Listening to Men: Are Men the Unheard Gender?

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Abstract

An ontological view of conceptualizing the world that women are more important than men may create a male gender bias which gets trapped in and blurs the epistemological lens of how one sees the world. Subtle social representations of women and men are present in society such as in literature, and government legislation. An essential factor to consider in the helping profession is gender. Understanding women's lives and women's unique needs from their perspective is just as critical to understanding men's lives and men's individual needs from their perspective to minimize the potential of any biases.

Women have voiced their concerns to helping professionals for their inequities and people listened to the women (Turner, 2011). Men have voiced their concerns to helping professionals for their iniquities, but few have listened to men's concerns leading to the perception of the "unheard gender" (Baum, 2015). The difference for women is that the helping institutions have implemented mandates to encourage women and predominately entailed women listening to women (Turner, 2011). The problem a male client may encounter during the helping process may be based on his gender (Baum, 2015; Smithers, 2012).

Social Portrayals of Women and Men

Subtle social representations of women and men can be found in present-day society such as in literature, and government legislation. These messages play an active role to inform, instruct, and perform a significant function towards ushering in social change (Gupta, & Jain, 1998). By indirectly projecting social norms of the expected behavior for women and men, and popularizing the image of women as apriority over men, it has effectively contributed to social dominate values over men (Gupta, & Jain, 1998). Perhaps, these messages are emanating from the injustices women suffered in the past. However, it may be possible that injusticesexperienced by men are occurring and not being reported. The helping profession is not immune to societal messages encapsulated to convey that women are a priority above men.

Societal Messages

An ontological view of conceptualizing the world that women are more superior than men may contribute to a response that is "one-dimensional, epitomizing a rather binary classification of men as "bad" and women as "good" (Lonne, Parton, Thomson, & Harries, 2008, p. 86). Men are perceived to bedangerous and risky (Ferguson & Hogan 2004; Scott, & Crooks, 2004) because of their larger size, strength, and fictitious inherent tendency to victimize women and the vulnerable (Hollander, 2001). Such stereotypes have had a considerable influence on North American agencies and institutions in socially constructing men as the "enemy" and women the "victim" to be protected (Hooks, 2000, p.69). It makes the possibility of a male gender bias seem "natural" and mostly "invisible in daily life" (Hollander, 2001, p. 85). For example, insurance companies charge higher premium rates for males than they do for the same coverage for females. On the other hand, women are perceived to be vulnerable, in need of protection and not dangerous to others because of their smaller average size, the apparent lack of strength, and vulnerability to being victimized by men (Hollander, 2001).

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For example, in the Canadian budget of 2017, 100.9 million dollars over five years is invested to support Canadian Minister Monsef's Gender-Based Violence Strategy (Government of Canada, 2017b) focused on women. Although statistically there is a higher number of female victims of domestic violence cases constructing such victims as inherently women make it almost impossible for male victims even to seek the services they need and deserve.

A male gender bias gets trapped in and blurs the epistemological lens of how one sees the world. Traditionally, men had specific roles to support the family. In today's society, with more women in the workforce men need to adapt to theirever-changing roles. This sentiment echoes in the Canadian federal government.

Canadian Federal Government

The term "employment equity" was introduced in 1984 by Judge Rosalie Abella in her report to the commission on equality in employment (Cardillo, 1993). It provided the foundation for the legislative framework of the 1986 Employment Equity Act (the Act)(Cardillo, 1993). The Act helps ensure that all Canadians have the same access to Canada's labor market and requires that employers take actions to provide the full representation of members of the four designated groups within their organizations, one of the groups being women (Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC), 2013). In 1995, at the United Nations conference for women, Canada publicly committed that before any policy decisions are made an analysis of their impact on women is accounted for (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2009).

It has had a considerable positive impact on women in the Canadian workforce. For example, in 2015, the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was the first to hire an equal number of women and men in the cabinet (Murphy, 2015). Perhaps to prove that he has fulfilled his duty of fair representation of women. John Horgan, the new premier of British Columbia sworn in on Tuesday, July 18, 2017, has followed Trudeau's lead to achieve gender parity (The Canadian Press, 2017). Hiring to fulfill the Equity Act requirements encourage employers to no longer hire on an individual's merit but instead based on a distinguishable characteristic, gender. An asymmetry of male gender bias seen in other institutions may create an inadvertent message that men are less valuable than women which may result in serious societal implications.

Firefighters, police, paramedics and other physically demanding jobs have different qualifying tests to hire women based on their gender to meet the notion of equality between the sexes. Despite the fact women are biologically differentthan men, regarding size and strength, and may not be able to meet the demands of the position physically. A femalefirefighter is climbing a ladder to rescue an individual weighing considerably more than she can prove disastrous. Extraction from a burning building might just be a matter of life or death, based on her physical ability to be successful. Filling employment positions need to be aligned with a person's qualifications, expertise, knowledge, and skills rather than the gender of the individual.

