

Do the social media accounts 8-12-year-old boys are exposed to encourage a toxic masculinity mindset?

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Project Introduction

Now, more than ever, it's increasingly important to consider the role social media plays in child development. For most modern-day adults, childhood did not include a cell phone or unsupervised access to the internet. However, as society advances beyond previous technological realms, the age and rate at which children are being introduced to social media is increasing. While there are benefits to having access to these applications at a young age, one must critically think about the role early access to social media plays on a child's overall persona. Moreover, how the media that children take in during the most formative years of life eventually develops into a behavioral pattern to use throughout their lifetime.

It is no secret that the people we consider role models play a crucial role in how we see the world. Often times, we adapt to a similar belief system as those who we surround ourselves with, and social media influencers are no exception. This research study attempts to examine the social media accounts boys aged 8-12 follow, specifically on YouTube, and if these influencers introduce them to negative practices, ultimately helping to raise young boys into men who fall into the cyclical cycle of toxic masculinity.

Toxic masculinity is a concept that has been around for ages but increased in popularity alongside feminist theory. Toxic masculinity originally stems from the idea that men are taught to be tough all the time and that anything other than that precedent is seen as weak. It's the same concept that stigmatizes gender roles and gives attribution to the infamous saying "boys will be boys." While these lessons are rooted in parenting styles and societal standards, the social media accounts that younger boys expose themselves to reinforce this ideal. These channels, often video gamers, practice racial slurs and cursing, enforce gender roles and whether they realize it or not, encourage younger boys to bully their peers that do not fit into society's standard. The

most important thing about these potential findings, are that the morals and beliefs young boys create during their formative years will follow them through their life. Toxic masculinity is not only dangerous for the men within the practice, but also for the women they come into contact with, their potential children, and anyone they interact with in the future. Can something as simple as watching a politically incorrect video gamer during middle school have the power to change the course of a young boy's life forever? The following research study attempts to answer the question:

“Do the social media accounts 8-12-year-old boys are exposed to encourage a toxic masculinity mindset?”

In order to get accurate data, boys aged 8-12 were the primary population of this study. This age range was chosen as 8 is when most younger children begin to have less constricted access to the internet, and 13 is when children become teenagers. The sample will come from children within Virginia's sixth congressional district, as there are a wide array of socioeconomic statuses, races, and urban and rural locations throughout the district. The sample will be polled on their favorite social media influencers, specifically YouTubers, and then compile a list on the most popular ones. In addition to polling them on their favorite YouTubers, they will be asked a series of questions on a Likert Scale that will serve as a base to see where children within this sample's morals lie. The scale will be 1-7, with 1 as strongly disagree, and 7 as strongly agree. Some potential questions they will be polled on include:

1. It's okay for boys to cry
2. If someone doesn't look and act like me, it's okay for me to mistreat them
3. It's wrong for pink to be a boy's favorite color
4. It's okay to be homosexual (a man attracted to another man or a woman attracted to another woman)
5. I look up to the YouTubers I watch

These questions will help get a better sense of opinions and how it lines up with potential research. In addition, we will actively watch videos from the most popular YouTubers for a two-month period and look to see if there is a connection in their discourse to toxic masculinity traits. While we will be looking for a great deal of key words and phrases, we are ultimately looking for bullying, putting down of individuals who stray from the status quo and an overall poor view of women. All of these moving parts should compile an effective research study that is not only sound in reason, but also accurate in results. The research is mainly qualitative, as the primary purpose of the study is to understand underlying reasons and motivations behind toxic masculinity. However, quantitative research methods will be conducted through surveys and responses on a numerical scale. The use of multiple research methods will help to aid in findings and help researchers look at the research question through different lenses.

The main hope of the intended research is to help society as a whole understand the culture that has been perpetuated over the years. Many people do not realize the adverse effects societal standards, parenting tactics or social media can have on a child's development. It is important to look into the content children are exposed to during their formative years and work to draw conclusions on how this helps to create their overall persona. Often times, research conducted on toxic masculinity focuses on how it hinders those who come into contact with the man. However, this research study attempts to illustrate how the man himself is impacted by rigid gender roles and how his morals and values change because of the media he surrounds himself with in his youth. Over time, this study hopes to bring to light the true effects of toxic masculinity and work to create a that supports men for who they are, instead of putting them down when they act outside of societal expectations.

