry yours as well.'

It was clear that several of the men welcomed the opportunity to talk about their late wives and their grief in detail, often for the first time. However, other men had been encouraged to take part by others because they were depressed. There is an interesting contrast here between these findings and the evidence presented earlier concerning "talking to others." What can account for this apparent discrepancy? The most likely explanation is that while men may talk to other people about their late wives and their situation, they may not be discussing their deepest emotions. Indeed, there may be social pressures not to, as illustrated by Jack:

> Jack: As our son put it, some time ago, 'Dad,' he said, 'can I advise you,' he said, 'don't go on too much,' he said, 'I know how you're feeling, I know....'

Interviewer: Don't what?

Jack: Don't go on talking, like meeting people in the bus-stop, wanting to. Now they want to talk.

Interviewer: Family?

Jack: Yes. And the neighbors and that. People at the bus-stop that I bump into, like. They ask or pass some comment but I don't go into any detail.

This is a clear illustration of the idea of No Sissy Stuff. The interviews may have been one of the first opportunities for these men to talk in detail about their experiences without fear of censure or embarrassment.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that men believe they fare worse than women and they have common explanations for this difference. These views are shared by previous research (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001), and can be understood in the context of notions of masculinity (Brannon, 1976; Kimmel, 1994). However, these views are only partially matched by their experiences, and in some cases these experiences contradict previous empirical evidence. There is evidence that widowhood in later life presents a threat of double jeopardy to men's sense of masculinity. It can threaten Brannon's conceptualizations of No Sissy Stuff, The Big Wheel and The Sturdy Oak, and Kimmel's views of masculinity as capable, successful, in control, and strong. For some men and in some life domains, this is the case. However, the broader picture is of men incorporating their new responsibilities and new challenges into their sense of masculinity. They represent the diversities of masculinity (Harrison, Chin, & Ricarrotto, 1995), and they benefit from the changes occurring in the traditional masculine role.

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Author Note

Thanks are due to the people who participated in this study, and to those organizations that assisted us. Thanks also are due to Janette Davies, Alexis Halliwell, and Kate Davidson. This research study

was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (Award No. L480254034) and is part of the Growing Older Programme of 24 projects studying the quality of life of older people. However, the findings reported here are entirely the responsibility of the researchers.

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