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### Title

Toxic Masculinity in American Culture: An Analysis of Maladaptive Socialization in Childhood

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**Title: Toxic Masculinity in American Culture: An Analysis of Maladaptive Socialization in Childhood**

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**Background**

Prior to 2016, the term “toxic masculinity” rarely made an appearance in academic writing. Although the concept has been in circulation since the 1980’s, it has only recently begun to be written about in academic literature. Between 1990 and 2015, texts referring to toxic masculinity never numbered above 20 a year, mostly from non-academic sources. Toxic masculinity only began to appear in academic texts in earnest after 2016. (Harrington, C. 2021). Due to this, the concept of toxic masculinity is still regarded as relatively peripheral in academic discussions. Although definitions vary by source, toxic masculinity is defined as a set harmful belief systems and behaviors associated with the societal expectations of what a man “ought to be.” Deeply rooted in the patriarchal structure of western civilization, it is characterized by the political, economic, and social expectation that men should seek and attain power due to the alleged “superior” status of their gender.

*Socialization*

It is during the primary socialization of childhood that toxic masculinity-based belief systems are formed. The four key areas of socialization in regards to toxic masculinity are: (1) **sexual norms**, (2) **gender norms**, (3) **financial status**, and (4) **violence/dominance status**. The consequences of these belief systems that are learned in childhood are associated with a wide range of social maladies, such as violence against women (including sexual violence), mass shootings, murder, criminal enterprises, gangs, human trafficking syndicates, and even warfare.

## Study Design and Methodology

The research was designed to utilize a 20-question survey that asked questions designed to identify the strength of common messages received in childhood that support toxic masculinity. Five questions were asked for each of the four key areas of toxic-masculinity based belief systems. That is, **sexual norms**, **financial status**, **gender norms**, and **violence/dominance status**. Additionally, the survey requested that respondents try to identify the **age** at which they first remember hearing those messages, and from which **sources** they remember receiving those messages. Each question carries a weight of 5 points, for a total of 25 possible points of magnitude in each of the four categories. Multiplying the actual scores as the numerator, and the 25 points possible as the denominator, yields a toxic masculinity socialization score TMSS.

### Example Box 1

A TMSS of  $22/25=88\%$ , or an **88%** TMSS in the **sexual norms** category.  
 A TMSS of  $20/25=80\%$ , or an **80%** TMSS in the **financial status** category.  
 A TMSS of  $24/25=96\%$ , or a **96%** TMSS in the **gender norms** category.  
 A TMSS of  $23/25=92\%$ , or a **92%** TMSS in the **violence/dominance status** category.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 22/25 \\
 20/25 \\
 24/25 \\
 +23/25 \\
 \hline
 = 89/100 \text{ Total TMSS (TTMSS)}
 \end{array}$$

### Sample Population

#### Gender

The sample size of this study is comprised of 59 people, including both men and women who range in age from 18 to 46. Males comprised 51 of the 59 responses, and represent 86.4% of the population. Females comprised the remaining 8 responses, or 13.6% of the population.

#### Racial identity

Of the population surveyed, 13.6% (8 respondents) identified as “African American” or “Black”. 33.9% (20 respondents) identified as “Mexican”, “Hispanic”, or “Latino/a”. 47.4% (28 respondents) identified as “White” or “Caucasian”. And approximately 5% (3 respondents) identified as biracial white and black.

## Findings by Racial Identity

#### Aggregate Scores

The Toxic Masculinity Measurement Tool, delivered to a sample size of 8 African American men, yielded the following data:

- The average TMSS for **Sexual Norms** =  $23.125/25$ , or a **92.5%**, with an average age of receiving sexual norms messages at **10-years of age**.
- The average TMSS for **Financial Status** =  $21.125/25$ ,

MAGNITUDE /25					TOTAL %	AGE				
22	22	24	20	88		10.2	9.2	8.2	8.6	9.05
25	24	25	25	99		10.6	9.2	7.6	7.6	8.75
23	14	18	20	75		10.4	9	7	10.2	9.15
20	22	23	20	85		8.2	8.8	9	8.8	8.7
22	22	23	22	89		9.8	9	8.4	8.2	8.85
25	23	23	22	93		10.8	10.8	8.6	8.8	9.75
25	21	23	24	93		10	9.8	8.2	9.2	9.3
23	21	25	21	90		10	8.8	8.4	9.6	9.2
23.125	21.125	23	21.75	89		10	9.325	8.175	8.875	9.094

or an **84.5%**, with an average age of receiving financial status messages at **9.3 years of age**.

