

MASCULINITIES: TOXIC or Authentic?

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Masculinity isn't just *one* thing: it can live and show in different ways depending on how we shape it. **Toxic masculinity** pushes **harmful ideas** like, “real men don't cry,” “power means control,” or “you have to dominate to be respected.” These messages can be incredibly damaging; not just to males, but to anyone who believes these messages. On the flip side, **authentic masculinity** is about **being true to yourself** – showing strength through honesty, empathy, and respect. This document will help you look closer at both, so you can decide for yourself what kind of masculinity makes sense for you.



Throughout history, *some* groups have believed they were superior to others based on identity or beliefs. As a result, they pushed harmful ideas about **how people “should” act based on gender**.

In this document, when you see words like *man, woman, boy, or girl*, we're mostly referring to the way **cisgender, heterosexual** people have been expected to behave – especially in the context of toxic masculinity. **Gender is a social construct**, meaning *not everyone fits into these categories*. **Gender and identity are more diverse than two labels (called “binary”) suggest!**

This is a document to help you **think critically**, regardless of your gender identity. Everyone deserves the freedom to be their **full, authentic** self.

A comparison of toxic and authentic masculinity:

TOXIC masculinity	Authentic masculinity
Suppresses emotion (“man up”)	Expresses emotion honestly and without shame
Seeks power over others	Builds mutual respect and equity
Associates worth with dominance, status, or looks	Rooted in values, character, and relationships
Objectifies or controls women	Treats others with dignity and care
Fears vulnerability	Embraces vulnerability as a strength

PAUSE!
Check yourself:

- 1 In general, what do you see more of: “toxic masculinity” or “authentic masculinity”?
- 2 Where do you witness toxic masculinity?



HOW IS TOXIC MASCULINITY PROMOTED?

We see toxic masculinity in many forms of media: social media, movies, music, etc. We can see it when we play sports, are on the bus, or even in spaces with our friends or family. Let's look at some ways it promotes harm:



Glorifies Dominance & Control Over Others

- Toxic masculinity often brags about **controlling women** and treats **relationships as a power game**.
- It says **men should “lead”** and **women should “submit,”** which reinforces outdated gender roles.

Promotes Emotional Suppression

- Toxic masculinity tells men that **showing vulnerability or emotions is “weak” or “feminine.”**
- This encourages **bottling up feelings**, which can lead to mental health issues.

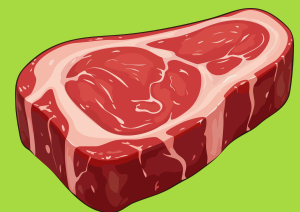


“Looksmaxxing” & Hyperfocus on Appearance

- Toxic masculinity pushes the idea that your value as a man depends on being **hyper-muscular, rich, and conventionally attractive**.
- This creates **pressure and anxiety** around appearance, especially for teens going through body changes.

Objectifies & Dehumanizes Women

- Toxic masculinity talks about women like they're **prizes to be won or owned**.
- Toxic masculinity normalizes seeing women as **sexual objects instead of whole human beings**.



Links Worth to Wealth & Aggression

- Toxic masculinity promotes constantly flaunting money and status, **implying one's worth is tied to how “alpha,” rich, popular, influential, etc., one is**.
- **Promotes aggression** as a default response, whether during arguments or competition.



HOW IS IT HARMFUL TO US?

Hearing harmful messages repeatedly can have a deep impact on everyone. Toxic masculinity:

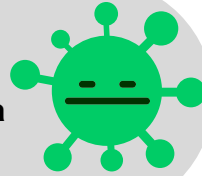


Kills Vulnerability & Authenticity

It tells boys they have to be “tough” all the time. This **stunts emotional growth** and **prevents healthy relationships**.

