



About Vivek, in his own words: I am a 4th year Chemical Engineer with a minor in Global and International Studies at UC Davis. I currently work at Pac Sci EMC, a defense contractor specialized on ignition systems for military aircraft, missile technology, and spacecraft. I love to play chess, read books, and debate politics. My interest in toxic masculinity stems from my own personal struggles against the problem and my desire to see its influence purged from human society.

Toxic masculinity is a scourge. The notion that men ought not to feel, can't be weak, and should bottle up their emotions is clearly unhealthy. Whether the cost is measured in lives lost through suicide or aggression exhibited in forms of homophobia and sexism, toxic masculinity and its destructive impacts continue to chain civilization to the ground.

Yet I struggle to accept this obvious truth. Let me be clear. I am fully intellectually aware of the dangers of toxic masculinity. My experience with my friends, family, and community have been positive regarding taking on the challenge of toxic masculinity. Overwhelming evidence from social science research confirms that men who buy into toxic masculinity continually exhibit more sexist tendencies and suffer from higher levels of mental illness. But every time I feel sad, there is always a part of me saying that I am weak for feeling emotion despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. This disconnect between what I know is true and how I feel is not easy to deal with. Again, feeling sad is not the problem since it is a natural human emotion. Feeling weak for being sad is where toxic masculinity limits my ability to live a fully meaningful life, not the sadness itself.

I don't believe there is anything wrong with young men pursuing goals that are traditionally masculine just as there is nothing wrong with women pursuing traditionally feminine roles. Feminism is about liberating women and maximizing their choices, not further limiting them to a new set of norms. The problem comes when the very definitions of traditional gender roles make people behave in ways contrary to their nature and unjustly limit their options. I will continue to pursue a meaningful career not because it conforms to traditional masculine gender roles, but because I want to use technology to protect democratic values and to push the boundaries of science. I will continue to be intellectually aware that being emotional is not a sign of weakness even if I still struggle accepting that truth. Simply reminding myself that sadness is a normal human emotion helps mitigate the problem. With practice I will get better at dealing with the feeling of weakness. I have made modest but real progress dealing with this problem on a personal level. I hope this helps others and moves us closer to removing this disgusting notion from humanity.