



WOMEN AND GENDER ADVOCACY CENTER ([HTTP://WGAC.COLOSTATE.EDU](http://wgac.colostate.edu))



(<https://www.facebook.com/womenandgenderadvocacy>)



(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwzBaJFP56iQxrMdcSMVBcA>)



(https://www.instagram.com/csu_wgac/)



MEN AND MASCULINITIES

So you may be asking, "why a tab on men and masculinities on WGAC's website?" The short answer is we believe that gender plays an often hidden but highly important role in men's lives, and that men can play a vital role in addressing inequality and violence.

When we're talking about **men** we're talking about a socially constructed and ever changing *gender identity*. When talking about **masculinities** we're referring to behavior and culture associated with men, and the different *ways of being a man*.

Where do these ideas come from? Men and gender socialization

As socially constructed identities, boys and men learn "appropriate" gender roles in accordance to the masculine expectations of their given society. This means that from very early on boys get messages on what it means to be a boy. To illustrate how pervasive the "gendering" process is, we can take a look at how toys are marketed differently for boys and girls. The graphics below are word clouds that display the words used to market toys to girls and boys respectively. The bigger the text, the more frequently it appears in toy marketing material.

Word Cloud for Girl's Toys



Word Cloud for Boy's Toys

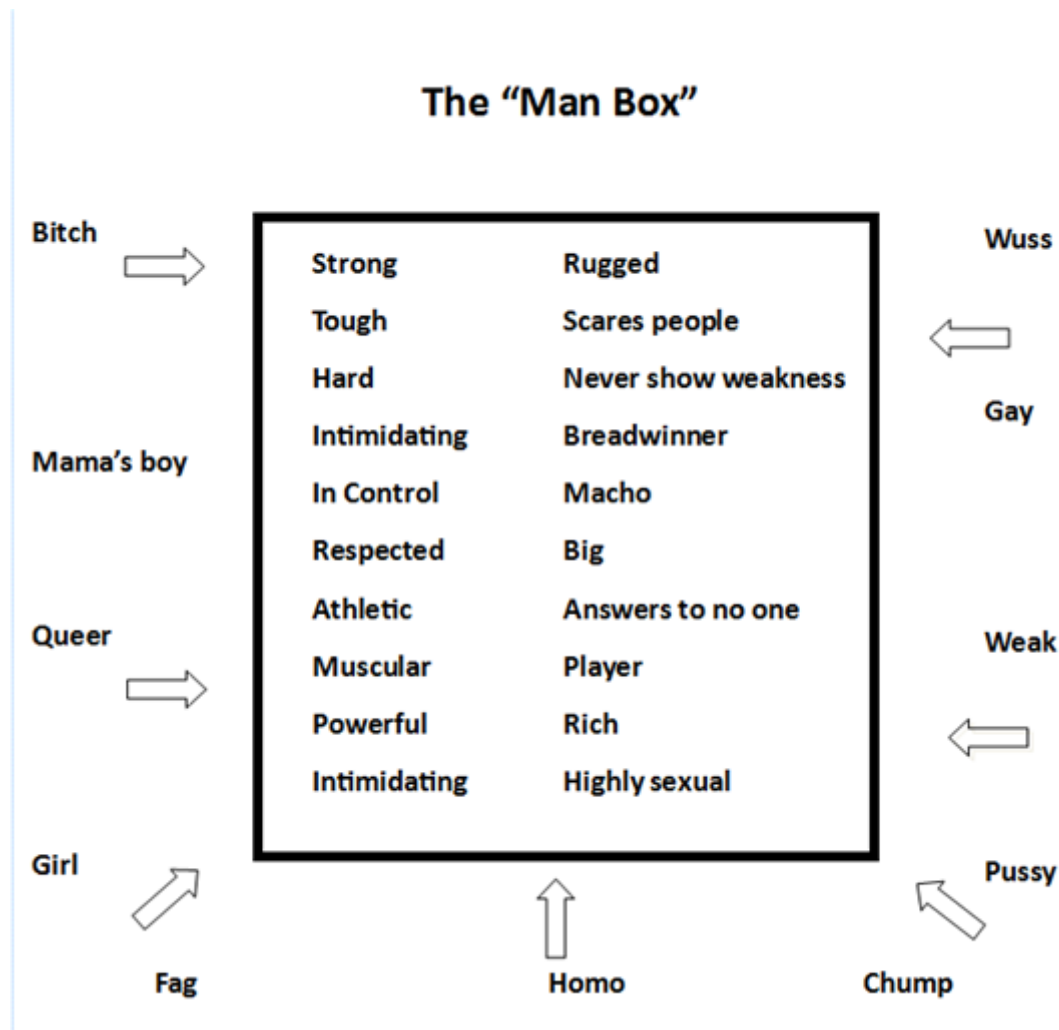


Source: <http://www.achilleseffect.com/2011/03/word-cloud-how-toy-ad-vocabulary-reinforces-gender-stereotypes/>

Translate »

From an early age these messages work to shape individuals into boys or girls. In addition to external sources, boys and men learn conventional gender roles from family and friends. In most homes, boys are told that "boys don't cry" and to "[man up \(http://goodmenproject.com/ethics-values/25-ways-to-redefine-the-phrase-man-up/\)](http://goodmenproject.com/ethics-values/25-ways-to-redefine-the-phrase-man-up/)". These colloquialisms are ways of relaying the message that as a member of a certain gender, there are rigid expectations. If these expectations aren't fulfilled then one will be subject to ridicule and even violence.

Another way to explain masculine socialization is through what is known as the "man box" (below). Inside the box is a list of socially valued roles and expectations that constitute conventional masculinity, and the words outside of the box are used to confine boys and men into a narrowly constructed definition of manhood.



In this way, boys and men are punished (often by other boys and men) in a particularly gendered manner. For example, if boys and men do not meet the expectations of being a man they are often called homophobic or feminizing slurs. These degradations work to police the boundaries of what is acceptable

