**What do men gain from listening to men’s mental health podcasts?**

**Abstract**

*Background:* Although men are more likely to die by suicide than women, they are less likely to seek help when feeling suicidal. Masculine socialisation leaves men feeling stigmatised for their mental health problems. Researchers consider podcasts an efficient way to promote health information and offer social support to individuals who are unable to access services.

*Methods*: Nine listeners to a UK based mental health podcast series were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Participants discussed their reflections of twelve podcast episodes and what they gained from listening. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

*Results:* Five interconnected themes were identified which described listener’s reflections: understanding other men’s lived experiences; facilitating male intimacy; combating male isolation; learning how to seek help and reflecting on a culture of positive masculinity.

*Conclusions:* Reflecting on experiences through the medium of mental health podcasts may be a way for men to both initiate new ways of help seeking and challenge their own masculine socialised attitudes. The podcasts promote more inclusive, flexible versions of masculinity which encourage reflection on an individual’s lived experience. Recommendations on how the findings of this research can assist podcast creators develop episodes promoting flexible masculinity are discussed.

**Keywords:** masculinity, suicide, podcast, mental health, masculine socialisation

**1.1 Introduction**

According to the Office for National Statistics (2021) since the 1990’s men have accounted for three-quarters of all deaths by suicide. Male suicide and depression are widely considered major health issues impacting men worldwide. Although depression is not the single catalyst for suicide the two issues are interlinked. Despite high levels of male suicide, male diagnosed depression has historically been low, with Oliffe & Phillips (2008) proposing a need for gender-sensitive depression screening. This is important as some depressed men externalize their symptoms through suicidal thoughts or behaviour.

Although men are more likely to die by suicide than women, they are less likely to adopt help-seeking behaviours for their mental health difficulties. Barriers to help-seeking for mental health issues are widely thought to be connected to traditional masculine norms, particularly the notion of masculine socialisation (Gough & Novikova, 2020). Masculine socialisation “is a learned, ingrained and deeply personalised set of values, attitudes and behaviours which men adopt from other males within their family groups when growing up” (Shepherd et al., 2023, p. 1).

There has been some research suggesting boys raised to conform to traditional masculine norms may later experience difficulties in identifying and expressing their emotions (Levant & Rankin, 2014). Studies by King *et al*. (2018) seem to reinforce this notion with researchers identifying how masculine socialised young boys tended to increase their risk of suicidal ideation and poor mental health. Furthermore Cleary (2015) found that masculine socialised men who had acted on a suicidal impulses often lacked capacity to express their problems.

Shepherd *et al.,* (2023) view men’s mental health through a sociological lens, arguing that due to their changing position in society many men often feel overlooked, isolated and lack the resources to improve their mental wellbeing. Consequently, men growing up within masculine normative environments may develop unhelpful coping patterns such as stoicism, rumination and self-imposed isolation when their mental health deteriorates.

In a recent scoping review Seidler *et al*., (2018) demonstrated how masculine socialisation often prevented men to engage with mental health support. The authors proposed to further male engagement, mental health professionals should accept men with masculine socialisation traits and employ a strength based, as opposed to a deficit-based attitude to their mental health. Sagar-Ouriaghli *et al*., (2019) agree with this proposition, suggesting that if mental health professionals encouraged men who display more positive male traits, help seeking may increase.

This highlights the importance of Struszczyk, Galdas and Tiffin’s (2019) research which suggesting reframing men’s socialisation to a strengths-based approach in order to decrease suicide ideation and suicidal acts. Findings from Sagar-Ouriaghli et al. (2019) highlight the importance of using male role models to communicate information to men. The authors propose this approach combined with the use of psychoeducational materials may help increase emotional literacy and improve male help-seeking.

