Toxic Masculinity:

How our Current System

of Gender Relations is Harmful to People

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Toxic Masculinity

Toxic masculinity is a cultural script of acceptable behaviour for men. Harmful effects of toxic masculinity arise when men internalise stereotypes associated with masculinity that are inconsistent with their inner experience, desires and understanding (Pleck, 1981). Countering masculine ideals is difficult because socialisation of men to accept these norms is so insidious that many do not realise the expectations conferred by masculine ideology are completely arbitrary and unnecessary. Feminism is not only concerned with liberating women through broadening what they can achieve, but also with liberating men from restrictive ideals of manhood contained in toxic masculinity. Outside of feminist and psychological research, however, masculinity is not widely discussed. It has been acknowledged that masculinity is 'unmarked precisely as a factor of its privilege' (Puri, 2006; cited in Peretz, 2016). This means that masculinity is at the same time universal and invisible, making it difficult to recognise, critique and understand. As such, this paper aims to draw together findings from various researchers to explore the perpetuation of toxic masculinity throughout society and the ways in which it is harmful to people.

What is Toxic Masculinity?

Across many societies, the way we view gender and gender relations are governed by a masculine/feminine binary.[1] That is, women should be feminine and men should be masculine. Femininity refers to a possession of traits that are stereotypically associated with women. For example, they should be gentle, nurturing, empathetic and sexually chaste. Masculinity, on the other hand, refers to a possession of traits that are stereotypically associated with men. While there are a number of ways to express masculinity (known as 'multiple masculinities'), hegemonic masculinity is understood as the dominant form of masculinity across cultures (Connell, 1987). This masculinity contains a script of manhood that is governed by a rigorous set of unattainable standards including that men should be stoic, physically tough, competitive, successful, able to provide for others and sexually adept. A further problem with this dominant form of masculinity is that it reflects a white,

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[1] Binaries inherently denote that one side is dominant (masculinity) and the other side is subordinate (femininity). Thus, it is important to note that traits associated with the masculine side of the binary are privileged throughout society (Levi-Strauss, 1973).

heterosexual, middle class standard (Connell, 1987), thus being restrictive in relation to cultural background, sexuality and class.

It is this form of masculinity feminists are referring to when they speak of toxic masculinity. It is toxic because the standards of manhood that it prescribes are unattainable; the idea of manhood has been described as an 'elusive ideal' (Vandello & Cohen, 2008, p. 653). It is toxic because hegemonic masculinity itself is a cultural and structural ordering of the masculine/feminine binary that reinforces and 'institutionalises men's dominance over women' and men's dominance over each other (Connell, 1987, p. 185-186; cited in Bird, 1996). In relying on the masculine/feminine binary, hegemonic masculinity ignores and invisibilises those falling outside the binary. This maintains stigma around gender fluidity, gender non-conformity, bisexuality and people who are transgender or intersex.

In formulating the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell (1987) acknowledges micro interactions may differ significantly from this dominant form of masculinity. However, she proposes key aspects of social organisation at a structural level centres on the dominance of hegemonic masculinity over femininity and other masculinities (such as homosexual masculinity) (Connell, 1987). The systemic dominance of hegemonic masculinity is linked to the perpetuation of patriarchy as one of the prevailing social structures in modernity. Accordingly, the way in which hegemonic masculinity achieves its ascendancy is complex. Hegemonic masculinity is embedded in various institutions throughout society such as mass media, religious doctrine, the labour force, welfare and taxation (Douglas, 1993). The role media and popular culture play in its dominance will be discussed later in this paper.

How is it Harmful to People?

Toxic masculinity is one of the ways in which patriarchy is harmful to people. It facilitates what has been referred to as a 'triad of violence' (Kaufman, 1987 cited in Burrell, 2016). That is, men's violence against other men, against women and against themselves. Further, it impacts men's health, wellbeing and relationships (Brooks, 2010; Hayes & Mahalik, 2000; Lease, Çiftçi, Demir, & Boyraz, 2009 cited in Pietraszkiewicz, Kaufmann & Formanowicz, 2017). Accordingly, this section will explore the various ways hegemonic masculinity is detrimental to people.