- The average TMSS for **Gender Norms** = 23/25, or a **92%**, with an average age of receiving gender norm messages at **8.2 years of age**.
- The average TMSS for **Violence/Dominance Status** = 21.75/25, or an **87%**, with an average age of receiving violence/dominance status messages at **8.9 years of age**.
- The total TMSS score (TTMSS) of the African American sample = **89%**, with an average age of receiving toxic masculinity-based messages at **9-years of age**.

The Toxic Masculinity Measurement Tool, delivered to a sample size of 16 “Hispanic”, “Mexican”, and “Latino” identifying men, yielded the following data:

- The average TMSS for **Sexual Norms** = 23.75/25, or a **95%**, with an average age of receiving sexual norms messages at **10.2-years of age**.
- The average TMSS for **Financial Status** = 20.3/25, or an **81.2%** with an average age of receiving financial status messages at **9.4 years of age**.
- The average TMSS for **Gender Norms** = 22.063/25, or a **88.252%**, with an average age of receiving gender norm messages at **8.3 years of age**.
- The average TMSS for **Violence/Dominance Status** = 19.438/25, or an **77.7%**, with an average age of receiving violence/dominance status messages at **9-years of age**.
- The total TMSS score (TTMSS) of the Latino male sample = **85.56%**, with an average age of receiving toxic masculinity-based messages at **9.2-years of age**.

Score					Age				
25	22	25	24	96	10.4	9.2	8.4	9	9.25
23	24	24	20	91	9.8	8.4	7.8	8.6	8.65
24	22	21	21	88	10.4	9.6	9.6	9.4	9.75
22	19	17	20	78	11	9.8	9	8.8	9.65
25	19	23	18	85	10	9.8	7.6	9.8	9.3
23	20	24	16	83	10.2	9.4	8.4	8.6	9.15
22	16	16	14	68	10.2	9.4	8.8	9.4	9.45
23	23	24	20	90	9.8	8.4	8	8.4	8.65
25	22	25	25	97	10.4	9.2	7.6	8.2	8.85
25	21	25	20	91	10	9.2	8.2	8.8	9.05
25	22	25	22	94	10	10	8.2	9.8	9.5
23	16	17	14	70	10.2	9.4	8.8	9.6	9.5
25	21	24	23	93	9.6	9.2	7.8	8.4	8.75
22	19	17	20	78	11	9.7	9	8.8	9.625
25	19	23	18	85	10	9.8	7.6	9.8	9.3
23	20	23	16	82	10.2	9.4	8.4	8.6	9.15
23.75	20.313	22.063	19.438	85.5625	10.2	9.369	8.325	9	9.223

The Toxic Masculinity Measurement Tool, delivered to a sample size of 24 “White” or “Caucasian” identifying men, yielded the following data:

- The average TMSS for **Sexual Norms** = 22.963/25, or a **91.8%**, with an average age of receiving sexual norms messages at **10.3-years of age**.
- The average TMSS for **Financial Status** = 20.519/25, or an **82%**, with an average age of receiving financial status messages at **9.4 years of age**.
- The average TMSS for **Gender Norms** = 21.926/25, or a **87.7%**, with an average age of receiving gender norm messages at **8.3 years of age**.

