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### **A Proposal to Evaluate Man Therapy: A Culturally-Sensitive Intervention to Better Engage Men with Psychological Services**

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# A Proposal to Evaluate Man Therapy: A Culturally-Sensitive Intervention to Better Engage Men with Psychological Services



David Gretz and Jeffrey Rings

## Introduction

- Over 35,000 men died by suicide in the United States in 2017, and roughly 15% of men in the country are currently struggling with a mental health disorder (CDC, 2018; NIMH, 2019).
- Men are less likely than women to engage in treatment for mental health concerns (Addis and Mahalik, 2003).
- The Man Therapy initiative was launched in Colorado to help reduce the number of men who die by suicide. In recent years, it has expanded to address men's mental health in general rather than only focusing on suicide prevention.
- Despite the time and money invested in the Man Therapy initiative, there are currently no peer-reviewed studies evaluating whether or not it is effective.
- According to Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behavior, attitudes are a key predictor of future behavior. If Man Therapy can improve attitudes among men toward utilizing mental health services, then it should increase engagement with those services.

## Man Therapy

- Launched in 2012, the Man Therapy initiative is a media campaign that aims to reach men at risk of negative outcomes related to mental health concerns.
- The current goals of Man Therapy are:
  - Lower the number of men who die by suicide
  - Reduce stigma against mental health concerns in men
  - Help men find resources when mental health concerns arise
- The main focus of Man Therapy is their website, and they have also advertised through billboards, posters, drink coasters, and more.
- The Man Therapy website contains self-help tools, referrals links, testimonies from men who have overcome mental health difficulties, information about mental health, and more.
- Man Therapy makes heavy use of humor in presenting its message, and can at times be crude or irreverent.
- Man Therapy approaches mental health subjects using traditionally masculine language and metaphors rather than clinical jargon, such as calling a mental health evaluation tool a "head inspection."
- Many messages are presented through Dr. Rich Mahogany, a fictitious therapist who is a caricature of masculine values.

## Measure

- The Mental Help Seeking Attitudes Scale (MHSAS) is a 9-item scale that measures an individual's attitudes towards seeking mental health treatment from a qualified professional (Hammer, Parent, & Spiker, 2018).
- The scale is unidimensional, which is an improvement over prior scales attempting to measure these attitudes.
- The scale was developed based upon Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behavior.

## Procedure

- All procedures are contingent upon obtaining IRB approval.
- Participants will be adult men in the United States, or adult men who are citizens of the United States and living elsewhere.
- Participants will be recruited via email. For sufficient statistical power, 159 participants will be needed.
- Participants will first be given an informed consent. If they agree, they will then complete a few questions to ensure they meet the requirements for inclusion in the study. Afterwards, they will complete a demographic questionnaire.
- Participants will be randomly assigned to one of three groups: the control group, a treatment as usual group, and an experimental group.
  - Participants in the control group will receive no intervention.
  - Participants in the treatment as usual group will be directed to a generic website on mental health.
  - Participants in the experimental group will be directed to the Man Therapy website.
- After the intervention, all participants will be given the MHSAS.
- After this, participants will be thanked for their time and given the opportunity to explore the Man Therapy website if they were not part of the experimental group.

## Statistical Analysis

- MHSAS scores will be analyzed through the use of an ANOVA, following the appropriate tests to ensure the data fit all hypotheses required for an ANOVA.
- An ANOVA checks for whether or not there is a difference in group means between three or more groups. It does not say where the difference is, just that one exists.
- If a difference is detected, further appropriate statistical tests will be run to determine which group means are significantly different.

## Hypotheses

- Given previous research (Hammer & Vogel, 2010), it is hypothesized that there will be a significant difference in MHSAS scores between the control group and the experimental group.
- Given previous research (Hammer & Vogel, 2010), It is also hypothesized that there will be a significant difference between the treatment as usual group and the control group.
- The sample size of 159 is based on a medium effect size, which is consistent with previous research. If differences exist but are smaller than a medium effect size, they may not be detected.

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