In a recent scoping review, Shepherd *et al.,* (2023) identified the utility of community-based male centric networks to counter barriers to men’s help seeking. Research into mental health promotion aligns with these findings, suggesting successful community-based approaches provide safe male spaces and promote the normalisation of men’s engagement (Robertson et al., 2016). The authors also found male-positive language and values, a focus on activities and the facilitation of social participation to be important factors to male help seeking. Along with this, Seaton *et al.,* (2017) argue the language employed in gender-sensitive psychological services is important, as therapeutic sounding interventions may be unappealing for socialised men who prefer more practical engagement.

According to Rime, Pike and Collins (2022, p. 10) “A podcast is a piece of episodical, downloadable or streamable, primarily spoken audio content, distributed via the internet, playable anywhere, at any time, produced by anyone who so wishes”. Podcasting is recognised as an efficient and accessible way for healthcare services to share knowledge and build communities of practice.

Podcasting reduces barriers to learning at low cost for both service users and service providers(King, 2022). This is important as 80% of individuals with mental health issues are unable to access quality, low-cost mental health services (World Health Organization, 2022). Podcasts also provide an alternative for the improvement of mental health literacy where services are inadequate (Caoilte et al., 2023). A significant example of this was demonstrated in the COVID-19 pandemic when podcasting was a particularly useful medium for the delivery of health information (Morawska et al., 2023).

Research has shown that media can positively impact individuals with mental health conditions and promote social support among podcast listeners (Pavelko & Myrick, 2020). O’Caoilte, Lambert and Murphy (2022) studied the growing interest in mental health podcasts, particularly in the podcasts ability to increase mental health literacy. Podcasts were also effective in improving the personal development of the most socially excluded individuals. Research by Casares (2022) outlined the numerous benefits podcasts have including the ability to reach a diverse audience and the ability to reduce stigma.

In the modern world mental health communities require an online presence to interact with their users as this is where the majority of people initially seek mental health support. The same is true of professional mental health services who similarly require a presence within online spaces if they are to reach vulnerable groups (Peek et al., 2015).

There are a number of benefits to podcast listening for mental wellbeing including the opportunity for ‘media companionship’. Podcasts have been shown to engender parasocial relationships, alleviate feelings of loneliness and foster feelings of social connectedness. Opportunities to interact with podcast hosts via social media are also a significant factor in the experience of media companionship with podcasting audiences (Perks et al., 2019a).

A podcast may be a platform for men to seek help for their issues if they consider the podcast to be within a trusted community (Gough & Novikova, 2020). This may be especially relevant as research by Tobin and Guadagno (2022) suggest men are more likely to be podcast listeners and that podcasts may have the potential to meet men’s social and emotional needs.

**2.1 Service Overview**

This research was carried out in a UK based men’s mental health support service known by the pseudonym ‘MenGage’. MenGage supports men to help learn how to challenge masculine socialisation behaviours, which in times of mental health crisis may lead to suicide ideation or suicidal acts. MenGage has around 3,000 registered users who access either social media based support (via closed WhatsApp and Facebook groups) or come together for in-person activities such as to play sports, play video games, attend gardening groups or come together for support groups. Typically, men who use MenGage have been referred from their General Practitioner (GP), a family member or their employer and are often depressed with many displaying behavioural traits of masculine socialisation such as stoicism, introversion or self-reliance.

MenGage hosts a popular and regular podcast series that takes the form of one-to-one discussions with men who all have some connection with the service and willing to discuss their mental health challenges as a way of helping other men in the community. The podcasts are in a longform style (Dowling & Miller, 2019), being around two hours in length and posted on social media platforms. Interview content varies and includes discussions around masculinity, interpersonal relationships, mental health, depression, depressive episodes, anger, experiences of bereavement and suicide.

The podcast host is empathic, encouraging guests to reflect on their experiences candidly, seeking to help them understand their experiences in deeper ways. Throughout the podcasts, host and guests reflect on healthy and unhealthy ways of managing mental health experiences, offering listeners insight into how they understand mental health challenges. The host has a person-centred interviewing style, using effective listening skills and empathy whilst asking mainly ‘open’ questions (Tolan & Cameron, 2016). This style encourages guests to provide longer, more detailed answers which helps facilitate insight and understanding. Many interviewees attend group activities as participants, which provide podcast listeners the opportunity to meet them in person.

