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### Hyper Masculinity; Influences and Prevention in Children

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# Hyper masculinity; influences and prevention in children.

Brittany Doherty

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### **Abstract**

This article is a research piece on hyper masculinity. It will discuss what hyper masculinity is, how it effects our society and the ways that we can prevent it. This is a review of many other articles pertaining to hyper masculinity. It also includes my attempt at combating hyper masculinity stemming from childhood interactions and beliefs. Research states that masculinity is engrained into our children at a young age. This masculinity can transform to hyper masculinity in young men due to simple influences. It is important to combat this behavior at all stages of development. This article will focus on the young school age, however it is still important for programs with in older grades. Interactions between both young children themselves as well as their teachers and parents is important.

**Introduction:**

Masculinity is seen as a rejection of femininity, the caregiving and nurturing components of a mother (Kaufman, 2014). There have been many studies that look into masculinity that correlated masculine beliefs to sexual and nonsexual violence (Brown, 2016). These studies state that masculinity is not a 'standalone' construct but collated into many different subtypes (Brown, 2016). In one study a 64 year old professor asked his undergrad students two very similar questions; what does it mean to be a 'good man'? And when does it take to be a 'real man'? (Bennett, 2015). The responses that he was given were drastically different. To be a good man he was told meant to be 'caring, putting others before yourself and being honest' (Bennett, 2015). However if you were to be a 'real man' you needed to take charge, be authoritative, take risks, and most importantly never cry or show weakness (Bennett, 2015). It is found in many different sources that masculinity and this idea that feminine traits show weakness are programed into our children at a very young age. Males are 'higher in status', they work their way up into administration (Pruit, 2014). If they are found as being feminine or homosexual it threatens their image, and they will be taken advantage of (Pruit, 2014). Masculinity itself is not harmful however when it turns to hyper masculinity it is very harmful to those around the individual.

**What is Hyper Masculinity?**

Hyper masculinity was introduced by Mosher and Sirkin in 1984 (Brown, 2016). The prefix hyper referring to over or beyond, excessive (Brown, 2016). Hyper masculinity is described as a threat used to gain control, respect and power (Brown, 2016). Hyper masculinity is often found in correlation to sexual and nonsexual violence among males. This often leads to males making impulsive decision to commit an act of violence (Brown, 2016). Two very

prominent traits of hyper masculinity are, feelings of isolation and compulsion for viral notoriety (Reiner, 2016). Hyper masculinity is often a consequence of physical or financial accomplishment or suppression emotions and needs. We predisposition our children to think masculinity is something that they need, causing an increase in hyper masculinity.

Hyper masculinity can be linked to men's violence against other men as well as internalized violence of a male against himself (Kaufman, 2014). There are many different victims in regards to hyper masculinity, there is not a specific type of individual that is targeted however there are traits that are targeting when picking the victim. Many individuals that are targeted due to hyper masculinity are physically weaker, vulnerable (Kaufman, 2014). Likely targets are not limited to a specific religion, sex or nationality however a child, women, gay individuals and immigrants are often targeted by someone experiencing hyper masculinity (Kaufman, 2014). Due to hyper masculinity men typically have a lower life expectancy, if the deaths due to hyper masculinity are removed (death from violence, speeding and death from tension related diseases) a male's life expectancy will increase three to four years (Bennett, 2015).

### **Hyper Masculinity and Society**

This hyper form of masculinity negatively effects society in a variety of ways. In *The Seven P's Of Men's Violence* by Michael Kaufman, Kaufman discusses the seven p's to men's violence, all of which stem from hyper masculinity. These p's are correlated to violence by males on others of society. Patriarchal power, the first of the seven p's determines that violence is used in male society to determine a pecking order (Kaufman, 2014). Men's violence has been used to ensure the continuation of 'privileges' that they receive from being more masculine (Kaufman, 2014). Although today we are seeing an emergence of metrosexual individuals and

fathers that stay at home we are unable to completely remove the tough guy mantra (Reiner, 2016).

Another 'p' that Kaufman writes about is privilege. Male's sense of privilege is shown through hyper masculinity when a man will beat his wife for not having dinner on the table one time, or when he feels like physical pleasure is something that he is entitled to. Males experiencing hyper masculinity often feel a sense of entitlement to be waited on by their significant other. These leads to an increase in domestic abuse and sexual assault in the population (Kaufman, 2014). This sort of privilege often takes form in older males, starting in high school and progressing into college and adulthood.