appearance and behavior for boys and men, which is one explanation as to why gender roles in our society are still rigidly defined and vigilantly enforced.

Masculinity, Male Privilege, and Intersectionality

All men are influenced by their upbringing, experience, and social environment which play a big role in determining one's view of masculinity and manhood. This means that masculinity is going to be different for everyone. Some particularly influential factors in shaping one's idea of manhood are **race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and gender**. Social justice advocates view these social identities as the most salient factors in society that determine who has power and privilege and who faces societal oppression. Men who are oppressed in one or more ways within this structure embody "**marginalized masculinities**", which are ways of being men that are seen as less than or ridiculed by more privileged men as a means of constructing their own identities as men.

Since factors like class, race, gender, sexual orientation and ability have to be taken into consideration when understanding masculinity, it's important to note the complexities of masculine privilege from an intersectional (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersectionality>) lens. Masculine privilege (http://sap.mit.edu/content/pdf/male_privilege.pdf) is the idea that men are afforded unearned benefits, rights, and advantages in society. These privileges are often times invisible to men and can be difficult to notice because they are so normalized. For men with marginalized masculinities, masculine privilege operates differently because they are privileged as men but hold at least one oppressed identity. For example, one of the privileges that men have is the ability to take up social space in a room. However, men of color (in a mostly white space), men with disabilities (in a mostly able bodied space), working class men (in an upper-middle class space), transmen (in a mostly cisgender space), and queer men (in a mostly hetero space) may not necessarily be afforded this privilege (although it does occur at times). But men with marginalized masculinities still have more privilege than their female counterparts.

Hegemonic Masculinity

There are an infinite number of ways to be a man which exist within a hierarchy of manhood. The most dominant form of manhood is called "**hegemonic masculinity**" which is characterized by several key tenants: 1.) distance oneself from femininity; 2.) restrict emotions; 3.) be tough and aggressive (avoid vulnerability); 4.) be seen as highly sexual with women; and 5.) prove one's heterosexuality via homophobia.