Although there are a wide range of male centric mental health style podcasts on the internet, there is a paucity of academic research on the thematic content of these within the literature. There are no studies exploring how masculine socialised men respond to listening to men’s mental health podcasts. Furthermore, there is no research which analyses the content of such podcasts to discover how effective the messaging actually is. With this in mind, the current research asks ‘What do men gain from listening to men’s mental health podcasts?’

**3.1 Methodology**

This research utilises a phenomenological lens to gain insight into participants experiences of listening to men’s mental health podcasts (Finlay, 2011). Research on phenomenological experiences is always influenced by the researchers own ontological frame which, in reflexive thematic analysis is linked to analytic practice (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The approach is based on a constructivist, interpretivist methodology which understands the individual’s lived experience as both ideographic and unique Schwandt (1998).

*3.2 Participants*

Purposive sampling was employed as a clear and defined research group was required for the study (Hennink et al., 2020) Participants were male, aged between 30 to 60 years old and had been members of the service between one and four years. Participants had all listened to at least six podcasts from a total of 12 selected by the research team. The Principal Investigator (*xi*) and two service managers collaborated to identify suitable interviewees after advertising for participants on MenGage’s social media platforms.

*3.3 Interviews*

After gaining ethical approval from xxx University (Reference ETH2223-0264), the research team developed semi-structured interviews using an interview method based on Kvale and Brinkman’s (2009) ‘thematizing’ recommendations. Before formulating the research questions the team ‘clarified’ the purpose of the study, gained ‘preknowledge’ of the subject through literature searches before ‘devising’ the most appropriate interview technique to adopt. Interviews were carried out by (*xi*) on nine participants. Individuals were interviewed over Microsoft Teams video. The recording was used to create interview transcriptions using Word Transcribe. The transcripts were checked for accuracy by the (*xi*) and (*xii*).

*3.4 Data Analysis*

A manual thematic analysis was performed on the data by (*xii*) in line with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six stages of Thematic Analysis. After transcription, (*xi*) highlighted sections of the data which was relevant to the research question. (*xii*) also familiarised themselves with the transcripts, reading them several times to deepen their understanding of the data and patterns amongst the data. During this phase, (*xi and xii*) made notes on ideas for potential codes that could be returned to in later phases of the analysis in an attempt to increase trustworthiness of the process (Nowell et al., 2017). Initial codes were generated which (*xi*) and (*xii*) developed and arranged into initial themes. Though computer software can be useful to organize datasets, they are incapable of the level of conceptualizing and judgement needed to develop data (Thorne, 2000). To enhance trustworthiness, two other researchers (*xiii* & *xiiii*) reviewed the themes and made recommendations for amendments. Finally, (*xi*) and (*xii*) used these recommendations as a basis to create final themes.

**4.1 Results**

This study asked ‘What do men gain from listening to men’s mental health podcasts?’ and identified five interconnecting themes: understanding other men’s lived experiences; facilitating male intimacy; combating male isolation; learning how to seek help and reflecting on a culture of positive masculinity.

*4.2 Understanding other men’s lived experiences*

Many men described the value of learning about other men’s lived experiences through the podcasts. Hearing lived experiences seemed to help some men feel more confident in connecting with other men within MenGage. Some described the impact of hearing other men discussing ‘taboo’ subjects, especially when a particular topic held personal significance. This helped men realise these subjects were not as uncommon as they had assumed, helping them normalize their experience.

