

Football fans may drink to compensate for not playing

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Men across the nation will be getting the pints in and staring at the big screen this month as the World Cup kicks off in Germany. But what do football and alcohol have to do with being a man? A recent psychological study by the University of Sussex reveals that the roaring crowds may be drinking their way through the game in an effort to compensate for not being man enough to play in it.

The study, made up of in-depth interviews with thirty-one 18-21 year olds in inner London, investigates what young men consider to be masculine behaviour and how this affects their health. Dr Richard de Visser, lead researcher on the study Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) sponsored study 'Young Men, Masculinity and Health' explains: "What is really interesting about the study, is the idea of using one type of typically masculine behaviour to compensate for another. For example, men who are not confident in their sporting abilities may try and make up for this by drinking excessively."

Because some men engage in unhealthy masculine behaviour, whilst others build their masculine identities through positive behaviour such as sport, the policy implications are huge. The project calls for greater understanding of attitudes to masculinity in health promotion.

"It seems that many young men aspire to an idea of masculinity that includes emotional and physical toughness, being the bread-winner, confidence in risk-taking and sexual confidence. A variety of behaviours, some that have a positive impact on health, some that have a

negative, are employed to develop and demonstrate such masculine identities" says Dr de Visser.

Young men's health is currently an area of serious concern, with adolescent and young adult men being more likely to drink excessively and use illegal drugs, to engage in risky casual sex and to be killed or injured in road traffic accidents. This research shows that understanding the desire to appear masculine may hold the potential to reduce such unhealthy behaviour

"If these findings are used effectively," says Dr de Visser, "they may be able to have an impact on the growing levels of anti-social behaviour such as binge-drinking, violence and illicit drug-use. Young men could be encouraged to develop a competence in a healthy typically male area - such as football - to resist social pressures to engage in unhealthy masculine behaviours."

The study forms part of an ongoing investigation into masculine identities by the Department of Psychology at the University of Sussex and full findings are due to be published in the *Psychology and Health* and the *Journal of Health Psychology* later this year.

Source: University of Sussex

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