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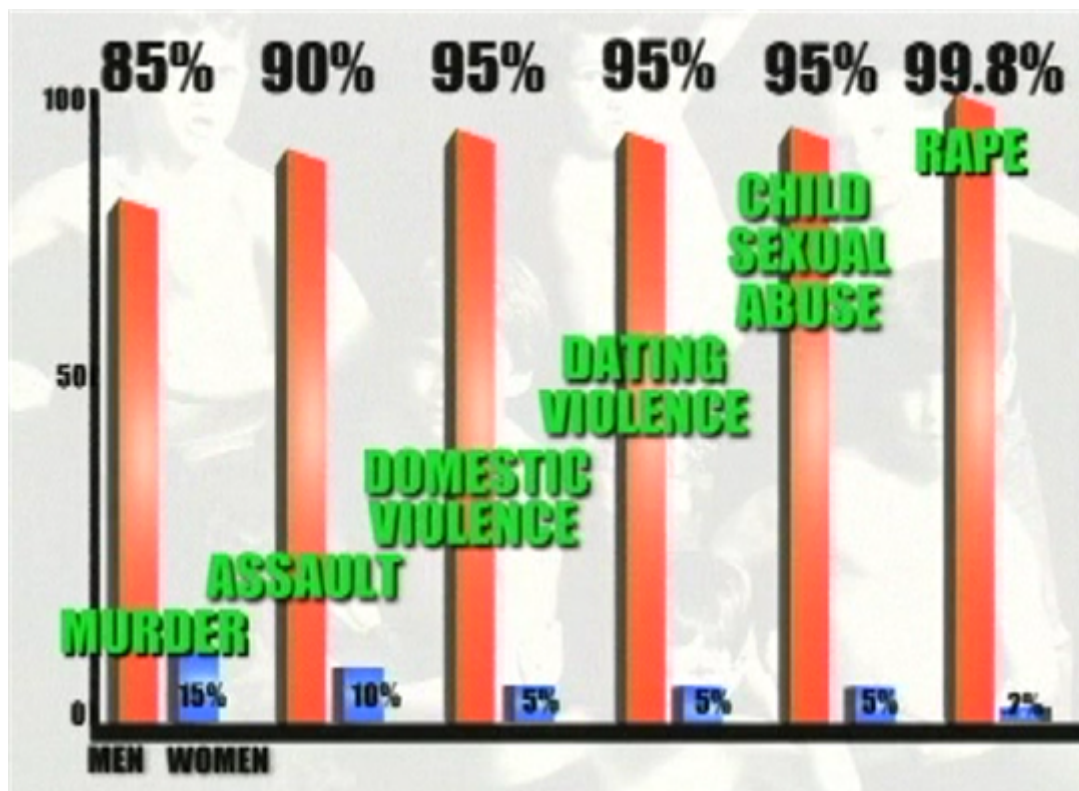
Hegemonic masculinity is not oppositional to marginalized masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity cuts across all of the aforementioned social identities but men of color, working class men, men with disabilities, queer men, and transmen can still embody hegemonic masculinity. However, the ways that men with marginalized masculinities embody hegemonic masculinity is expressed differently depending on one's access to resources, social capital, and social mobility.

These conventions exist as part of the normal fabric of our daily lives but when laid out bluntly, it becomes clear why some men are choosing to resist hegemonic masculinity because of the harm it causes not only to others, but to themselves as well. Lots of men feel that being emotionally restricted and having to constantly prove one's manhood are not the most fulfilling ways to live their lives. One of the exciting things about our generation is to see the variety of ways that men from all backgrounds are living beyond the confines of hegemonic masculinity. Whether it's choosing not to prove manhood with violence, affirming people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, or challenging the sexism of male peers, the movement to live beyond hegemonic masculinity is finding encouragement (and considerable backlash) in all parts of society.