Here Brian recounts how hearing and relating to other men’s experiences enabled him to feel at ease socializing with the group:

 *“I'm not very social. I have social anxiety and I don't like groups of people… I don't like groups of men. And it's bizarre that... I feel comfortable to just go in to the [in-person supporting events], just turning on, chatting to people who a few weeks ago, a few months ago I just didn't know at all and I'll have brilliant conversations with people and for me six months ago I could never have done that. And I think that is a lot to do with the podcasts, a lot to do with understanding other people's issues and sort of crafting them around my own”.*

The next quotation shows the effects of listening to the podcasts on men within the service. In this reflection, Steven discusses how men who have listened to the podcasts changed their views on their mental health struggles:

*“You've got guys like me who have got some experience in this area, and some lived experience of mental health. And you've got guys who have never thought about their mental health were opening up about their feelings. And for them, this is a profound experience and a life changing experience”.*

Phil describes the shock in hearing men discuss topics that some might only think about and feel unable to discuss out loud and how these stories resonate with his experience:

*“They're approaching subjects that you and I would go ‘I really want to talk about that’ and people are actually sitting there and they're going through the subjects, they're going through the topics, they're going through their own personal experiences. And you're sitting and you're going shit! I've gone through that”.*

*4.3 Facilitating male intimacy*

A number of men stated how the podcast helped them gain a deeper understanding of other group members which often helped them interact with men in more meaningful ways. Although men stated the value of social activities, many respondents felt there was not always enough time to establish meaningful connections with other men on such occasions. Listening to the podcast provided a platform to help men understand one another on a more intimate level. Often men would see podcast interviewees at social occasions and feel more confident to speak and connect with them.

Terry explains that despite spending social time with group members, listening to podcasts was a way of understanding men at a deeper level:

 *“And even though we've sort of played football together or sort of done a couple of social events together because they're sort of, you know, social, and there's large groups, you don't get that intimacy or that sort of time to build up perhaps a one-on-one relationship”.*

In this excerpt Joseph explains how the podcast episodes provide an opportunity for more relational depth with some podcast guests:

*“So people like [man 1] and [man 2], who I already knew from [their podcast], it was a way of hearing their story and hearing their human trials and tribulations and how they got to where they were so that I could get to know them better”.*

Brian explains how listening to other member’s interviews on the podcast gave him the sense of personally knowing group members, even on their first meeting:

*“…it's a strange one and I was talking to [man 1], who's just in the last podcast, and the other night we were down at the [group meetup] and I said ‘it's a bit strange for me’, I said, ‘because obviously I just listened to your podcast last week’, I said ‘so for me, it's like, yeah, it's like, I feel like I know you’”.*

*4.4 Combating male isolation*

Several interviewees thought the podcasts helped them feel less isolated and more involved with others in a communal way. Mental health issues discussed on the podcast helped some men feel their mental health struggles were shared and normalised. Men also described a sense of connectedness as they identified as all being men advocating for greater understanding of men’s mental health. Many interviewees spoke of their togetherness and the feeling they had a place to go should they need help with their mental health issues in the future.

In this example Phil recounts how the podcast helps him feel as though he is not alone and not ‘abnormal’:

*“I think for me it's getting to understand exactly that other people out there are going through the same thing. You know, I'm not isolated. I'm not... I'm not the freak of the house, pardon the expression”.*

Terry explains how listening to the podcast makes him feel less isolated in his mental health difficulties, and that he is part of a group of men who are all mental health advocates:

 *“I do struggle with my mental health at times, and I think that listening to the show, like I said, it helps me feel that I'm not alone in facing that and that you know I’m with part of a broader group of people who are trying to speak about it”.*

In this quotation, Paul describes how the podcast makes him feel as though he has the support he requires, should he need it in the future:

*“So again, it just makes you think of how I deal with things in the future, or just the fact that whatever I'm going through there are other people out there either to talk to, yeah, that are going through similar things and because we're a little group of people you know, we've got each other’s backs”.*

*4.5 Learning how to seek help*

A number of men told how listening to podcasts was an important first step in the process of help seeking. This may be due to the podcasts providing the opportunity for men to understand the service before committing time to attend in-person events. After listening to two or three podcast episodes men were able to counter their fear of the unknown and engage further. Men also reported how the podcast cultivated a more open-minded attitude to mental health and provided strategies for future help seeking.