Score					Age				
22	20	19	17	78	10.8	9.6	8.8	9	9.55
22	20	20	17	79	10.2	9.8	9.6	10.2	9.95
20	24	23	24	91	8.4	8.4	10	9.2	9
21	19	19	17	76	9.8	9.8	8.6	9.2	9.35
23	20	19	17	79	10.2	9.6	8.4	9.2	9.35
24	19	23	16	82	10.8	9.6	7.8	8.8	9.25
24	20	24	22	90	9.8	9	8	9.6	9.1
21	20	17	16	74	11	9.6	9	9.2	9.7
25	23	22	24	94	10.4	9.4	8	9	9.2
23	20	18	15	76	10.2	9.6	8.8	9.6	9.55
25	22	20	22	89	10	9.6	7.6	10	9.3
23	18	20	17	78	11	9.8	7.8	9.4	9.5
25	20	25	22	92	9.8	9.2	8.2	9.6	9.2
22	21	22	17	82	9.8	9	8.4	9.6	9.2
25	22	25	24	96	10.6	9.2	8.6	8.4	9.2
25	19	19	18	81	10	9.8	8.4	9.4	9.4
23	18	25	23	89	10.4	8.8	8.2	10.4	9.45
22	21	23	17	83	9.8	9	9	8.4	9.05
25	20	25	17	87	10	9.6	8.2	9.2	9.25
24	19	23	16	82	10.8	9.6	7.8	8.8	9.25
25	22	25	24	96	10.6	9.2	8.6	8.4	9.2
25	22	20	22	89	10	9.6	7.6	10	9.3
12	24	25	15	76	11	9.2	7.2	4	7.85
23	18	23	20	84	11.4	10.2	7	8	9.15
23	21	22	14	80	9.6	9.2	8.2	8.6	8.9
25	21	23	17	86	9.8	9.4	8.8	9.8	9.45
23	21	23	17	84	11	9	9	9.2	9.55
22.963	20.519	21.926	18.778	84.185185	10.27	9.4	8.356	9.044	9.267

- The average TMSS for **Violence/Dominance Status** = 18.778/25, or an **75.1%**, with an average age of receiving violence/dominance status messages at **9-years of age**.
- The total TMSS score (TTMSS) of the White male sample = **84.18%**, with an average age of receiving toxic masculinity-based messages at **9.3-years of age**.

The Toxic Masculinity Measurement Tool, delivered to a sample size of 3 “White/Black” or “African American/White” identifying men, yielded the following data:

The average TMSS for **Sexual Norms** = 23.667/25, or a **94.7%**, with an average age of receiving sexual norms messages at **10.1-years of age**.

Score					Age				
23	21	22	14	80	9.6	9.2	8.2	8.6	8.9
25	21	23	17	86	9.8	9.4	8.8	9.8	9.45
23	21	23	17	84	11	9	9	9.2	9.55
23.667	21	22.667	16	83.333333	10.13	9.2	8.667	9.2	9.3

- The average TMSS for **Financial Status** = 21/25, or an **84%**, with an average age of receiving financial status messages at **9.2 years of age**.
- The average TMSS for **Gender Norms** = 22.667/25, or a **90.7%**, with an average age of receiving gender norm messages at **8.7 years of age**.
- The average TMSS for **Violence/Dominance Status** = 16/25, or a **64%**, with an average age of receiving violence/dominance status messages at **9.2-years of age**.
- The total TMSS score (TTMSS) of the White male sample = **83.33%**, with an average age of receiving toxic masculinity-based messages at **9.3-years of age**.

### Findings by Gender

Toxic Masculinity Survey Scores						Average Age Receiving Messages				
Racial ID	SN	FS	GN	VDS	Total	SN	FS	GN	VDS	Total
<b>Black</b>	23.125	21.125	23	21.75	89	10	9.325	8.175	8.875	9.094
<b>Hispanic</b>	23.75	20.313	22.063	19.438	85.5625	10.2	9.369	8.325	9	9.233
<b>White</b>	22.963	20.519	21.926	18.778	84.185	10.27	9.4	8.356	9.044	9.267
<b>Biracial</b>	23.667	21	22.667	16	83.333	10.13	9.2	8.667	9.2	9.3
<b>AVG Total</b>	23.376	20.739	22.414	18.99	85.52	10.1	9.3	8.4	9.0	9.2
<b>Female</b>	9.25	11.5	11.125	6.42	38.3	11.8	10.24	8.356	8.719	9.78
<b>AVG Total</b>	9.25	11.5	11.125	6.42	38.3	11.8	10.2	8.4	8.7	9.8

