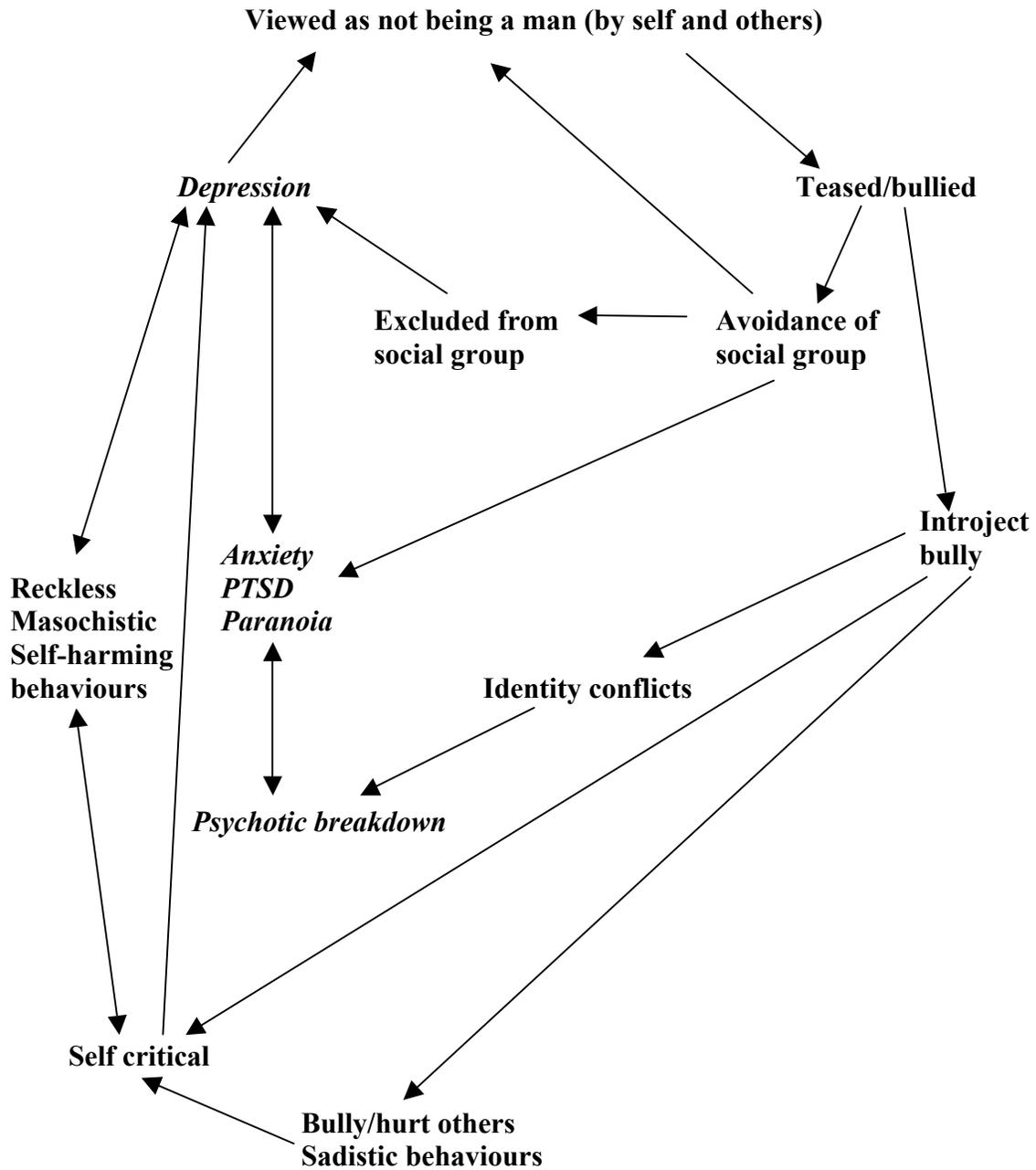


## **The shame of ‘not being a man’: experiences of gay, straight and bisexual men**

### **Guy Holmes and Geoff Hardy**

Fig.1 is a model of how ‘not being a man’ can end up in behaviours that get medicalised and treated by psychiatry. Being gay, camp, effeminate, not macho, not standing up for yourself - in fact any behaviours that involve difference from the male ‘norm’ (see later), even being ineffectual at sports or fighting – can lead to teasing and bullying by male peers who try to exclude the ‘different’ person from the group. In group theory this is referred to as scapegoating – the scapegoat is reacted to because he demonstrates traits that other group members reject (as a result of socialisation e.g. homophobia, or as an attempt to remove from consciousness aspects of the self that disturb group members e.g. ‘feminine’ aspects of character). Potential allies avoid the scapegoat or ally themselves with the excluders for fear of being tarnished and consequently teased and bullied themselves. The bullied person isolates himself and avoids others. This is common in schools and many workplaces, especially those with dominant male cultures. People in positions of authority frequently neglect their duties to protect people and often add to the process: Geoff recalls being publicly taunted by a P.E. teacher at school: “*Hardy, you run like a girl, a pansy!*” Physical intimidation is common. Paul Gilbert has written about evolutionary processes that make rank critical – the male who is ‘not a man’ is pushed to the bottom of the rank, scapegoated and pushed out of the ‘pack’. Shame and depression ensue. The person absorbs the bully, putting himself down for not being ‘man enough’ and the inner critic takes command. Being bullied can also lead to post-traumatic stress reactions and anxiety. Avoidance as a survival strategy leads to people living more in their inner worlds which can exacerbate realistic fear into paranoia. A person can come to question who they are: core identity issues such as sexuality and even gender can become confusing: *Am I a man? Am I gay? What’s wrong with me? Am I in the wrong body? Being gay means being hated...am I despicable...is being gay despicable?* Identity problems can lead to psychotic breakdowns as a person is caught in Laingian type knots – unable to be ‘a man’ and fit in but unable to survive as a different kind of man due to lack of societal and practical support for that identity. Bizarre identities based on phantasy can develop. The person may try and escape through drugs and alcohol, or the conflicts, isolation and loathing combine to induce self-harm or suicide. People who have not been valued can find it hard to value themselves or others, and can become reckless regarding their own and other people’s health and safety –health publicity alone (e.g. regarding sexually transmitted diseases) will never be powerful enough to overcome this<sup>1</sup>. Bullied people also learn how to bully and sometimes behave sadistically to others, acting out the experiences that they have endured, giving others a taste of what it has been like to be them. Many of these impacts lead to depression, and for men who loathe the appearance of being vulnerable (‘weak’), the cycle of being further viewed by themselves and others as not being ‘man enough’ continues.

**Fig 1. The Shame Cycle**



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