Here Brian discusses how listening to the podcast helped him gather the courage to join an in-person support session:

*“It took me two months to go to the first [group event]... two months of cancelling. But then like I say, having listened to the podcasts and gone for the first time, very, very nervous, I didn't speak, literally said hello to one person sat there, absolutely terrified”.*

Pauldescribes how listening to the podcast has led him to consider other forms of help seeking:

*“And then let's talk about these audio-books and I think well, if I can listen to a podcast, then perhaps the way for[ward for me] is to read these books, that are kind of self-help books [this] is another way forward”*

In the next quotation, Phil reflects on negative past experiences and how he would manage his mental health differently if he had the knowledge gained from listening to the podcasts:

*“Do you know if I'd have... if we turned the clocks back to last year when I had my nervous breakdown… and I turned the clocks back with the knowledge I have now - I’d have spoken up; I’d have let people know, I wouldn't have just been suffering in silence.”*

*4.6 Reflecting on a culture of positive masculinity*

Some men described how the podcast promoted a culture of positive masculinity and how healthy this was for their interpersonal relationships. Podcast discussions led men to reflect on their own masculine norms and how they tended to respond to other people.

The following excerpt demonstrates Joseph’s perception of the positive culture created by MenGage and how he has reflected on his own interpretation of masculinity:

*“There [is such a] generosity of spirit and emotion and kindness that all the men at [the service] display. … the version of masculinity that I've been following is not helpful and I need to give more time to being kind, generous and more accepting of others”.*

Below, Paulexplains that listening to the podcast has caused him to be less judgemental with others and consider their inner struggles:

 *“Anybody that I come across – you just don’t know what they’re going through, what they’ve been through, what they’re dealing with. So, it’s just like, you just take people at face [value]…well, I do – I take people at face value.”*

Here Terry recalls how listening to men being vulnerable on the podcast helps him empathise with others:

*“When you are sitting there listening to people tell their stories about how they've dealt with certain things, it certainly makes it an awful lot easier to understand, because there's other people that are going through it and these people have actually put their thoughts out there for everybody to listen to.”*

**5.1 Discussion**

This research has explored what masculine socialised men gain from listening to a men’s mental health podcast series. It has provided an organisational insight into MenGage and shown how its values effectively challenge male hegemony and masculine socialisation. In this section we reflect on our research findings and go on to explore the possible roots of masculinity within parenting styles. After describing masculinity as rigid, semi rigid and flexible, we propose how the service in this study helps challenge rigid masculinity for more flexible attitudes. Finally, we use the five thematic headings to propose suggestions for men’s mental health podcast creators. The suggestions aim to help podcasters introduce messages of flexible masculinity into their podcasts. We conclude the discussion posing a set of questions for creators to answer and actions for them to complete which we anticipate may be a useful template for future podcasters.

*5.2 Reflections on the thematic analysis*

The overall message from our thematic analysis was that men tended to feel less isolated, closer to the group with a more flexible self-image. Some men listening to podcast episodes reported feeling part of a community and were encouraged to join in-person groups where they could speak to podcast guests. These findings echo the research of Perks et. al., (2019b) who explain how media companionship can help reduce feelings of loneliness through opportunities for interactions with podcast hosts and in our research, podcast guests themselves.

For others, listening to the podcasts was a cathartic experience especially if the topics discussed had personal resonance. This aligns with Conway’s (2000) research suggesting men with higher levels of traditional masculine socialisation tend to describe their own and others’ emotions in less nuanced ways. Our podcast listeners seemed to have a more reflexive response to their masculinity and seem comfortable engaging with emotion laden feelings.

Men from our study reported that hearing people with similar experiences to themselves helped reflection on their own struggles. It also gave men confidence to connect with other men at in-person events. We think podcast guests sometimes become ‘emotional role models’ to listeners, a process which according to Rice *et al.,* (2018) helps promote male engagement with service providers.