Feminist Theory

The theoretical framework chosen to advocate gender equality for men is feminist theory. It may initially seem odd, but it is situated for "people who are dealing with issues that are shaped by oppressive relations and who might benefit from a structural analysis of their problems" (Coady, & Lehmann, 2016, p. 369). To begin to achieve social justice for men, the recognition that gender inequality affects everyone, including men, is a starting point to solve their problems and minimize any potential biases. Using a feminist perspective to change the negative gendered belief systems for men may bring about awareness of the biases men encounter and enhance their quality of life (Zalmanowitz, Babins-Wagner, Rodger, Corbett, & Leschied, 2013).

Feministtheory is a gender-conscious practice which acknowledges the clients' gender and how it affects their situation (Hick, 2006). Feminist theory grew as a social justice movement for women to eliminate inequities that kept women in secondary status (Turner, 2011). Today, women may still face a lot of problems based on their gender. However, men too are confronted withalot of challenges based on their gender. The growing gender inequality for men is evident in the flourishing predomination of femaleissues and attention to women in literature.

Gender is an essential factor to consider in a helping profession (Baum, 2017). Understanding men's lives from their perspective is just as critical to understanding women's lives from their vantage point.The Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (the "Charter"), Part One, in section 15. Section 15(1) Equality Rights states:

" Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability" (Government of Canada, 2017a).

However, everyone has their own personal, cultural and religious values and beliefs that when left unexamined these individual values, beliefs and biases can negatively affect the ability to work effectively with diverse groups of clients (Elze & Snell, 2009). The bias of any kind tends to marginalize people, disconnect their sense of belonging and diminish their sense of trust (Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC), 2017).

Literature in the Helping Professions

Literature in the helping professions is one of the most effective ways to disseminate knowledge to students and practitioners. Sharing ideas and bringing meaning to the world around us can be found in many literary forms such as books, journals, and articles. It is how we can make changes in our society, hopefully for the better. However, in this case, a male gender bias in literature results in students and practitioners being unaware of problems men encounter and their unique needs. These may include illnesses, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, divorce issues, aging, even the "uncertainty of what to expect from service involvement" can be very problematic for men (Cameron, Coady, & Adams, 2007, p.215). Helping professionals unprepared to work with men, may not be aware of effective interventions to use with men to solve their unique problems. The menreferred to here are mostly men who are not criminals, but everyday men. Students and practitioners who see the lack of attention given to men in literature may lead them to believe that men are not important. Likewise, students and practitioners who see most of the attention granted to women in literature may lead them to think that women are most important.

Attention to Women

The vast amount of attention to women's issues may be due in part that the majority of helping professionals are women (Smithers, 2012). Authors and researchers have constructed a body of knowledge with a feminist orientation (Anderson-Nathe, Gringeri, & Wahab, 2013; Day & Langan, 2002; Dominelli, 2002; Munson & Saulnier, 2014; Phillips, & Cree, 2014; Turner, & Maschi, 2015). Additionally, the journal Affilia, is committed to encouraging feminism. These may all contribute to a women orientation in the helping professions. The lack of attention to men creates misconceptions that men's needs are less significant and less important to helping professionals. If there is a discussion of men, it usually has a negative tone as mentend to report higher levels of biases towards them based on their gender than women (Carter, 2007).

Men have Unique Needs

Men have particular health and social concerns that require specific attention. For example, socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the most influential known determinants of variations in health, but there are elevated health risks for men at all levels of SES (Adler, Boyce, Chesney, Folkman, & Syme, 1993).

Health Needs. There are many health concerns specific to men (Liu, Wu, Mao, Mery, & Rouleau, 1999). Such as testicular cancer (Garner, Turner, Ghadirian, & Krewski, 2005), prostate cancer (Thompson et al., 2004) and erectile dysfunction (Guay, Seftel, & Traish, 2010).Men are more likely to smoke cigarettes and twice as likely to consume more alcohol in a single day as women (Eberhardt, Ingram, & Makuc, 2001). Today men live seven years less than women (Farrell, 2012) and have rates at least twice as high for accidents, suicide, cirrhosis of the liver, and homicide(Williams, 2003). Men tend to work in more potentially dangerous manual labor jobs than women and represent 90% of job fatalities (Courtenay, 2000). Additionally, men are more likely to suppress the expression of need and minimize pain to avoid engagement in preventive health care visit than women (Courtenay, 2000). Men are also less likely to seek professional help on existinghealth-related concerns than women (Lipsyte, 1999).

Social Needs. Men are overrepresented in a broad range of stigmatizing social conditions, such as incarceration, unemployment, and institutionalization for substance use and severe mental illness (Farrell, 2012; Williams, 2003). Men are more likely than women to be homeless and be homeless for more extended periods of time (Phelan, & Link, 1999). There also appears to be a lack of attention to the emotional needs of men.

The sexual assault of adult males receives little attention in research literature or by the public, and few people are willing to help male victims of rape (Davies, & Rogers, 2006). Men's health and social needs are just as crucial as women's health and social needs. Gender equality is an essential factor to consider in the helping profession. Literature and the helping professions need to include men's studies to enable future helping professionals to know how to work with meneffectively. The lack of attention to men and men needs can lead to the development of negative attitudes and beliefs toward men as well as the unfair treatment of men. A helping professional who is unprepared to work with men, may not be aware of effective interventions to use with men to solve their unique problems.

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