

Male Eating Disorders

Russell Delderfield

Male Eating Disorders

Experiences of Food, Body and Self

palgrave
macmillan

Russell Delderfield
University of Bradford
Bradford, UK

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*For my Mam and Dad, Val and Keith, and my brother, Roly, who love me
whether I am fat or thin, mad or sane, struggling or recovering.*

For Ian and Gillian, who know exactly why they are mentioned here.

For any man who experiences disordered eating.

You are not alone.

PREFACE

This book began life as my doctoral project that I undertook part-time whilst working, until last year. The text is the result of extensive scholarly endeavour in making sense of men's experiences of eating disorder, using interpretative analysis of primary data. This is something that is woefully under-represented in our field, despite the lives that disordered eating affects. In addition, the work embraces a reflexive approach, as I have personal experience of being a man with an eating disorder.

I have had more than one career before finally realising my dream of doing research, I have no doubt that these other life experiences have contributed to the eclectic and trans-disciplinary foundation that has informed my thinking about male experience. The social psychology represented here has been fed by diverse ideas from within and without psychology. My hope is that this will allow readers access to a broader base of understanding about this phenomenon.

In the main text, I rely on an elementary understanding of the main eating disorders, as these have not been described using their clinical criteria. Forgive me if this hinders immediate engagement with the book. I thoroughly recommend *Beat Eating Disorders* website for highly-accessible lay descriptions of the main disorders.

This leads me to a brief note about terminology. As will be seen, I have not insisted on formal clinical diagnoses from the men who have contributed. I use eating disorder and disordered eating interchangeably with no pretensions to recognised clinical definitions. I perceive the words 'male' and 'female', used as nouns, to be the province of medicalised, biological terms for sex. On occasion, for clarity, I have needed to adopt this nominal

use. Otherwise, my main uses are adjectival, as demonstrated by the book's title. Wherever possible I have used men/boys and women/girls, as these denote socially constructed gender, as well as being common parlance. 'He' and related pronouns feature heavily. I make no apology for this as I am foregrounding the lives of men. Other pronouns that appear, that may be troubling to some readers, are 'I' and 'we'. Above, and in greater detail in Chap. 1, I make it clear that I am implicated in the interpretative work that I have undertaken, therefore, I need to own this where appropriate. On occasion, I have made judicious use of 'we' where I need to be clear that I am referring to the four stories featured together with myself.

Lastly, a mild word of warning. I believe in books because they can be accessed and read by anybody. 'Anybody' means that someone may read this who has intimate knowledge of living with an eating disorder. I have not stinted on the detail and coverage of the men's experiences and as such what lies ahead may be triggering for some. It is not my intention to exacerbate distress, so please exercise discretion where needed.

Bradford, UK

Russell Delderfield

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content of this thesis-turned-book, and she listened and tried to understand its importance and meaning. She also liberally supplied gin and tonic and fizz where it was most needed.

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