Before doing so, it is first necessary to understand the social and cultural context that sustains toxic masculinity. The dominant form of masculinity is socially

constructed and hence systemic. The social system that constructs and perpetuates toxic masculinity is patriarchy. Inherent in patriarchy is an expectation of behaviours, roles and values for men that are learned and passed down from one generation to the next through socialisation (Schumann, 2016). Thus, performing gender and gender relations in accordance with ideals of toxic masculinity is not the problem of a 'tiny number of bad men' (Flood, 2013)**.** Rather, it is the problem of ordinary men who have been taught to be complicit in a system of social relations that benefits them whilst simultaneously suppressing others (Flood, 2013).

Men's violence against other men.

Interpersonal violence between men is one of the ways toxic masculinity is harmful to men. Men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of violence, both amongst themselves and against others (Flood, 2010; Burrell, 2016). However, this violence is not inevitable or biologically innate. Rather, it is the result of a complex interplay of 'cultural, ideological, economic, political and personal forces' (Douglas, 1993). Such violence arises out of commonly held versions of manhood that are reinforced at various levels of society (Jewkes, Flood and Lang, 2014). Accordingly, the way in which toxic masculinity can materialise as interpersonal violence is complex.

One explanation for the emergence of masculinity as violence is the performative nature of masculinity (Vandello & Cohen, 2008). Masculinity is a social and cultural construct that is not naturally attained upon maturation of boys to men, but requires constant performance in order to be earned and maintained (Gilmore, 1990; cited in Vandello & Cohen, 2008). Vandello and Cohen (2008) propose that men use violence against other men as a response to real or perceived threats to social standing in order to uphold stereotypical standards of manhood, such as physical toughness**.** The performance of masculinity is not peculiar, as the very nature of gender and gender expression is something society expects people to perform.[2] Hostile interpersonal behaviour is also understood as a projective psychological defence to the unattainability of masculinity (Mahalik, Cournoyer, DeFranc, Cherry & Napolitano, 1998 cited in Hayes & Mahalik, 2000). Toxic masculinity materialising as violence against other men evidences one of the ways in which it is harmful to men.

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[2] The way society expects people to perform their gender is problematic, especially for people who are gender diverse or non-binary.

Homophobic violence.

An exploration of homophobic violence and violence against people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities is illustrative of the way in which hegemonic masculinity dominates other expressions of masculinity and is therefore harmful to people. Homophobia is still rife across many societies and cultures. People who identify as LGBTIQ experience violence, harassment and bullying at rates higher than the general population (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014). Ratele (2014) states that homophobic violence is a tool used to protect and maintain hegemonic masculinity. He reads homophobic violence as an expression of the frustration of the unattainability of hegemonic masculinity (Ratele, 2014). Homophobic violence allows the perpetrator to perform heterosexuality by distancing themselves from homosexuality as well as male expressions of femininity (Ratele, Shefer, Strebel and Fouten, 2010).

Further, people who are transgender experience even greater levels of physical and non-physical violence than people who are homosexual (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014). This demonstrates a broader stigma around human experience that falls outside the narrow confines of the masculine/feminine binary. Homophobic and transphobic violence therefore exemplify how hegemonic masculinity is harmful to people and the way in which expressions of hegemonic masculinity serve to reinforce the binary of gender relations.

A review of perceptions of sexually assaulted male people further illuminates the dominance of hegemonic masculinity over homosexual masculinity. Davies and Rogers (2006) found that male people who had experienced rape and who are homosexual are judged to be more at fault than male people who had experienced rape and who are heterosexual (Davies & Rogers, 2006). Further, those who had experienced rape who are homosexual and also effeminate are judged to be more at fault than those who are homosexual but 'straight-acting' (Davies & Rogers, 2006, p. 375). These homophobic perceptions of rape and violence further elucidate hegemonic masculinity's dominance over subordinate masculinities and femininities and the harmful effects this dominance has on people.