Normalizes Harmful Behavior

It **excuses violence, bullying, misogyny, transphobia and queerphobia** as “*just being a man.*”



Creates Insecurity & Loneliness

Impossible standards (hypermuscular, money, dominance) make many guys **feel like they're not “man enough.”**



Perpetuates Gender Inequality

By promoting control over women, it feeds into **rape culture, harassment, and abuse**.



AFFECTS ALL OF US

girls/women

...harms girls and women by **normalizing**

- **being disrespected**
- **being controlled**, and being
- **objectified** (e.g. only exist for pleasure)

in relationships, which can lead to **feeling unsafe, unseen, and undervalued** for who one truly is.

non-binary

- makes people who are non-binary **feel invisible or wrong** for being themselves
- punishes anyone who doesn't act “masculine enough”
- makes people **feel unsafe or undervalued** by claiming only certain types of people should have power or respect

boys/men

- **isolates** boys and men from each other
- **discourages asking for help**
- increases risk of **depression, substance use, and thoughts of self-harm**





WHAT IS AUTHENTIC MASCULINITY?

Authentic masculinity is about being real with yourself — not performing some *idea* of what a “real man” is “supposed” to be. It means being strong and kind, confident and respectful, driven and emotionally honest.

It’s not about trying to dominate others or hiding your feelings, it’s about **having values**, **uplifting** others, and **treating people with care**, and knowing your worth doesn’t come from looks, money, or being “the alpha.”

Authentic masculinity allows you to:

- Speak **your truth without demeaning** others
- Build healthy relationships **based on respect**
- Show **emotion without shame**
- Lead with **compassion and confidence**
- Practice **healthy habits** without causing any harm



Being authentic means being you — not a version of yourself that’s shaped by fear, pressure, or the need to impress.

When some of us hear messages from social media influencers like Jake Paul, Andrew Tate, Clavicular, etc., we can **feel inspired**, or **motivated to work out** and to **look our best**.

...it’s **completely** valid to want to grow, improve, and feel confident! **But...**

... when that motivation is **built on putting others down, treating people as less than, or chasing power over others**, it becomes **harmful** — not empowering.



Think Critically: Questions to Ask 🤔

Consider these when hearing motivational messaging:

1. Is this motivation helping me grow **without hurting others**?
2. Do I feel **empowered** or **pressured** to meet someone else’s standards?
3. Does this person model **respect for everyone** — or just people like them?

FIND THE RED FLAGS: CRITICAL THINKING PRACTICE



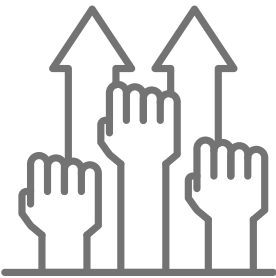
Below are some example messages you might hear in conversations that have toxic ideas about masculinity being shared. Your job is to think critically and write down why the message is harmful.

Idea shared	Hidden/Concerning Message
"Men who cry are embarrassing."	
"Women only care about money and status."	
"You have to dominate the room to be respected."	
"If you're not rich or alpha, you're a loser."	
"If you're not lifting, grinding, or making money, you're wasting your life."	
"Focus on being yourself--emotions just get in the way."	
"If a girl dresses a certain way, she's asking for attention."	

FIND INSPIRATION WITHOUT THE HATE

Here are some positive, healthy people you can follow vs some toxic influencers we hear from at times...

Want to...	Try Following:
Be disciplined & healthy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joe Blanchet• Louise Green• Gabi Dixon• Steph Curry
Be confident & kind?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pedro Pascal• Jaylen Hurts• Alex Elle• Alexis Ohanian
Build self-respect?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sonya Renee Taylor• Tabitha Brown• Marcus Rashford• Alok Vaid-Menon• Laverne Cox
Stay mentally strong?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Gabor Maté• Malala Yousafzai• Dr. Nicole LaPera• Dr. Raquel Martin• Nelson Mandela



Real strength builds others up and real confidence isn't about making others feel small.

Let's be confident, healthy, and inspired in ways that lift each other up, not tear each other down.