Literature Review

Toxic Masculinity

The concept of toxic masculinity and the morals and ethics associated with it have been thoroughly analyzed and researched, especially in recent years. By thoroughly analyzing pre-existing scholarship, the contents of our research are better understood. A clear and concise definition of the concept helps researchers and audience members alike to better understand the purpose of the research. “Toxic masculinity is characterized by the enforcement of rigid gender roles, but also involves the ‘need to aggressively compete [with others] and dominate others,” (Parent, Gobble, Rochlen, 2018, p. 278). Other scholarship draws upon the sustainable male theory, a concept that “visualizes the ultimate man to be a ‘hard man’ with a tough impenetrable exterior shell,” (Rivera, Scholar, 2018, p. E4). Regardless of what theory or concept researchers choose to draw from, the premise of toxic masculinity stays the same. Men are exposed to a regiment that instigates certain behavioral pattern, creating a toxic way of life. These morals and ethics follow the status quo of gender roles and whether aware of it or not, encourage homophobia, bullying, a devalue of women, sexual assault, negative body image and suppressed emotions. It is vastly important to fully understand the implications of toxic masculinity, especially in relation to a research question that draws so much from the definition.

Past studies have helped society understand the role toxic masculinity plays in a man’s life, and how these characteristics and values affect others that may interact with him. Research has been conducted to see how this concept plays out in an adolescent’s life and studies have found that toxic masculinity can start as early as elementary school. An article published in 2019 found that middle school boys who fall into the same category of beliefs as toxic masculinity

models are less likely to stand up for friends when they're bullied and unsurprisingly, more likely to be the bully (Ingram et al., 2019, 148). Often times, the children who are experiencing bullying are those who stray away from gender norms. These boys could be shy, sensitive, musically inclined, or nonathletic, but regardless, "these males become socially marginalized as the result of being unmasculine and may develop feelings of pain and rage for the loss of control in their desire to be embraced as masculine," (Rivera, Scholar, 2018, p. E5). This is just one example of a string of research that has been done on the adverse effects of a toxic masculinity mindset and how it can hinder America's boys from reaching their potential.

On a vastly different note, a lot of scholarship exists on how a toxic masculinity mindset proves harmful for women. In *Rape, Representation, and the Endurance of Hegemonic Masculinity*, Elizabeth Swanson work to explain how toxic masculinity perpetuates sexual assault, as a means to enact power. The article looks at statements made over the course of combat and how men have used sexual violence against women as a means of strategy in war. While the article focuses on a different concept than our intended research, it does a great job portraying how toxic masculinity can create a mindset that makes men believe women are property and allowed to be abused. "Men's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times," ultimately a tactic that has been used for years to come and "continues to fuel the race to hegemonic masculine identity," (Swanson, 2019, p. 1623). The article serves as an example of what young boys can become if they continue to grow up in a society that supports toxic beliefs.

While studies have not been conducted on the specific research question at hand, it is incredibly important to understand how past research on similar topics have explained the role of toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity is the focal point of our research study; therefore, the

following sections will work to explain how toxic masculinity infiltrates different aspects of life. By examining past scholarship, the audience and researchers alike will have a better understanding of the importance of the topic and what we can learn from previous research.

Social Media

There is no doubt that social media plays a huge role in instigating societal standards and gender norms. In recent years, social media has also been used as a tool for bullying and harassment and works to create a cyclical cycle of constant comparison, leading to mental and physical health complications. Moreover, the way that young boys and girls act on social media is vastly different. Women are more likely to find themselves trying to fit a difficult standard for body image, looks, and capabilities. “Women are generally seen as object of sex in social media advertisements,” (Dasgupta, 2018, p. 47). Beyond that, the researchers found that “in traditional media, gender differences and portrayal which continues in the real world as well,” (Dasgupta, 2018, p. 47). Although there may be no ill-intent, the increased use of social media among younger children helps to perpetuate stereotypes and gender norms.

A study done in 2020 looked at a similar concept but worked a bit further to explain how masculine and feminine traits translate into cyber-aggression. The study focused on eighth graders in the midwestern United States and ultimately found that “boys and girls with more feminine traits engaged in more cyber relational aggression through social-networking sites and mobile phones, while boys and girls who endorsed more masculine traits perpetrated this behavior and cyber-aggression more often through online gaming,”(Wright, 2020). Both articles, although different, prove that gender norms are very much alive and well on social media.