Violence (including sexual violence) against women.

Toxic masculinity also contributes to men's violence against women. This is because violence against women arises out of norms within which men are socialised;

the way men are taught to behave and the way men are taught to view women (Flood, 2013). It is not possible to explore the way in which hegemonic masculinity is linked to violence against women without acknowledging the widespread incidence of gender inequality and sexism across societies and cultures. Men's violence against women is inherently gendered for the fact that physical and sexual violence could be 'perpetrated by anyone, against anyone but are committed by men against women in uniquely systemic and structured ways' (Burrell, 2016, p. 70). This means gender, gender inequality, toxic masculinity and violence against women are 'inextricably linked' (Sharma & Das, 2016, p. 7).

A number of examples serve to explain these links. First, a global view of men's violence against women demonstrates that rates of violence are higher in societies with rigid constructions of the gender binary and strong policing of manhood (Flood, 2013). In societies with rigid gender roles, men are more likely to be career-focused while their female partners are more likely to take on the role of housekeepers, wives and mothers (Flood, 2013). The unpaid domestic labour performed by women in these societies perpetuates power imbalances as the female partner becomes economically dependent on her male partner. In fact, male economic dominance in the family sphere is one of the strongest predictors of violence against women (Heise, 1998 cited in Flood, 2013).

In following these rigid gender roles, women are also socialised to feel responsible for her male partner's emotional and sexual needs (Flood, 2013). Men's pressure and coercion of women into sex relies on the assumption that men are entitled to access women's bodies (Burrell, 2016; Flood, 2013). This male entitlement stems from the dominance of men over women inherent in patriarchal social relations and embedded in hegemonic masculinity. Accordingly, if a woman refuses to fulfil a man's emotional and sexual needs that he feels entitled to, performance of physical and sexual violence against women is used to maintain dominance. The impact of men's violence against women is that it reinforces and maintains the dominance of hegemonic masculinity as well as unequal social relations.

The use of sexual violence and harassment against women as an expression of male-to-male solidarity is another example illustrating the link between gender, gender inequality, toxic masculinity and violence against women. Socialisation of boys and men in particular peer cultures 'foster and justify abuse' and promote

violence against women (Flood, 2008, p. 342). Such peer cultures have been identified in male prisons, college fraternities, male rugby, the Royal Australian Navy and the Australian Defence Force (Thurston, 1996, Boswell and Spade, 1996, Muir and Seitz, 2004, Agostino, 1997 cited in Flood, 2008). They are also present in informal peer groups (Gardner, 1995 cited in Flood, 2013). Just as men's violence against other men arises out of the performative aspect of masculinity, men's physical and sexual violence against women is performative. This performance again serves the function of maintaining dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity.

Specific aspects of these male-to-male peer cultures are characterised by various problematic behaviours and norms, which perpetuate toxic masculinity and violence against women. In particular, the boasting of a man's sexual exploits of women is an important aspect of male bonding across male social groups (Bird, 1996; Boswell and Spade, 1996 cited in Flood, 2008). Interviews with convicted rapists specifically elucidate this point (Scully, 1990 cited in Flood, 2013). Further, the policing of manhood in these peer cultures results in many men who have non-sexual relations with women being 'homosexualised and feminized' by other men (Flood, 2008, p. 245). Men's violence against women can also be practiced collectively (Flood, 2013). At its extreme; this is discernible through instances of gang rape but also includes street sexual harassment such as catcalling and wolf whistling and other more insidious forms of violence or harassment (Flood, 2013).

