

6 Harmful Effects Of Toxic Masculinity

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Academics and the public alike have been becoming more aware of the [harmful effects of toxic masculinity](#) — the set of standards our society holds for men that end up damaging both their lives and others'. By dictating that men must be strong, have no feelings, and dominate women, Western ideals of masculinity lead men to miss out on aspects of life that should be available to all people, regardless of gender — things like emotional connection and nurturing. And at its worst, toxic masculinity can encourage violence.

To clarify, "masculinity" in this context refers not to men's innate traits, but to the cultural construction of manhood. When we talk about the harmful effects of toxic masculinity, we are not criticizing men, but are calling out the unfair standards imposed upon them. [Patriarchy hurts men](#) as well as women — and erases gender-nonconforming people completely — by prescribing roles that both genders are expected to embody. That's not good for *anyone*.

What, then, would a non-toxic masculinity look like? Since masculinity and femininity don't have any inherent meaning, a healthy masculinity or femininity is one you get to define — or not identify with at all, because it doesn't have to mean anything to you if you don't want it to.

As it stands, though, the cultural construct of masculinity — particularly when it turns toxic — has many problematic and truly damaging consequences. Here are a few of its most harmful effects.

1. The Suppression Of Emotion

Patriarchal beliefs/toxic masculinity create contexts insisting boys/men not show emotion. We need cultural change!

Toxic masculinity dictates that the only emotion men can express is anger, which can hinder men from getting in touch with other things they're feeling. Eventually, this can distance men from other people and keep them from developing close relationships with

their partners and kids. One study in the *Social Psychological and Personality Science* even found that [suppressing emotions can lead to aggression](#)— a bad start to forming healthy relationships.

2. The Encouragement Of Violence

As masculinity educator Siavash Zohoori points out in the above video, toxic masculinity teaches that violence is the best way for men to prove their strength and power, and it discourages them from releasing their feelings in other ways. Sociologists Tristan Bridges and Tara Leigh Tober point out in *Sociological Images* that [American masculinity in particular depicts guns](#) as a source of power for men. This may help explain why men have been responsible for the [great majority of mass shootings](#) in the United States. Bridges and Tober also point out that men are more likely to act violent when their masculinity and male privilege are threatened. Elliot Rodger, who carried out the [2014 shooting in Isla Vista](#), referenced this type of threat in a video explaining his motives. "I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it," he said, implying that he was denied his rights as a man and had to act violent to reclaim them.

3. The Discouragement Of Seeking Help

Mental health stigma and toxic masculinity make it extremely difficult for men to acknowledge that they need help, or seek it out

According to the American Psychological Association, [men are less likely than women to seek help](#) regarding their mental health, which may likely be due to ideals of masculinity. "Try to imagine the Marlboro man in therapy. The image just doesn't compute, does it? The Marlboro man wouldn't admit to needing help," Lea Winerman points out. This ideal of a "tough man" who doesn't struggle with any emotions can force men to withstand untreated mental health problems. This might explain why 25 percent of women but only [15 percent of men take psychiatric medications](#), according to a Medco Health Solutions study. Men are suffering in silence because toxic masculinity teaches them to be afraid of looking "weak."

4. The Perpetuation Of Rape Culture

The "real man" myth is a component that contributes to toxic masculinity and rape culture. It is damaging to all men *and* women

College cultures that encourage masculinity, specifically in fraternities, can [encourage campus rape culture](#). "This system of social rules on campus, it is about dominance and hierarchy," Texas Tech University professor Elizabeth Sharp told *The Huffington Post*. Toxic masculinity teaches men that their identity hinges on their ability to exert dominance over women, and one common way for men to assert their dominance is through [sexual assault and harassment](#).

5. Homophobia

[#MasculinitySoFragile](#)

Case in point of how homophobia is key to propping up toxic masculinity.

Masculinity has been constructed in contrast with femininity, so whenever a man does something considered a woman's role — like dating a man — he is automatically considered less of a man. Gay slurs like "f*g" are used to put men down for not conforming to masculine ideals. These serve not only to shame men who aren't gay but also to dehumanize gay men. Perhaps toxic masculinity could help explain why twice as many [women as men have had same-sex relationships](#), according to a CDC study. The pressure to be masculine creates a greater stigma around gay men than women.

6. Misogyny

As [Tony Porter explains in the above TED Talk](#), [calling boys "girls" as an insult](#) perpetuates the idea that being like a girl is a negative trait. Toxic masculinity teaches us, Porter explains, "that men are in charge, which means women are not; that men lead, and you should just follow and just do what we say; that men are superior and women are inferior; that men are strong and women are weak." In short, by attaching certain characteristics to men and valuing them above qualities associated with women, toxic masculinity encourages a culture that not only puts down men for being "feminine" but also puts down women. At the hands of toxic masculinity, like all aspects of patriarchy, everybody loses.