Podcast listeners seemed to regard a number of people as emotional role models including the podcast host. This finding may be useful for men’s help-seeking in its broader sense as it corresponds to Seidler *et al.,* (2019), who found men who could identify with help-seeking role models within friendship groups to be more likely to engage in help-seeking behaviours as a consequence.

Our participants seemed likely to display positive masculine attributes such as empathy, consideration and being less judgemental. This contrasts with hegemonic men whose male centric values purposefully impose gender inequality (Morrell et al., 2013) Research on such men suggests a likelihood of suicidality, underlining the urgency for hegemonic attitudes to be deconstructed (Jordan & Chandler, 2019).

*5.3 Parental roots of hegemonic and socialised masculinity*

The majority of men in the study seemed to enact ‘healthy masculinities’ which Di Bianca and Mahalik (Di Bianca & Mahalik, 2022) describe as flexible expressions of masculinity including behaviour such as expressing compassion, making intimate connections and becoming emotional vulnerable. Hegemonic masculinity can be traced back to boyhood where many boys are encouraged to disconnect their emotions and connect with feelings deemed ‘masculine enough’. In adulthood such men tend to hide their ‘unacceptable’ emotions which they regard as shameful. Our group seemed to have the ability to reflect on their own masculinity and be more willing to explore how their attitudes affected their ability to be emotionally authentic with others.

DeGue, Singleton and Kearns (2023) locate the masculine socialised attitudes of men as originating from the parents of school aged boys. The authors describe parents’ beliefs about masculinity on a spectrum ranging from ‘rigid’ beliefs (inflexible, traditionally masculine norms) to ‘flexible’ (a more varied set of attitudes and behaviours considered as masculine). Mothers are more likely to hold more flexible attitudes towards masculinity than fathers and White parents seemed more likely, in comparison to Black and Latino parents.

The authors imagined men with rigid gender beliefs to be men in control of themselves, their emotions and their households. Rigid men believe in the idea that men should ‘defend their honour’ physically and metaphorically. Such men prized the notion of men as leaders especially when it came to leading the family. Men were lauded for being effective providers for their families whereas expressing interpersonal traits or behaviours were undervalued.

Men with flexible gender beliefs on the other hand, tend to have a broader understanding of masculinity. They may happily share household tasks including traditionally feminine activities such as care-giving. Flexible men understood they can access emotions without compromising their masculinity. Such men would view masculine and feminine divisions of labour as problematic.

The authors also found participants expressing gender beliefs which were in the centre of the rigid to flexible spectrum, describing those as ‘semi-rigid’. Such men regarded themselves as strong financial providers within the family and maintain respectful relationships as well as taking on care-giving commitments (see figure 1).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Rigid Masculinity | Semi-Rigid Masculinity | Flexible Masculinity |
| Men in control of themselves, their emotions. and their households. Men should defend ‘their honour’ physically and metaphorically. Men as leaders.Men as effective providers. | Gender beliefs in the centre of the ‘rigid’ to ‘flexible’ spectrum. Holding a mixture of rigid and flexible beliefs. The ideal man as a financial provider who also maintains respectful relationships with women.Men can possess care-giving qualities. | Flexible gender beliefs including those associated as traditionally feminine.Openness to care-giving and expressing emotion without compromise to their masculinity. Masculine versus feminine hierarchy problematic. Respect for women, rejection of harmful masculine norms.  |

**Figure 1** Gendered beliefs about masculinity derived from DeGue, Singleton and Kearns’ (2023)

*5.4 Suggestions for podcast development*

It seems to us the podcasts help men in our study challenge their own hegemonic masculinisation and masculine socialised behaviour. As we previously discussed, when first joining MenGage many men feel anxious and depressed and often report problems associated with rigid masculine attitudes. This contrasts with podcast interviewees who we found to have more flexible and healthy attitudes to masculinity as described by both Di Bianca and Mahalik (2022) and DeGue et.al., (2023).