Without disregarding the validity of the adult industry and sex work as a legitimate form of work, Flood (2008) also points to some particularly problematic social practices that serve to consolidate male-to-male social bonds whilst simultaneously objectifying women. These include watching pornographic movies together, sharing sexually explicit content, harassing women on the street from their cars, going to strip shows and frequenting brothels together. Ultimately, many aspects of male homosociality reinforce ideals of manhood constructed by hegemonic masculinity. These relations form the foundation on which violence and harassment against women can be reproduced.

Men's violence against themselves: Male suicide.

Whilst more women attempt suicide each year, men are more likely to be successful in their attempts (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; World Health

Organization, 2015). This data adds further weight to the claim that toxic masculinity is harmful to men. A number of links can be drawn between hegemonic masculinity and suicide. First, adherence to stereotypically masculine traits such as emotional detachment, stoicism, risk-taking and sensation seeking can increase propensity for suicide amongst males. Further, toxic masculinity confers social roles that are difficult for most males to fulfil. Finally, hegemonic masculinity's dominance over other masculinities such as homosexual masculinity is linked to higher suicide rates amongst LGBTIQ populations than the general population.

>   *Adherence to stereotypically masculine traits and suicide.*

As mentioned earlier, emotional detachment and stoicism are stereotypical traits associated with men through hegemonic masculinity. Bird (1996) found that the most highly stigmatized behaviours in male homosociality are those that are associated with expressions of intimacy, such as talking about feelings. Expressing feelings is something that is seen as feminine and weak and is therefore suppressed (Bird, 1996). In her interviews with men, Bird (1996) found that violating this social norm often results in ostracism from one's male social group. Conversely, suppression of emotion signifies strength, a trait associated with manhood. Suppressing emotions and feeling unable to seek help and support for their problems can increase a man's capability for suicide (Granato, Smith & Selwyn, 2014). This occurs because without help, those who adhere to masculine gender norms must cope by relying only on themselves, which leads to problems when self-reliance inevitably becomes an insufficient coping mechanism (Granato et al., 2014).

Other typical masculine behaviours include risk-taking and sensation seeking. These traits have been linked to the gender discrepancy in suicide rates as adherence to these norms results in higher pain tolerance and impulsivity, thus leading to an acquired capability for suicide (Alabas et al., 2012; Cazenave, Le Scanff, & Woodman, 2007; Öngen, 2007 cited in Granato, et al., 2014). Consequently, adherence to behavioural norms encapsulated in hegemonic masculinity is linked to higher rates of suicide amongst men.

>   *Increased capability for suicide through expected social roles.*

Toxic masculinity is also linked to male suicide rates by presupposing social roles upon men that cannot be fulfilled. Two examples are illustrative of this idea. First, inherent in hegemonic masculinity is the idea that men should be able to provide

for others. This aspiration is problematic, especially for men of a lower socioeconomic status (SES) (Jewkes et al., 2014). There is evidence of male suicide rates following a linear SES-suicide gradient, where suicide rates increase as SES decreases (Taylor, Page, Morrell, Harrison & Carter, 2005). The gradient remains the same even after controlling for demographic factors, country of birth and rurality (Taylor et al., 2005). Interestingly, the linear SES-suicide gradient is not evident in female suicide rates (Taylor et al., 2005).

Second, hegemonic masculinity places unachievable social roles upon men by expecting success in the delivery of their duties. As Douglas (1993) observes, the majority of the world's generals, admirals, bureaucrats and politicians are men. Men are also seen across many cultures as the head of the family (Douglas, 1993). While this confers a great amount of social power upon men, there is an expectation imparted by hegemonic masculinity that men cannot make mistakes in the delivery of their duties as heads of institutions and families (Vandello & Cohen, 2008). Due to the performative aspect of masculinity, a decreased sense of personhood and identity may arise if mistakes are made (Vandello & Cohen, 2008; Bird, 1996). The significant link between men and their value of power may compound feelings of failure (Pietraszkiewicz et al., 2017). Adherence to the masculine norm of success and power is not directly linked to suicide, but does promote exposure to painful life events, which increases capability for suicide amongst men (Granato et al., 2014). Ultimately, toxic masculinity's unachievable social roles lead to a range of harmful consequences for men, including an acquired capability for suicide.

