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**August 15, 2010**

**Today's Superheroes Send Wrong Image to Boys, Say Researchers**

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*'Macho' masculine stereotype not healthy for relationships*

SAN DIEGO — Watching superheroes beat up villains may not be the best image for boys to see if society wants to promote kinder, less stereotypical male behaviors, according to psychologists who spoke Sunday at the 118th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association.

"There is a big difference in the movie superhero of today and the comic book superhero of yesterday," said psychologist Sharon Lamb, PhD, distinguished professor of mental health at University of Massachusetts-Boston. "Today's superhero is too much like an action hero who participates in non-stop violence; he's aggressive, sarcastic and rarely speaks to the virtue of doing good for humanity. When not in superhero costume, these men, like Ironman, exploit women, flaunt bling and convey their manhood with high-powered guns. "

The comic book heroes of the past did fight criminals, she said, "but these were heroes boys could look up to and learn from because outside of their costumes, they were real people with real problems and many vulnerabilities," she said.

To understand how the media and marketers package masculinity to boys, Lamb surveyed 674 boys age 4 to 18, walked through malls and talked to sales clerks and came to understand what boys were reading and watching on television and at the movies. She and her co-authors found that marketers take advantage of boys' need to forge their identity in adolescence and sell them a narrow version of masculinity. They can either be a "player" or a "slacker" - the guy who never even tries – to save face.

"In today's media, superheroes and slackers are the only two options boys have," said Lamb. "Boys are told, if you can't be a superhero, you can always be a slacker. Slackers are funny, but slackers are not what boys should strive to be; slackers don't like school and they shirk responsibility. We wonder if the messages boys get about saving face through glorified slacking could be affecting their performance in school."

Teaching boys early on to distance themselves from these images and encouraging them to find the lies in the messages can help, said Lamb. "When you crowd out other types of media messages, you promote stereotypes and limit their options."

Boys seem better adjusted when they resist internalizing "macho" images, according to a researcher who also presented at APA's convention.

Researcher Carlos Santos, PhD, of Arizona State University, examined 426 middle school boys' ability to resist being emotionally stoic, autonomous and physically tough — stereotyped images of masculinity — in their relationships. He also looked at how this would affect their psychological adjustment.

Santos looked at whether boys could resist being tough, emotionally unavailable, and detached from their friends as they moved from sixth to eighth grade; whether ethnicity made a difference; whether their relationships with their families and peer group fostered this resistance; and whether resisting these images affected their psychological health.

Participants were from different racial/ethnic backgrounds: 20 percent were African-American, 9 percent were Puerto Rican, 17 percent were Dominican-American, 21 percent were Chinese-American, 27 percent were European-American and 6 percent were of another race or ethnicity.

Boys from diverse ethnic and racial groups were equally able to resist these masculine stereotypes, going against the common belief that certain ethnic minority boys are more emotionally stunted and hypermasculine, said Santos. Few differences were detected and most tended to dissipate over the course of middle school.

He found that boys were more likely to act tough and detached from their friends as they got older. But boys who remained close to their mothers, siblings and peers did not act as tough and were more emotionally available to their friends compared to those who were not as close. However, closeness to fathers encouraged boys to be more autonomous and detached from friendships.

"If the goal is to encourage boys to experience healthy family relationships as well as healthy friendships, clinicians and interventionists working with families may benefit from having fathers share with their sons on the importance of experiencing multiple and fulfilling relationships in their lives," Santos said. He also found that boys who were depressed had a harder time not acting macho in their friendships.

Interestingly, levels of emotional stoicism tended to remain stable throughout the middle school years and boys who did not adopt these macho behaviors had better psychological health in middle school, he found.

The results show that being able to resist internalizing these macho images —especially aggression and autonomy — declines as boys transition into adolescence and this decline puts their mental health at risk, said Santos. "Helping boys resist these behaviors early on seems to be a critical step toward improving their health and the quality of their social relationships."

**Symposium:** Boyhood — Making and resisting masculinity

10–10:50 a.m., Sunday, August 15

**Session 4092:** San Diego Convention Center, Upper level, Room 26B

"Superheroes and Slackers: Limited Media Representations of Masculinity for Boys," Sharon Lamb, EdD, University of Massachusetts-Boston; Lyn Mikel Brown, EdD, and Mark Tappan, EdD, Colby College

"Resistance to Ideals of Masculinity in Middle School Boys," Carlos Santos, PhD, Arizona State University

For more information or an interview, contact [Sharon Lamb, EdD](#) at (802) 578-3437. or [Carlos Santos, PhD](#) at (480) 727-9686 or (480) 203-0991 (cell).

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 152,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.

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## August 14, 2010

### Childhood Adversity Worsens Effects of Stress, Adding to Current Hardships, Says New Research

*Can lead to serious disease in adulthood*

SAN DIEGO — Children who experience trauma may enter a cycle of negative emotions-anxiety and depression-that could contribute to health problems later and precipitate an early death, a leading health psychologist said Saturday.

"A child who experienced a death of a parent, witnessed severe marital problems between parents or was abused may be more vulnerable to stressful events later in life," said Janice Kiecolt-Glaser, PhD, of Ohio State University College of Medicine. "Our latest research shows that childhood adversity casts a long shadow on one's health and can lead to inflammation and cell aging much earlier than for those who haven't experienced these events. Those reporting multiple adversities could shorten their lifespan by seven to 15 years."

Further, adults who experienced some adversity in childhood appeared to continue to be at greater risk for health consequences even in later life, said Kiecolt-Glaser, who studied men and women whose average age was 70.

