

# Men who are depressed and the women who love them

When men suffer from depression, it is often women who recognize the illness - and lead them out of the darkness

By CHRISTINE STAPLETON  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

**P**ity the men, for there is nothing manly about depression.

Every belief a man holds about his masculinity is attacked by depression — his physical strength, sexual prowess and ability to provide and protect. All the traits that our society says makes a man manly.

Worse, most men do not know what's hit them. The symptoms of depression in men are so different than in women that many men are emotionally blindsided.

If asking for directions is difficult, imagine asking for help with your feelings.

"There is a huge amount of stigma for men," said Michael Addis, head of the Men's Coping Project, a study funded by the National Institutes of Health. "Depression is seen as a personal weakness and a character flaw."

Because many men define success by their bank accounts, experts expect to see more depression in men — and more suicide.

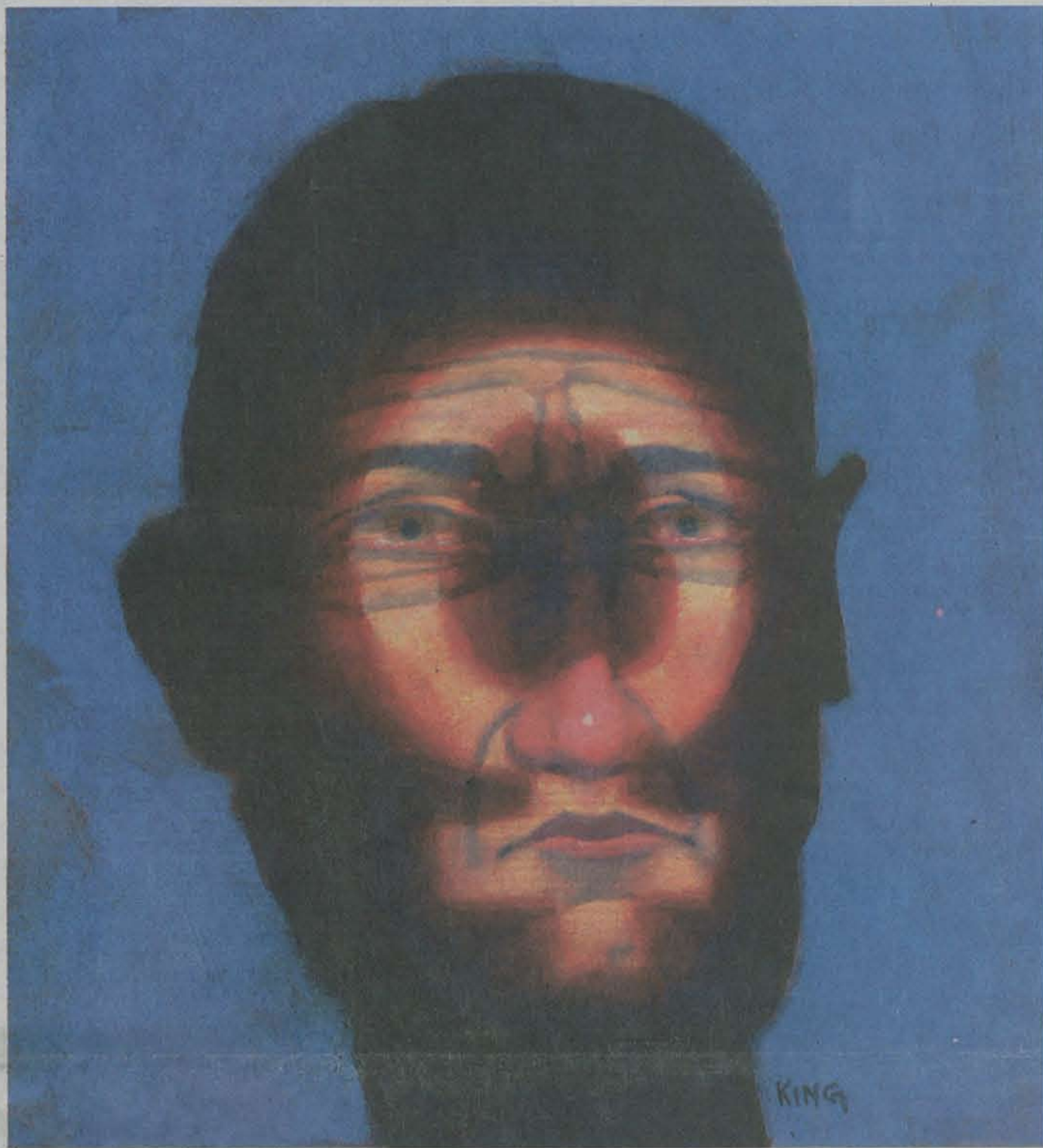
French aristocrat and financier Rene-Thierry Magon de la Villehuchet slashed his wrists after learning he had lost \$1.4 billion he had invested with Bernard Madoff. A German billionaire and a prominent businessman in England threw themselves in front of trains out of desperation over their financial losses. In January, a California man shot and killed his wife and five young children before turning the gun on himself out of despair over losing his job.