Diverse sexualities, masculinities and suicide.

Finally, hegemonic masculinity is related to higher rates of suicide amongst people in the LGBTIQ population than in the general population (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2016). As explained earlier, hegemonic masculinity exists relationally to subordinate masculinities and femininities, such as homosexual masculinity (Connell, 1987). Expressions of homosexuality or diverse sexuality therefore exist outside of the script of expected behaviour imparted by hegemonic masculinity. This is supported by the social and cultural norm that individuals of a social identity not encapsulated in the dominant ideology are not tolerated (World Health Organisation, 2009). Consequently, suicide rates amongst people who identify as LGBTIQ represent another problematic link between toxic masculinity and suicide.

Men's health, wellbeing and relationships.

Negative impacts on men's health, wellbeing and relationships arise as a result of internalising stereotyped masculine norms that they cannot achieve. The gender-role strain paradigm, developed by Pleck (1981), proposes that psychological strain arises when gender expectations are contradictory or unattainable. This psychological strain impacts on men's health, wellbeing and relationships in a number of ways. It has been linked to higher rates anxiety and depression (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Davis, 1998; Good & Mintz, 1990; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991; Simonsen, Blazina & Watkins, 2000 cited in Hayes & Mahalik, 2000) as well as alcohol abuse (Blazina & Watkins, 1996 cited in Hayes & Mahalik, 2000). It also inhibits men's likelihood to seek help and support in instances of ill-health (Courtenay, 2000).

Further, some men have expressed social discomfort caused by an inability to express affection or emotionality toward other men (Hayes & Mahalik, 2000). The consequence of this is twofold. First, men feel unable to express emotionality to other men. Second, men feel uncomfortable when other men are emotionally expressive toward them. This is perpetuates stoic behaviour, which is contained in the script of hegemonic masculinity, but is contradictory to true human experience.

Finally, conformity to hegemonic masculinity is linked to lower intimacy and lower relationship satisfaction, especially with women (Campbell & Snow, 1992; Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Rochlen & Mahalik, 2004; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991; Sharpe, Heppner & Dixon, 1995 cited in Burn & Ward 2005). Restrictive emotionality contained in the script of hegemonic masculinity can lead to feelings of distance and a lack of understanding between partners (Burn & Ward, 2005). Accordingly, men's socialisation within the dominant masculine ideology can lead to gender-role strain, which has a number of harmful consequences on men's health, wellbeing and relationships.

Popular Media's Reinforcement of Toxic Masculinity

As noted earlier, the way in which hegemonic masculinity achieves its ascendency is complex. Ideals of manhood encapsulated in hegemonic masculinity are reinforced and perpetuated throughout societies and cultures at various levels. Because of its pervasiveness, the media's role in reinforcing toxic masculinity is particularly significant. As a powerful institution, the media is part of a broader, structural conditioning of boys and men. Analysis of the media in this context reveals

how popular media and commercial pornography reinforce narrow archetypes of manhood. Further, the media's use of language invisibilises toxic masculinity's role in various phenomena.

Depictions of men in popular media.

Looking to depictions of men in popular media assists in understanding the dominant form of masculinity and the expectations it places upon men. The imagery and narratives of manhood presented by the media are widespread but extremely limited. Examples can be found in advertising, popular film, television and sports. These narratives are particularly restrictive in relation to men of colour.

Advertising reinforces problematic ideals of manhood to appeal men to certain products. One of the most pervasive advertising figures in the world is the Malboro Man (Jhally, 1999). He is a rugged individualist, keen for adventure and epitomises strength and prowess; encompassing many of the reductive attributes contained in hegemonic masculinity (Jhally, 1999; Connolly, 2011). Utilising the hyper-masculine image of the Malboro Man proved a successful way of distancing the product of filtered cigarettes from its previous perceptions of femininity (Connolly, 2011). More recent advertising of protein, strength and muscle-building products reproduce the idea that physical strength, size and muscularity are integral aspects of manhood.