She spoke Saturday on the topic "How Stress Kills: Assessing the Damage and Various Remedies" at the American Psychological Association's 118th Annual Convention.

Using a community sample of 58 caregivers for a spouse or parent with Alzheimer's disease or another progressive dementia and 74 demographically similar controls who had no caregiving responsibilities, Kiecolt-Glaser, research partner Ronald Glaser, and co-authors analyzed participants' depression levels and occurrence of childhood trauma

to determine how negative emotions and stressful experiences affect known biochemical markers of stress. The authors also wanted to know if childhood maltreatment could even enhance the adverse effects of caregiving, a chronic stressor that can affect mental and physical health.

The researchers measured several blood inflammatory markers: cytokines interleukin (IL-6), tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-a) and telomere length. Telomeres are the ends of strands of DNA. Shorter telomeres have been linked with aging, age-related diseases and death. IL-6 and TNF-a have also been linked to a number of cardiovascular, autoimmune and infectious diseases.

Participants completed a questionnaire on depression and answered questions about past child abuse or neglect; losing a mother or father during childhood; witnessing severe marital problems; growing up with a family member who suffered from mental illness or alcohol abuse; or lacking a close relationship with at least one adult in childhood.

Participants with immune-related health problems, such as cancer or recent surgeries or diabetes, were excluded as well as those taking anti-inflammatory medications.

In the sample, 42 (32 percent) of the participants reported some form of physical, emotional or sexual abuse during childhood while 90 (68 percent) of the participants reported no child abuse. Fifty-eight (44 percent) of the participants reported no childhood adversities, 43 (33 percent) reported one childhood adversity and 31 (24 percent) reported experiencing multiple adversities.

"We found that childhood adversity was associated with shorter telomeres and increased levels of inflammation even after controlling for age, caregiving status, gender, body mass index, exercise and sleep," said Kiecolt-Glaser.

"Inflammation over time can lead to cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, arthritis, Type 2 diabetes and certain cancers."

Childhood abuse and caring for an ill spouse or parent was also associated with higher levels of depression, she said.

"These early childhood experiences have lasting, measureable consequences later in life, producing effects that are large enough to be perceptible even in the face of a current major stressor — caring for a family member with dementia. The findings show the importance of intervening early to prevent these stress effects."

This study and others suggest that psychological factors may influence the incidence and progression of a variety of age-related diseases through how they affect the immune system. Psychological treatment, exercise, yoga and meditation can lessen negative emotions, which may diminish inflammation from occurring in the first place, said Kiecolt-Glaser.

How stress kills: Assessing the damage and various remedies,

Janice K. Kiecolt-Glaser, PhD, Jean-Philippe Gouin, MA, Nan-Ping Weng, MD, PhD, William B. Malarkey, MD, David Q. Beversdorf, MD, Ronald Glaser, PhD; Institute for Behavioral Medicine

**Invited Address:** Research, Ohio State University College of Medicine

**Session 3345:** 3–3:50 p.m., Saturday, August.14, San Diego Convention Center, Upper level, Ballroom 6C

For more information or an interview, contact [Janice K. Kiecolt-Glaser, PhD](#) at (614) 293-3499 or (614) 937-8374 (cell).

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<http://www.examiner.com/cycling-in-arlington/hiking-and-near-arlington-va-when-weather-is-bad-for-cycling>

## Hiking in and near Arlington, Va. when weather is bad for cycling

It is 20 degrees out and the ground still has ice and snow from a midweek snowfall. You want to do some activity outside but do not want to ride. This is a good time to go hiking. You do not even have to drive far to find woods and nice paths.

[Potomac Overlook Regional Park](#) is in north Arlington and has several loops to walk. There are several streams to cross so be prepared to rock hop.

Here is the [trail map](#). You can hike close to four miles and be blocks from Military Road, a local throughway in Arlington. Here is a 3.6-mile loop to try from [Garmin connect](#).

A great resource for hikes close to Arlington is a website on [local hikes](#) in the area. Some hikes are more than an hour away but several are inside the beltway.

Blockhouse Point Conservation Park Trails are a 15-minute drive from north Arlington. It is off River Road in Bethesda, Md. The trails run to the Potomac and can connect together via the canal.

Scotts Run is in McLean right off route 193 and is a 15-minute drive from north Arlington. There is a great path along a ridge that overlooks the Potomac. You will be able to see further in the winter without tree cover. Also, you will not have to deal with bugs or sun exposure.

Sugarloaf Mountain is further, a 45 minute drive but offers a full day of hiking and spectacular views from White Rocks.

Hiking the Fairfax cross county trails can be a multi-hiking experience. You can do one section at a time or combine several and make a day of it. Here is a [6-mile hike](#) out and back on section 10 of the trail that begins off Georgetown Pike (Route 193) at the difficult run trail head.

Wonderful hiking trails are in Seneca Creek State Park. The park is two miles off 270, less than 30 minutes from Arlington. There are more than 27 miles of trails through the woods, plains and around Clopper Lake. Here is a [7-mile loop](#) that includes the lake.

A hike near Leesburg, Red Rock Wilderness Overlook Regional Park, has wonderful paths and beautiful river views. Here is a [3.5-mile loop](#).

You will need a pair of hiking/trail shoes, warm pants and layers for your top. You should wear gloves, bring a hat and have an outer shell to protect against the wind. It is winter and supposedly too cold to bike. If you are going to be out for more than an hour, bring water and snacks.

Hiking is great for your legs, for getting exercise outside and for exploring nature pretty close to your doorstep.