Another important factor that is discussed in research is the permission young males receive to be violent. Young males are often influenced by the type of media they watch. The TV shapes children's perceptions to the world around them, often today shows promote that masculinity is the polar opposite of femininity (Myers, 2012). Media often serve as an unvoiced permission for males to act more violently, traditional masculine characters lurk in the back ground, or are seen as the main character in media (Myers, 2012). In the media, acts of violence are celebrated in many different aspects such as sports and action movies (Kaufman, 2014). Violence is often glamorized and rewarded in the cinema (Kaufman, 2014). The heroes are often extremely masculine individuals in movies today, which lead to children looking up to them. This in turn leads to the idolization of masculine features and characteristics (Myers, 2012). This glorification allows young children to believe that aggression and violence is accepted, normalizing violence (Kaufman, 2014).

## **The Cause of Hyper Masculinity**

Although the glorification of masculinity and violence does play a large role in hyper masculinity, the ‘psychic pressure cooker’ plays an even larger roll. At a young age boys are often told to ‘be a man’ or to ‘never cry’ (Hlavka, 2014). Starting at a young age young boys are taught to internalize all of their emotions and redirect them in anger (Kaufman, 2014). Often families will push their children to participate in contact sports. During this time at their sport practices as well as at home we tell young children not to cry or to act like a ‘big boy’. They use the media influenced images of what a big boy is. This leads often to aggression and the internalization of other emotions (Kaufman, 2014). Unfortunately the negative effects of this behavior and pressure are often negative for the males experiencing this and in turn hyper masculinity. Men often have violent responses to many emotions including but not limited to; fear, hurt, insecurity, pain, rejection or belittlement (Kaufman, 2014). These behaviors are a learned survival technique, we cannot blame the individual for the origins of this behavior. However we should be holding them accountable (Martin, 2015). We should not overlook situations because ‘boys will be boys’ (Hlavka, 2014).

### **Solving the Problem:**

#### **In the School:**

Schools often facilitate hyper masculine effectors. Young children often are teased, and called names in school settings (Myers, 2012). For young boys at the elementary school age being called a girl is the worst thing they can imagen. However for older boys, being called a faggot, pussy, or gay is extremely demasculizing. This is not due to the actual fact of sexual difference or relations but because of the failure of masculine heteronormative behavior (Myers, 2012). When children feel as though their masculinity is being threatened they react

violently. This leads to hyper masculinity and the negative effects. Instead of allowing this behavior and socializing young boys into a culture in which this behavior and other aggression and power acts are normalized we need to stand together and combate it. In schools this could be work shops or projects like that of *The Mask You Live in* ([therepresentationproject.org](http://therepresentationproject.org)). *The Mask You Live in* curriculum allows children ages k-12 and even some college students with the critical thinking skills that will allow them to question gender stereotypes. This workshop has students define masculinity and critique gender representations and norms. They then are able to create their own positive relationships and self-concepts of what it is to be a 'real man' despite the social pressures of media ([therepresentationproject.org](http://therepresentationproject.org)). If each school were to incorporate this curriculum or even a broader aspect of it, we could start to combat hyper masculinity starting at the age of five.

### **In Every Day Life:**

Ending the violence due to hyper masculinity is going to be challenging. We have to first dismantle the structures of men power and privilege describe earlier (Kaufman, 2014). We have to redefine masculinity and remove the stereotype that males are weak if they show emotion.

There are many different organizations involving men that work in cooperation with women in reshaping gender organization (Kaufman, 2014). Many of these organisations are international and hold conferences on men and masculinities topics ranging from fatherhood to male friendships (Reiner, 2016). These programs look to empower men emotionally, teaching them it is okay to show emotions (Reiner, 2016).

Educational activities will also be a productive combat to the violence associated with hyper masculinity. These programs such as The White Ribbon Campaign, are very informative. There are many different events in relation to this campaign. During the events males reciete a pledge;



‘I pledge never to commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women.’ (whiteribbonpledge). This pledge and the actions of males participating can drastically effect violence due to hyper masculinity. It is not taking away the ‘permission’ that is received through out the media (Myers, 2012).