In film and television, there is no shortage of imagery of violent men and sexualised violence against women. Various action films portray stoic and violent men as heroes (e.g. James Bond films, Rambo, Die Hard**,** Dirty Harry, recent portrayals of Batman). Further, the slasher film archetype includes scenes of girls undressing with provocative camera angles at the moment the woman is assaulted (Jhally, 1999). These films sexualise violence, thus presenting violence in a way that is enticing and exciting for heterosexual male viewers (Jhally, 1999). Even romantic comedies have humourised men's violence against women. The film 'There's Something About Mary' portrays a woman being stalked by various different men, yet is presented as light-hearted and humorous, thus normalising men's violence against women (Jhally, 1999). Accordingly, advertising, film and television portray limited images of manhood, which reinforce narrow ideas of what it means to be a man.

Nonetheless, the portrayal of the hyper-masculine, violent male person is not limited to advertising, film and television. A glance at two prominent sporting events

in 2017 shows how sporting culture is underpinned by ideals of toxic masculinity. First, the recent boxing match between Floyd Mayweather Junior and Conor McGregor involved months of widely publicised pre-match slurs between the contenders. This maintains the association between physical toughness, strength, violence and aggression inherent in toxic masculinity. Further, the 2017 Tour de France showed the daily winner of the jersey on a podium with women in little clothing applauding the man from either side. This scenario depicts an athletic sportsman being praised by beautiful women, maintaining the narrative that if a man is athletic, he will receive attention and praise from women. This reinforces the expectation that manhood requires physical prowess whilst simultaneously maintaining masculinity's dominance over femininity.

Hegemonic masculinity is particularly narrow in relation to men of colour. Popular media is problematic in relation to many cultures and backgrounds because it is a system monopolised by wealthy, white men (Jhally, 1999). Thus, most common representations of men in the media are that of white, middle-class, heterosexual men. When men of differing cultural backgrounds are included in popular media, the imagery and characterisation used to present them is reproduced in very distinct ways. For example, media depictions of men who are African-American are presented as hyper-masculine, and their bodies are often glamourised and sexualised.[3] The depiction of men of Latino backgrounds is often restricted to criminals (particularly drug criminals) or other tough and stoic characters (Jhally, 1999). Men from various Asian regions are often grouped together as martial artists or hyper-intelligent beings (Jhally, 1999). Interestingly though, the media presents violence as an inherent aspect of men across cultural backgrounds, which helps reinforce the link between violence and masculinity as a universal norm. In reproducing distinct imagery of men from differing cultural backgrounds, the media reinforces expectations of men of colour that are extremely narrow and thus harmful.

Depictions of sexuality in commercial pornography.

In discussing the media's reinforcement of toxic masculinity, the narratives presented in commercial pornography cannot be ignored. There is an increasingly

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[3] The sexualisation of black male bodies has a particularly problematic historical context. Ownership and control of men (and women) of colour during slavery had their bodies being simultaneously viewed as beastly and unappealing on one hand, and hypersexual on the other (Foster, 2011).

widespread digital access to pornography for young boys and men. Data from Australia, the US and Sweden shows that pornography consumption is most common amoung young boys and men aged between 16 and 29 (Flood, 2010). Young men's consumption of pornography occurs in a context of limited formal sexual education (Gelder, 2002; cited in Flood, 2010a). Accordingly, commercial pornography is influential in shaping men's sexual practices and repertoires.

Commercial pornography reinforces the masculine/feminine binary by reproducing limited narratives about sexual practices. Commercial pornography is marketed to young, heterosexual men, thus primarily depicting heterosexual sex (Flood, 2010a). In commercial pornography, the woman is depicted as submissive whilst the man dictates and controls how the sex plays out (Mackinnon, 1983; Dines, 2010). The woman is often objectified as an instrument of male pleasure and feminine desire and pleasure is suppressed or presented only as supplementary to the narrative.