Men in our study seem to have confidence to explore their own mental health issues in concert with podcast guests; they develop confidence to connect with others who they regarded as role models; they begin the process of finding alternative ways to seek help; and reflect on their masculinity through the narratives of the podcast host and guest. This echoes the work of Pavelko and Myrick (2020) who propose media positively impacts individuals with mental health conditions and can promote social support amongst podcast listeners.

With these thoughts in mind, we would like to suggest how other men’s mental health podcasters may use the findings of our study to help develop their own podcast content. We envisage this to be useful in that it may help podcasters in the promotion of flexible masculinity. Our suggestions may be useful in helping over-stretched services provide more effective mental health literacy where traditional provision is inadequate (Caoilte et al., 2023) and may assist professional mental health services wishing to develop men’s mental health promotion within online spaces (Peek et al., 2015).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Questions derived from the research**  | **Questions for podcast creators** | **Actions for podcast creators** |
| How does the podcast help men understanding other men’s lived experiences? | Does your podcast invite guests with lived experiences of men’s mental health issues?  | Identify podcast guests with lived experiences who use platforms such as Facebook, X, LinkedIn and Instagram. |
| How does the podcast facilitate male intimacy? | What mechanism does the podcast have to create relational depth with both listeners and guests?  | Create easy to access communication platforms to connect listeners to podcast host and guests. |
| How does the podcast combat male isolation? | How does the podcast content engender togetherness and community?  | Consider using parallel platforms such as WhatsApp or Facebook to direct listeners onto online communities. |
| How does the podcast help listeners learn how to seek help? | How does the podcast encourage men to consider using external support services?  | Ensure podcast host facilitates conversations that identify external support services. |
| How does the podcast help listeners reflect on the culture of hegemonic and socialised masculinity? | How does the podcast host and guest embody the culture of flexible masculinity? | Ensure the podcast host models a flexible attitude to masculinity. Their interview style should be open, empathic and understanding. The host should encourage reflection on topics such as healthy and unhealthy ways to manage mental health issues. |

**Figure 2** Action plan for podcast creators

Figure 2 describes a three-step action plan services may consider in order to develop their own podcast series promoting flexible masculinities. The first column derives from our results section and asks services to evaluate how their podcasts help men understand their lived experiences, how they combat male isolation and help reflection on the culture of hegemonic and socialised masculinity.

The second column invites podcasters to consider the way in which their podcast is structured. These questions have been derived from column one and aim to encourage podcasters to think in detail about operational details. Podcasters are asked to consider the experience of guests; how relational depth is created; how community is enacted; how the podcast connects with other services and the cultural messaging of both host and guest.

The final column is more directive and has a number of actions podcast creators can take if they are interested in developing podcasts along the same lines as the service in this study. These actions include identifying guests from their social media profiles; considering the establishment of WhatsApp group type community support for listeners; linking guests and speakers easily to listeners and ensuring the podcast host has a person-centred interviewing style.

**6. 1 Conclusion**

This research has found men in our study who listen to mental health podcasts seem to overcome their isolation, develop new ways of connecting with other men through community connection and challenge or transform their rigid masculinity. MenGage is quite novel in that it combines its podcast episodes with in-person events and social media community. In doing so, we believe it helps challenge rigid masculinity whilst modelling flexible approaches to being a man. These circumstances have given our research team the confidence to propose the podcast/service model to other interested organisations who may consider our findings useful.

**7.1 Strengths and limitations**

We have attempted to build trustworthiness and rigour into our research throughout each phase of the project. Our approach has given us some confidence to suggest the action plan for podcast creator teams, which we hope may be useful. We understand, however that there are certain limitations to the claims we can make in such a relatively small piece of work. As well as interviewing a small group of men, our interviewees were all members of MenGage and had all been willing to take part in the study. This may suggest a bias within the sample of men willing to take part in the project due to their positive experience. In future research this should be considered with project teams identifying people with a range of experiences and attitudes about the podcasting. Future research may, for instance identify men who do not listen to podcasts even when prompted through health communication messages.

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