Masculinity and Violence

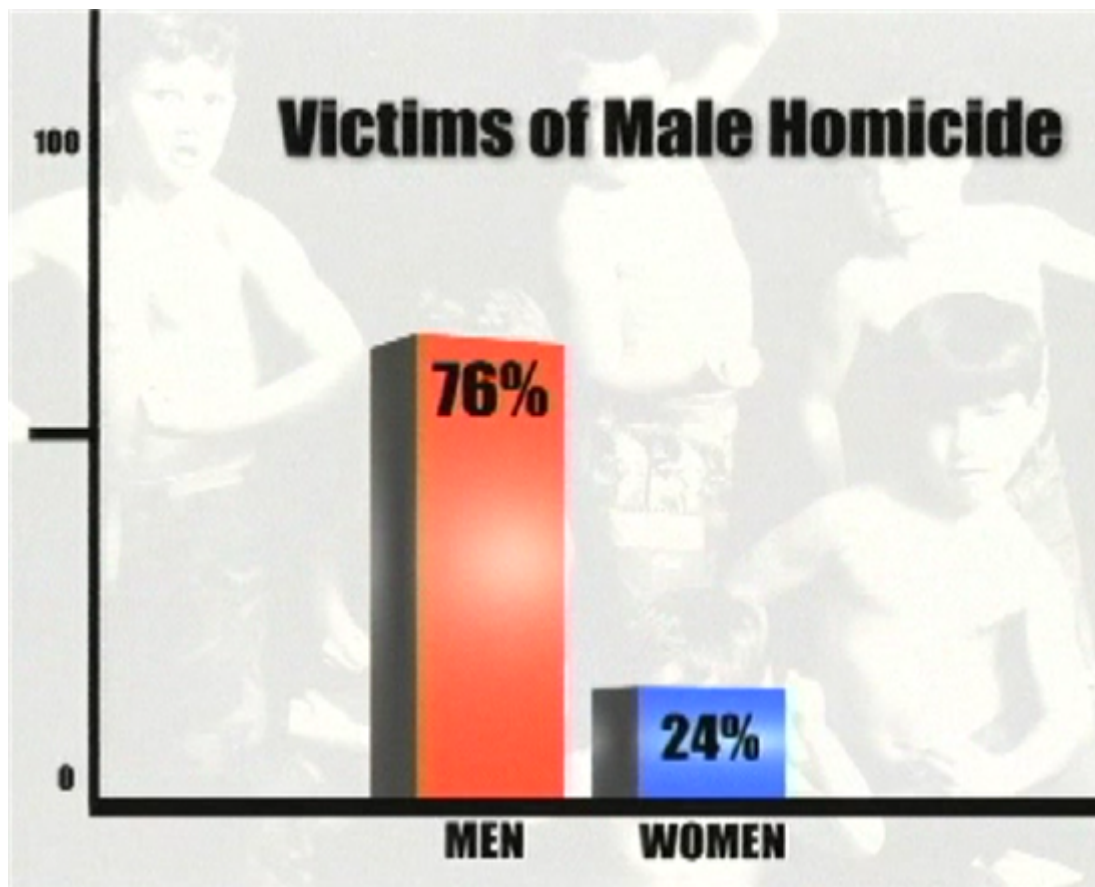
Since violence is one of the key tenants of hegemonic masculinity, it's important for us to take a moment to unpack some of the complexities surrounding the topic.

In recent years some men have recognized the fact that a vast majority of violence is committed by men and therefore its [men's responsibility to address it](http://www.themachoparadox.com/images/10%20Things%20Flyer.pdf) (<http://www.themachoparadox.com/images/10%20Things%20Flyer.pdf>). The graph below demonstrates that violence is a masculine phenomenon, yet it's rarely named as such.



Source: Tough Guise: Men, Violence and the Crisis in Masculinity (1999)

And not only is male violence directed towards women, statistics show that men are more often than not victims of other men's violence. This is especially true for queer and transmen, who experience violence at higher rates than straight cisgender men.



Source: Tough Guise: Men, Violence and the Crisis in Masculinity (1999)

This is also the case when we focus in on the statistics for sexual violence. One in six men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime (typically before the age of 14), often times by other men. When we break the statistics on violence up by gender it becomes obvious that there is something going on with contemporary masculinity and the idea that being violent makes one more of a man. These statistics do not imply that all or even most men commit violence, sexual or otherwise. It just means that men have an even greater responsibility to hold other men accountable and to not condone this behavior when it occurs.

While the scope of male socialization might seem pervasive there's hope in knowing that as individuals we have the power to question what we've been taught, examine how we perpetuate this cycle, and encourage others to do the same. All men have either experienced male violence or know someone who has and it's time for men to join together to embody forms of masculinity that everyone will benefit from.

Additional Reading and Resources:

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