The overall sample size of this study is small, especially in regard to the number of female respondents. Nevertheless, the data was able to yield the following findings:

1. Although Toxic Masculinity affects men and women in different ways, it *does* in fact affect the belief systems that females form during primary socialization. The fact that females scored an average of 38.3 on the TMMT, validates the hypothesis that toxic masculinity affects *everyone*. In comparison, males scored an average of 85.52 on the TMMT. As expected, males scored significantly higher in every category.
2. Toxic Masculinity based messages that females receive during childhood, are the inverse of the messages that males receive. For instance, males report much higher scores on questions regarding the acquisition of multiple sexual partners. Having several sexual

partners is seen as an acceptable behavior for men, complete with elevated social status. The opposite is true for women, as they often are the recipients of severe social sanctions for the same sexual behavior as men.

3. Males recorded scores nearly three times higher than women did in regard to violence and domination status. Women recorded a score of 6.42 out of 100, which was the lowest score of all four categories. In comparison, men scored an average of 18.99. This data partially explains *why* murderers, mass shooters, serial killers, and violent criminals in general, are nearly always exclusively *male*.
4. The average TMSS scores in each category for males by racial identification are very similar. The greatest difference is in the Violence/Aggression Status measurement. However, the common theme across racial identification, is that males recorded the lowest scores in the violence/aggression status category, than any other category. Women also scored the lowest in this category. Even so, males recorded a score nearly three times higher.

Average Age of Toxic Masculinity Based Messages Being Received

		<b>Average Age Receiving Messages</b>				
		<b>SN</b>	<b>FS</b>	<b>GN</b>	<b>VDS</b>	<b>Total</b>
Black Male		<b>10</b>	<b>9.325</b>	<b>8.175</b>	<b>8.875</b>	<b>9.094</b>
Hispanic Male		<b>10.2</b>	<b>9.369</b>	<b>8.325</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9.233</b>
White Male		<b>10.27</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>8.356</b>	<b>9.044</b>	<b>9.267</b>
White Male		<b>10.13</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>8.667</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>9.3</b>
Biracial Male		<b>10.1</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>9.2</b>
		<b>11.8</b>	<b>10.24</b>	<b>8.356</b>	<b>8.719</b>	<b>9.78</b>
	All Females	<b>11.8</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>9.8</b>

1. Although there is a difference between the average ages of receiving toxic masculinity-based messages between males and females in the sample size, both genders began receiving messages in each category in the exact same order: (1) **Gender norms** (M=8.4, F=8.4); (2) **Violence/Domination Status** (M=9, F=8.70); (3) **Financial Status** (M=9.3, F=10.2); (4) **Sexual Norms** (M=10.1, F=11.8). This supports the legitimacy of the data, and the measurement tool created for this study because across *every* category of message, every racial identity, and across gender, the same pattern holds true.
2. While male and female respondents recorded the same average age for receiving toxic masculinity-based messages on **gender norms** (8.4), Interestingly, women recorded an earlier average age for receiving messages about **Violence/Domination Status**. The messages differ in that females learn *the inverse of males* in regards to violence, at an earlier age. That is, they learn that it is not socially acceptable for them to be violent or dominant.

- Male respondents reported receiving messages regarding **sexual norms** 1.7 years sooner than female respondents.
- Male respondents reported receiving messages regarding **Financial Status** nearly 1-year sooner than females.
- Across genders, the close correlation between average ages associated with **gender norms**, and **violence**, suggests that there is an especially strong connection with the use of **violence/domination**, and **gender**. These two categories also represent the earliest categories where socialization takes place for both genders.

Most Commonly Reported Sources of Toxic Masculinity-based Messages

The Toxic Masculinity Measurement Survey asked each respondent to list the top five influences of each message, ranking them from 1 to 5. Many responses recorded “U” (Unsure) responses, and many responses only listed one to three sources. For the purpose of data analysis, I took the top three sources of each toxic masculinity-based message, and counted each. The following percentages are based off of the following formula: 51 Males x 3 sources x 5 questions per category. That is:  $51 \times 3 \times 5 = 765$ . 765 equals the number of possible slots to record a source for the entire category listed. Similarly, the formula for women is 8 females x 3 sources x 5 questions per category. That is,  $8 \times 3 \times 5 = 120$ .