Furthermore, that these gender norms create an environment for bullying and harassment, often times of individuals who do not follow those pre-conceived social norms.

Ultimately, this research proves that there is a direct correlation between the content children are consuming on social media and the way in which they treat one another and view the world. While the articles do not draw on any specific theories or concepts, such as toxic masculinity, to help explain these findings, they can be easily connected. The behavior that boys are partaking in online falls in line with the morals and beliefs of a toxic masculinity mindset and helps to further perpetuate this so-called norm.

Homophobia and Bullying in Middle Schools

Internalized masculinity can create a series of consequences, most serious, an attitude to treat those different from you without respect. Bulling, especially within homophobic, transphobic and xenophobic mindsets, is rampant in middle schools, given that it is a time of such change and growth. As explained by Michael Kimmel, “the fear – sometimes conscious, sometimes not – that others might perceive us as homosexuals propels men to enact all manner of exaggerated masculine behaviors and attitudes to make sure no one could get the wrong idea about us,” (Kimmel, 1997, p. 66). Many studies have been done on the reality of the situation and the correlation between masculinity and a uncomfortableness with those different from you.

Previous research has been done in an attempt to explain what perpetuates bullying and disrespect among middle schoolers. “Researchers suggest that bullying does not occur in isolation but is the product of the interconnections between the individual, their family, peer group, school, community and culture,” (Mischel, Kitsantas, 2018, p. 52). In relation to community and culture, this includes the media that one is exposed to, the values their role

models could hold and their cultural upbringing. One finding from the study is “bullies possibly engaging in aggressive behavior in order to gain status amongst peers,” (Mischel, Kitsantas, 2018, p. 59). If middle schoolers are taught to act a certain way, either because of social media, gender norms, or societal standards, it would make sense to assume this type of behavior would help them be seen as superior within their classrooms.

One great example was a study done over the course of three years to see how often these concepts were actually seen in middle schools. The researchers interviewed the same adolescents and asked them a series of questions about their beliefs and behaviors, most specifically in regard to sexual harassment, homophobic name-calling perpetration, self-reported delinquency and cyberbullying perpetuation. “Baseline levels of delinquency were also uniformly related to each aggressive behavior, as were baseline levels of homophobic name-calling; thus, delinquent behavior and homophobic name-calling may be viewed as “early indicators” of risk for later bullying and aggressive behavior,” (Espelage, Low, Van Ryzin, Polanin, 2015, p. 467). The studies main finding, as related to our research, was that students who participate in one of these behaviors are more likely to engage in all of them.

Gender Norms and Formative Years

Obviously, it’s important to understand gender norms and what they believe to be true. In their simplest form, gender norms assume that boys will act masculine, that is athletic, hard-headed, tactful and emotionless, whereas women will act feminine, kinder, softer, and are allowed to act on their emotions. Children understand gender norms from a very young age and actually start to adopt them by the age of three (Skočajić, Radosavljević, Okičić, Janković, Žeželj, 2019, p. 164). Given the nature of this study, it’s important to look at the role gender

norms play in society. The study ultimately found that children actually start enforcing stereotypes and gender norms in pre-school, and more relevant to the research, that “boys are more prone to sanction and to being sanctioned,” (Skočajić, Radosavljević, Okičić, Janković, Žeželij, 2019, p. 167). This essentially means that boys are more likely to feel the effects of gender norms from a young age, but also be the culprit encouraging stereotype reinforcements. Another study worked to understand how young boys and girls are treated differently. To no surprise, the research found that boys and girls are treated most differently “in the provision of toys and the assignment of chores,” (Conry-Murray, 2015, p. 319).

It’s extremely important to understand and analyze the data from these studies to better comprehend how deeply rooted gender norms are in our culture. From a young age, boys and girls are expected to act within a certain precedent decided by their birth gender. These roles are reinforced through parents, classroom settings, and material items. If children are raised to follow a certain belief system, it is to be expected that as they get older and make their own decisions, they will gravitate towards interests, hobbies, and role models that fall into those standards. In relation to our specific research, it is no surprise that younger boys are more likely to watch YouTube videos or follow social media persons that further reinforce this stereotype. Whether they realize it or not, children continue to perpetuate a culture of gender stereotypes and social norms through the media they ingest and ultimately helps to maintain the cyclical cycle of unachievable societal standards.