In addition, mainstream pornography reinforces myths on men's sexual adeptness, which is an integral aspect of manhood encapsulated in hegemonic masculinity. According to Brod (1990, cited in Flood, 2010a), these myths include that men are continually ready for sex, that people only experience sexual pleasure through genital stimulation and that there is a standard penis size. The limited sexual narratives have the effect of homogenizing men's sexual preferences through reinforcing what is acceptable sexual behaviour for a man (Brod, 1990; cited in Flood, 2010a). Therefore, mainstream pornography reinforces the ascendancy of masculinity over subordinate masculinities and femininity by presenting a narrow version of acceptable sexual practices, which centres on men's dominance and sexual adeptness.

Invisibility of masculinity in the media through language.

The media uses language that degenders phenomena that occur in specifically gendered ways, such as men's widespread use of violence against women. This disguises the problematic influence of hegemonic masculinity. Using the passive voice and failing to report the true cause of the crime in discussing men's physical and sexual violence against women invisibilises male perpetrators and shifts the blame to female victims (Jhally, 1999)**.** Examples include 'woman was raped', 'slain mother' or 'axe slashes family apart' (Gilmore, 2016; Gilmore 2016a). Using an active voice and representing the true cause of the crimes would lead these headlines to read 'man rapes woman', 'husband murders his wife' or 'man uses axe to slash

family apart.' In contrasting the differences between possible ways of reporting, it is apparent how the influence of gender in violence is presented as unremarkable. Thus, the media's use of language disguises the influence of hegemonic masculinity in violence against women. In doing so, problems perpetuated by ascribing to the dominant masculinity are assumed normal.

Consequently, the media reinforces toxic masculinity not only by narrowly characterising men in advertising, film, television, sports and pornography, but also by disguising its influence in phenomenon that occurs in specifically gendered ways.

An Alternate Masculinity

Toxic masculinity is harmful to all people. However, because hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated by complex systems and structures that invisibilise its absurdity as normal and universal, hegemonic masculinity maintains its dominance. Men and boys are conditioned to accept the rigorous set of unattainable standards associated with manhood. At the same time, hegemonic masculinity ascribes men a superior place in society. This means hegemonic masculinity simultaneously benefits men by affording them structural power whilst also harming them and their structural subordinates of women and people with diverse sexualities and genders. Hence, what is needed is a broader understanding of the ways in which toxic masculinity is harmful to people. Attention must be brought to the daily politics of doing gender, to bring consciousness to the unlearning of what people assume normal expressions of self. Space must be created for men to express themselves as broadly and colourfully as possible (Ford, 2017). An alternative masculinity would socialise men to respect themselves and others, to express vulnerability and shame, to have no tolerance for objectifying and degrading language and behaviour toward non-men, to know that sexually aggressive behaviour reinforces power imbalances, to practice empathy and to know that they are still men when they assume these behaviours and characteristics. The socialisation of men into hegemonic masculinity may be insidious, but social structures can be transformed.

Glossary

Hegemonic: deriving from the theory of cultural hegemony, hegemonic is an adjective used to describe something that is socially and/or culturally dominant.

Homophobia: prejudice against people who are homosexual. It can be expressed on an individual or structural level.

Homosociality: refers to social bonds between members of the same sex.

Ideology: a system of ideas and beliefs, which form the basis of a particular economic or political theory.

Micro-level: interactions that occur between individuals.

Patriarchy: the current sociological system, whereby male people hold predominant power in political, social, legal, religious and economic spheres.

Socialisation: the process by which one learns to behave, usually influenced through a mix of familial, interpersonal and societal forces.

Transphobia: prejudice against people who are transgender. It can be expressed on an individual or structural level.

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