Source #1

<b>Primary Influencers of Sexual Norms</b>			
	<b>Friends</b>	<b>Music</b>	<b>Movies</b>
<b>Males</b>	201/765	173/765	155/765
<b>Percent of responses</b>	26.2%	22.6%	20.3%
<b>Females</b>	29/120	27/120	26/120
<b>Percent of responses</b>	24.1%	22.5%	21.6%

Source#2

<b>Primary Influencers of Financial Status</b>			
	<b>Parents/Siblings</b>	<b>Music</b>	<b>Friends</b>
<b>Males</b>	156/765	134/765	151/765
<b>Percent of responses</b>	20%	17.5%	19.7%
<b>Females</b>	28/120	16/120	24/120
<b>Percent of responses</b>	23%	13.3%	20%

Source #3

<b>Primary Influencers of Gender Norms</b>			
	<b>Parents/Siblings</b>	<b>Movies</b>	<b>Music</b>
<b>Males</b>	289/765	112/765	57/765
<b>Percent of responses</b>	37.7%	14.6%	7.4%
<b>Females</b>	54/120	8/120	4/120
<b>Percent of responses</b>	45%	6.6%	3.3%

Source#4

<b>Primary Influencers of Violence/Dominance Status</b>			
	<b>Parents/Siblings</b>	<b>Friends</b>	<b>Movies</b>
<b>Males</b>	213/765	175/765	128/765
<b>Percent of responses</b>	27.8%	22.9%	16.7%
<b>Females</b>	58/120	24/120	9/120
<b>Percent of responses</b>	48.3%	20%	2.5%

*Findings Based on Sources of Toxic Masculinity Messages During Socialization*

- Of all possible sources of these negative messages, the most frequently cited sources are:

Male		Female		Total (out of 3180)	Percent
Parents/Siblings	658	Parents/Siblings	140	798	25%
Music	364	Music	47	411	13%
Movies	395	Movies	43	438	14%
Friends	527	Friends	77	604	19%
					<b>71%</b>

- Men and women shared the same most frequently reported sources. The top four sources of toxic masculinity-based socialization for each gender are: (1) Parents/Siblings (25% of all possible source responses); (2) Friends (19% of all possible source responses); (3) Movies (14% of all possible source responses); and (4) Music (13% of all possible source responses).
- Of all possible sources, 71% can be collectively attributed to parents and siblings, friends, movies, and music. These are the most influential factors in a child’s socialization.
- When it comes to violence, children primarily learn what is appropriate from their parents and siblings. This holds true for both men and women, although women are taught the inverse message (violence is the province of men).
- The primary influence for gender norms for both genders is also parents and siblings.
- Interestingly, the primary influences of sexual norms *are not* parents/siblings, but a narrowly separated combination of friends, music and movies. The fact that friends, movies, and music (not parents or teachers) are primarily responsible for the sexual socialization of children in our society is concerning. It is no wonder that there is so much violence committed by men.

**Conclusion**

Given the small sample size used for this research, it is difficult to draw any broad conclusions. There is potential to build upon the data yielded from this research, and there is potential to improve upon the survey used. Despite these shortcomings, the data was yielded using a self-created measurement tool. The patterns that emerged in the data suggest that the survey served its purpose, and I was able to measure toxic masculinity. I learned at what age the different categories begin their influence, and I learned where the most common sources of these belief systems originate.

The data, separated by toxic masculinity category, very clearly and quantifiably demonstrates why our society is in the midst of a century’s long epidemic of men’s violence against women. Men are socialized by parents, siblings, movies, and music to use violence and aggression as a tool. They are sexually socialized by friends, music, and movies (including violent pornography). This study was able to assign numbers to concepts and influences that do not easily lend themselves to quantification. The data generated is a good first step to larger, more complex studies using the same methodology in the future.