Methods

The most important part of a study, arguably, is the methods used. If research is not set up in an organized and mindful way, the study, no matter how important the topic, will ultimately run risk for failure. To make sure this study does not fall short, a series of methods will be used to help defend and support our ultimate research question.

Obviously, the population used in this study is American boys aged 8-12 years old. Due to funding and messaging constraints, our sample will be limited to Virginia's 6th congressional district. This location was chosen as it hosts a range of socio-economic statuses, as well as urban and rural locations. The district is also very close in location to the researchers and will make it easier to conduct in-person surveys in the future. In order to find a diverse sample, we will send a letter about our study and demographics to all private and public elementary and middle schools in the district. The letter will not specifically state the details of the study, but rather a broad explanation of the overarching point of the research. From there, school districts can decide how best to administer the message, but most likely it will be either in class to students or via email to parents within the sample demographic.

Any potential person who is interested in the study will submit a small form to be included in our population group. The form will essentially be demographical information, such as race, socio-economic status, location and age. Although a very small sample will be chosen from this overall population, anyone who submits this form will be automatically entered in a raffle to win a \$25 Amazon gift card. It is imperative, especially with volunteer-based research studies, that individuals can gain something from participating. This will help to increase our population size and ultimately create a more diverse sample group,

After receiving the population data, stratified random sampling will be used to find our end sample. We chose to use this method because it is the best way to make sure our data mimics the actual population. We will split our population group into smaller strata for different categories. We will have a category for race (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Caucasian), ethnicity (Hispanic or Latino), socio-economic status (0-\$25,000, \$25,000-\$50,000, \$50,000-\$70,000, \$70,000-\$90,000, \$90,000-\$110,000, \$110,000-\$130,000, \$130,000-\$150,000, \$150,000-\$170,000, \$170,000-\$190,000, \$200,000+) and age (8, 9, 10, 11, 12).

From these different categories of strata, we will use a random generator to get to our official sample size of 50. This sample size will be equally represented by all different strata categories and is subject to change in size if it is necessary for our research. A sample size of 50 was chosen because it is large enough to get unique perspectives but still small enough to make it easy to do in person research. After our sample is created, we will reach out to each individual chosen and let them know they were chosen to participate. If they agree, they will fill out a confidentiality agreement and consent forms, as well as receive a basic understanding of the study. This is done for multiple reasons, but most importantly, to ensure that the safety of our sample is ensured. While this study doesn't cross any ethical lines, it is important for our sample to feel safe and secure within our study and for their perceived benefits to be higher than potential risks. If a chosen individual in the sample decides not to participate, we will return to a random generator for that specific strata and go through the same process with a new individual. Once we have our official sample and all loose ends are tied up, we will reach out to those who were not offered a spot and thank them for their time and interest in the study. Obviously, we will do this after solidifying our sample to ensure that we do not have to use someone from the

original population as a replacement for the sample. This is the best way for us to go about this and to ensure that nobody is confused by our tactic or that there is a lack of professionalism.

Next, we will send out a basic survey to our sample and ask them for a list of their favorite YouTubers and social media influencers. This will be conducted online via a supported survey browser, as it will be easier for everyone to complete on their own time. The survey will consist of a list of names of YouTubers that are typically popular with that age range. The child will have the option to click the name of every YouTuber they have heard of, and also rate how much they watch them on a Likert Scale of 1-5. 1 will be equated with “I have heard of this person but never watched a video” and 5 will be equated with “I watch this person’s videos multiple times a week.” This will help us come up with an overall understanding of what YouTubers are influencing this age group, but also who they have heard of and exposed to. The sample will also have the option to submit their own write-in responses and rank them on the Likert Scale, to ensure that we are taking into consideration all potential influencers. The list of YouTubers are as followed:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| • Ssundee | Noahmade |
| • Clumsy | SMK |
| • Grian | Power DF |
| • Daily Dose of Internet | Grinding DF |
| • Mandjtv | Troydan |
| • Somethingelseyt | Dude Perfect |
| • Odd Ones Out | Jacksepticeye |
| • Black Gryphon | Markiplier |
| • Patty Mayo | Ryan Higa |
| • Little Z | PewDiePie |
| • Tekking101 | Shane Dawson |
| • Superbowser Logan | Joey Graceffa |
| • Luna | KSI |
| • Davidparody | AndrewSchrock |
| • Coryxkeshin | Smosh |
| • Cuda Cuda | Dan TDM |
| • Loveliveserve | Ryan’s World |

After receiving the results from the survey, the researchers will monitor the channels of the most popular YouTubers from the list over the course of the next two months. We will watch through channels, set Google Alerts for their YouTube and personal names and ultimately work to find out what their channels are about. By doing this, we will get a better understanding of the content these social media influencers produce. We will also pay close attention to their social media pages outside of YouTube and collect data from the comments sections of videos and posts. Through all of this research and data collection, we expect to find content that supports our ultimate research question, ultimately proving that the celebrities children pay attention to help to further perpetuate a toxic masculinity culture.