"A man's beliefs about manhood will affect how he experiences depression, how he expresses depression and his willingness to accept treatment," Addis said.

Addis was one of four experts who recently spoke to a crowd of mostly women at the annual luncheon of Hope for Depression, held at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach. The organization, just 2 years old, is the passion of philanthropist and socialite Audrey Gruss, whose mother suffered from depression.

With \$25 million of her own money Gruss founded the organization to target two

See MEN, 5D ►



BRENNAN KING/Staff Artist

# Men's depression harder to spot — and likelier to lead to suicide

## ► MEN from 1D

weaknesses in mental health research: the lack of research that integrates the biology of the brain and emotions, and the length of time it takes to get a research project approved. Already the organization has spent \$7 million on research at prominent universities such as Johns Hopkins and as far away as Israel and South Africa.

### Women play key role

Why talk about men and depression in a roomful of women?

Because men will often first talk to the women in their lives, and women "are the ones who help bring them into treatment," said Dr. Steven Roose, a Columbia University psychiatry professor and director of the Neuropsychiatry Research Clinic at the New York State Psychiatric Institute. A survey sponsored by the American Academy of Family Physicians found that 78 percent of all married men who visited a doctor had been influenced to do so by their wives.

Since many men tie their masculinity to making money and financially providing for their family, losing a job, the family's medical benefits, a pension or a car can make it even more difficult

for these men to ask for help with depression.

And while only half as many men as women are diagnosed with depression, men are four times more likely to commit suicide. Why? Men act quickly on their suicidal thoughts and show fewer warning signs, such as talk of suicide. They also use methods that are far more deadly, such as guns.

What are the symptoms of depression in men? Some mirror those seen in women: Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness; difficulty concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions; and persistent sad, anxious or "empty" feelings.

### Showing symptoms

However, men with depression also exhibit other symptoms that often go unrecognized as depression:

Violent or abusive behavior; inappropriate rage; escapist behavior, such as overwork or excessive sports; risky behavior, such as reckless driving; isolation and withdrawal; sexual liaisons; alcohol or substance abuse; and more frequent thoughts of suicide.

After reaching their sexual prime in their 20s, men's testosterone levels

gradually decline. Decreased testosterone can lead to decreased sex drive and erectile dysfunction, which can lead to depression.

"When men have ED there is a high rate of depression," said Roose.

For some men, the symptoms of depression were relieved with testosterone replacement therapy alone. But for men with full-blown depression, testosterone therapy is not enough. These men need antidepressants — some of which cause erectile dysfunction. In these cases it is especially important for women to know and reassure a man that the side effects of the antidepressants can be counteracted with drugs such as Viagra.

As for the best way to broach the topic of depression with men, Addis shared tips that he and his researchers use. Make it an informal conversation and sit beside, not across from the man. Do not use the word "depression" right away. Instead, slowly work it into the conversation.

"Many men don't have the vocabulary to talk about their inner emotional life," Addis said.

Which is where the women come in.

© christine\_\_stapleton@pbpost.com