**What I did:**

In order to try to combate masculinity in way that I thought would be successful I created a pamphlet highlighting some of the key factors in masculinity. I then shared the pamphlet with the teachers at the school I work at. Each teacher was surprised to see some of the things that we say or do that could lead to hyper masculinity. Each teacher was given a pamphlet to read through, we then had a discussion about what they saw in the pamphlet and their thoughts. I then went more into depth about hyper masculinity and its effects on society. This workshop seemed to be very useful, I only hope that it can make a difference.

## My Workshop

### My Pamphlet:

#### What is Masculinity?

"Act Like a Man" Box		
Verbal Abuse:		Physical Abuse:
slap	tough	have money
glot	aggressive	survive ask for help
stare	competitive	angry
mama's boy	in control	isolation
	no feelings	no love
ugly	don't cry	confidence
kick	take charge	low self worth
mark	don't make mistakes	responsible
punk	have sex with women	take it
		sexual assault

#### How it effects your child:

Masculinity is often misunderstood and thrust upon young boys. When a child is a male he is placed in a 'Man Box' (pictured above) at a very young age. The child will then do anything in order to keep himself with in this box. Although they are socially constructed into this role it takes years of enforcement.

Masculinity is dangerous, if miss handled it may lead to...

- Aggressive behavior in order to stay within the box they are placed into.
- Hyper masculinity
- Male privilege or a sense of entitlement

#### Gendered Toys



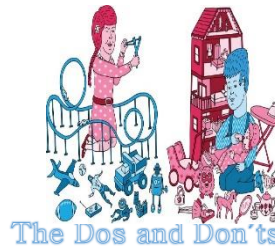
#### DOS:

- Allow the child to play with none gender confirming toys
- Encourage the child to play with toys they enjoy, not that they believe they have to play with
- Challenge stereotypes
- Tell the child it is okay to use 'girl toys', encourage it

#### DON'TS:

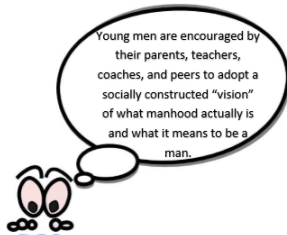
- Don't buy typical 'Boys Toys'
- Don't follow gender stereotypes, instead allow the young boys to play with a doll or let them wear a dress up skirt.

## A Teacher's Guide to Masculinity



By: Brittany Doherty

#### Watch what you say.



#### DOS:

- Support them emotionally and physically with choices they make
- Acknowledge it's okay to cry/get emotional
- Allow them to choose an activity with reinforcing approval.

#### DON'TS:

Don't say..

- "be a man"
- "Rub some dirt in it"
- "no crying"
- "you throw like a girl"

These phrases can create toxic masculinity.

#### Opposite Sex Interactions



#### DOS:

- Allow the child to have friends of all sexes
- Encourage socialization against gender norms
- Reinforce sensitive communication with the child

#### DON'TS:

- Don't stereotype his behavior or tease him
- Don't allow toxic masculine socialization
- Exclude girls from his friend groups

#### Sports

Many men throughout their life are taught that they are required to be a relentless competitive spirit. Young men learn a mindset of this belief that show what men ought to be like: physically strong, powerful, independent, self-confident, efficient, dominant, active, persistent, responsible, dependable, aggressive, and courageous.



#### DOS:

- Allow children to participate in the sports/arts that they want to do, even if they may be deemed 'feminine'

#### DON'TS:

- Force the child into a sport
- Do not allow children to bring 'sport violence' into the house or classroom
- Don't discourage feminine behavior in boys or 'tomboy' behavior in girls

**Discussion Points:**

- How masculinity effects males in their adult lives?
  - Man box
  - Domestic Violence
  - Rape
  - Assault
- What happens when masculinity is threatened?
  - Out of the man box
  - Aggression
  - They have to get back in!
- Hyper Masculinity
  - What is it?
  - Why is it bad?
- How to help prevent hyper masculinity.
  - Teachers are the molders of the next generation, do's and don'ts

**Conclusion:**

Hyper masculinity is something that greatly effects our society in the form of domestic violence, rape, and even school shootings. It is important for us to combat this negative effect. We can start having a positive influence when children are younger. Teachers are an important factor in this fight against hyper masculinity.

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