Three months after our original survey, we will reach back out to the original sample and work to conduct in-person interviews. Since these interviews will require more work, we will provide each individual with a \$50 Visa gift card. This is in part to help cover potential travel expenses, but mostly to encourage them to actually travel for the study. Given that our district is not too large, it should not be difficult for them to get to our research lab.

One or two of our researchers will interview each individual. This part of the research process will hopefully help us get a sense of where each person's personal values and beliefs lie, and moreover, if they are in line with our previous research. We will have them fill out a survey on a Likert Scale with ranges 1-7, 1 being "I completely disagree," and 7 as "I completely agree." We will then have an interview portion after the survey, where the researchers will ask the individuals open-ended questions about their answers and why they ultimately chose what they did. This will hopefully help us get a better idea of why our sample thinks the way they do and if it is in agreement with our initial research question. Some of the research questions that will be asked, include, but are not limited to:

1. It's okay for boys to cry
2. If someone doesn't look and act like me, it's okay for me to mistreat them
3. It's wrong for pink to be a boy's favorite color
4. It's okay to be homosexual
5. I look up to the YouTubers I watch
6. I care what other people think about me
7. My parents and friends will support me no matter how I act
8. Boys and girls are equal
9. When I was little, some of my favorite toys were trucks or action figures
10. I feel pressure to fit in with my peers

After receiving the answers to these questions and getting some more information via the open-ended section, our researchers will then compile all of our composed data. We will see if our data ultimately supports our original research question and if it does, how we can best conclude that. Through our findings, we also hope to gain insight on gender stereotypes and societal norms, as well as the media that children are ingesting. While the methods portion of our study is extremely detailed and requires a lot of work, it is imperative to do this to make sure we have the most accurate results. All of our methods will aid in helping us come up with final conclusions and to support our overall data, which is so important for a study that has never been done before.

Theoretical frameworks typically drive research and this study is no different. Ultimately, our study is being guided by concepts rooted in Masculinities studies. By definition, "Masculinities studies is a vibrant, interdisciplinary field of study broadly concerned with the social construction of what it means to 'be a man'," (Kimmel, Bridges, 2011). Masculinities studies is said to be a feminist inspired theory, and one that ultimately studies how men are taught to act, behave, and exist in modern day society. This theory feels close to home to me as a researcher and is ultimately what led me to choose a research question based in it. My own personal research is constantly rooted in Feminist theories and I am constantly looking at why and how

women's struggles are so prominent in modern-day society. I have looked at ways that toxic masculinity, my original inspiration for this study, can create an intolerant culture for women and their relationship with men far too many times. With this research study, however, I chose to take a different approach and look at how these beliefs can actually hurt the men acting within it, whether they realize it or not. What ultimately drives my research is the potential to expose the social structures and role models our society encourages for what they really are. Falling into a rigid belief system can create an intolerant mindset for men and ultimately limit their capabilities and happiness. While this study is mainly rooted in Masculinities studies, we draw inspiration from Feminist studies as well as Queer theory. Ultimately, this study has backings in a great deal of different theoretical frameworks that all work to expose the injustices different groups in our society may face.

The methods listed above are best suited for our research because they will help us fully understand all the moving parts of this study. While the research is specifically analyzing the role of social media on toxic masculinity mindsets in younger boys, there are so many different factors that create a belief system. Our methods acknowledge that there are a lot of different sources we must look at and our research intends to do so. In addition, by asking questions about gay marriage, bullying, and social norms, researchers have a better understanding of the individual's mindset as an overall whole, which can help us understand specific data. While it's difficult to analyze one factor in a situation that has so many, the methods chosen for this research will make sure we provide as accurate findings as possible.

Annotated Bibliography

Conry-Murray, C. (2015). Children's Judgements of Inequitable Distributions That Conform to Gender Norms. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, July 2015, Vol. 61, No. 3, pp. 319-344.

Conry-Murray's research ultimately begs the age-old question: "are boys and girls treated differently?" The study looks at differential treatment based on the perceived interests and abilities of different sexes and takes it one step further to examine if children are aware of these expectations. The study relates to our research as it looks to examine the gender roles that society pushes onto individuals. The study ultimately finds that those with authority often view boys and girls as different and expects different things from them, even from a young age. Overall, the study does a great job of explaining gender norms and how and why they are so prominent.

Dasgupta, D. (2018). Gender Portrayal in Age of Social Networking Sites: An Analytical Discussion. *Amity Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 8(1).

This analytical discussion attempts to tackle how gender roles and societal norms have been changed or further provoked due to social media. Dasgupta uses a theoretical approach to discuss how women are shaped by their involvement and portrayal in social media. Essentially, the discussion looks to see how various aspects pertaining to gender portrayal in the age of social media exists and examines other literature to do so. This relates to my study, as it is directly related to gender roles and social media norms. While this discussion is looking to explain how social media has changed these gender roles, the main conclusions drawn from the article is that social media continues to create stereotypical gender roles, which in turn, allows for negative beliefs and biases to continue to be spread.

Espelage, D., Low, S., Van Ryzin, M., Polanin, J. (2015). Clinical Trial of Second Step Middle School Program: Impact on Bullying, Cyberbullying, Homophobic Teasing, and Sexual Harassment Perpetration. *School Psychology Review*, (2015), Vol. 44, pp. 464-479.

This study attempted to look at how concept such as bullying, cyberbullying, homophobic name-calling, and sexual harassment perpetuates in middle schools. The study took place over the course of three years and looked at how self-reported delinquency across middle schools affected the above concepts. The researchers found that the middle schoolers who reported low levels of delinquency also saw significant decreases in bullying, cyberbullying and homophobic name calling, essentially drawing comparisons between more problematic children and the way they treat others. The overarching research conducted in this study doesn't relate to our research as much as the smaller findings. The study found that the number of students who experience or contribute to bullying, cyberbullying, homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment was in line with our personal research and beliefs on the subject matter. The researchers do a great job of shining light on how real these mindsets are in middle schools and that we as a society should be doing more to control it.

Ingram, K., Davis, J., Espelage, D., Hatchel, T., Merrin, G., Valido, A., Torgal, C. (2018).

Longitudinal Associations Between Features of Toxic Masculinity and Bystander Willingness to Intervene in Bullying Among Middle School Boys. *Journal of School Psychology* 77 (2019), 193-151.

The following study attempts to explain the correlation between toxic masculinity and bullying in middle schools, but more specifically, how the mindset affects a bystander willingness to intervene. The study uses growth mixture modeling to examine the heterogeneity

of middle school boys and broke them up into three classes based on their levels of dominance and pro-bullying attitudes. In relation to our research, this study shows that many boys do perpetuate this culture or experience it from their peers. Many students from this study had experiences with bullying via their peers, but even more students seemed to be creating the bullying atmosphere. At the same time, the study showed that although many students are exposed to this type of behavior, it does not affect everyone, and a lot of middle school boys turn a blind eye to it. This study helps to further explain how toxic masculinity is engrained in our middle schools and how it is hurting American youth.

Kimmel, S. M. (2003). Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity. *Rethinking Foundations: Theorizing Sex, Gender, and Sexuality*.

Kimmel's chapter comes from a book that attempts to explain and theorize sex, gender, and the social constructs that confine these topics. While the scholarship doesn't do any of its own research, it is a great resource for background knowledge of where masculinity came from and how it is rooted in our society as we know it. Kimmel discusses how masculinity as we know it is rooted in being the complete opposite of women, and how this can stimulate a culture that doesn't support men with more "feminine qualities." This chapter directly relates to my research, as it explores the constructs that created the concepts of toxic masculinity and feminism as we know it. It looks to explore how this normalized gender roles have created a society rooted in homophobia and toxic masculinity and is an important foundational piece to aid in understanding as we move forward with research.

Mischel, J., Kitsantas, A., (2018). Middle School Students' Perceptions of School Climate, Bullying Prevalence and Social Support and Coping. *School Psychology of Education* (2020), 23:51-72.

Mischel and Kitsantas' article is aimed at understanding how middle schoolers perceive their school climate and it's response to bullying and social support. The study ultimately found that there is a large prevalence of teasing, victimization and bullying in schools and that this behavior can lead to a difficulty with coping and an overall frustration with the way the school handles aggressive behaviors. This study relates to our research because it dives into what it's actually like inside a middle school and how students are treated by their peers. This study sheds light, not only on how prevalent bullying and homophobia is in middle school, but how poorly the administration is handling the situation. If those with authority are instigating and perpetuating a toxic masculinity culture in schools, it can directly translate to how society as a whole does this as well. Overall, this study is a great piece for actually understanding what it's like to be a middle schooler in modern times.

Parent, C. M., Gobble, D. T., & Rochlen, A. (2019). Social Media Behavior, Toxic Masculinity and Depression. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 20(3), 277-287.

In this study, researchers look to examine how the use of social media can affect men and male paradigms. The researchers chose a sample of 402 men to see how social media and social networks can create positive or negative reactions among toxic masculinity views and depression within men. The study found that positive online behaviors were associated negatively with typical and masculine depression, and negative online behaviors were associated positively with typical and masculine depression. More frequent social media use was associated with traditional

depression and masculine externalizing depression. Toxic masculinity was found to be directly associated with negative online behaviors, therefore men who strongly endorsed a dominance-heterosexism viewpoint were more likely to report negative online interactions. This article very clearly relates to my research plan as it discusses social media in relation with toxic masculinity norms. While this article studies older men, it can give readers a taste to what younger boys can eventually become.

Rivera, A., Scholar, J. (2019). Traditional Masculinity: A Review of Toxicity Rooted in Social Norms and Gender Socialization. *Advances in Nursing Science*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. E1-E10.

Rivera and Scholar's article essentially attempts to explain how traditional masculinity has been perpetuated in modern-day society and has created a toxic mindset for many. The article looks at what is defined as traditional masculinity, male theory, social norms, and the different types of masculinity to help explain how and why it is toxic. While the paper attempts to make a multitude of claims, its main purpose is to recognize how traditional masculinity can become toxic and that there needs to be a greater understanding of social and gender norms behind the concept. This relates perfectly to our conducted research because at its core, our study works to understand how toxic masculinity has infiltrated our lives. While we focus more on younger children and this article focuses on all people, a great deal of important lessons can be drawn from this study and help us understand our own personal research.

Swanson, E. (2019). Rape, Representation, and the Endurance of Hegemonic Masculinity.

Violence Against Women 2019, Vol 25(13) 1613-1630.

Swanson's article focuses on stereotypes that have been around for centuries and how these views have created a culture that perpetuates sexual assault. The article focuses mainly on how soldiers use sexual assault as a form of violence during wars and how it has been used as a form of power for as long as historically documented. The article also focuses on how current belief systems, such as toxic masculinity perpetuates this concept and make it difficult for both parties to escape gender norms. Although this article is focused on something very different than my research study, it provides a perfect example of what toxic masculinity can become. My research focuses primarily on young boys but holds so much importance because the mindset developed at a young age can follow children for years to come. By showing that a mindset like the one discussed in this article can come out of a belief system created from a young age, the audience will have a better understanding of how severe toxic masculinity really is.

Wright, F. M. (2020). The Role of Technologies, Behaviors, Gender, and Gender Stereotype Traits in Adolescents' Cyber Aggression. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 35(7-8), 1719-1738.

Wright's study focuses mainly on the impact of gender and the stereotypes associated with them in relation to technology, specifically social networking sites and video gaming consoles. The article essentially finds that boys are more likely to engaged in aggressive behavior and verbal aggression through online gaming. This is directly related to my research, as I focus mainly on different video gaming YouTubers as a means of perpetuating toxic masculinity in young boys. This article shows that boys will still engage in this behavior when

playing alone and not watching a video, most likely in direct relation to what they were taught via their social media influencers. Wright selected four random schools from a list of over 200 within Chicago and used adolescents from those selected schools within his study. The findings essentially revealed that boys with more “masculine” traits engaged in more hacking behaviors and negative talk all around.

Kimmel, M., Bridges, T. (2011, July 27). *Masculinity*. Oxford Bibliographies,

<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0033.xml>

Skočajić M., Radosavljević J., Okičić M., Janković I., Žeželj I. (2019). Boys Just Don't! Gender Stereotyping and Sanctioning of Counter-Stereotypical Behavior in Preschoolers. *Sex Roles* (2020), 82:163-172.