

Jason Gill



--Masculine and the feminine polarities are best understood in relationship to one another. Between and because of these two energies, the diversity of humanity exists. Like all energy, masculine energy can become toxic and destructive if left uncontrolled, unrestrained, and unbridled.

As an Assistant District Attorney, I have personally seen the destructive effects of toxic masculinity impact the lives of families, communities, children, and the accused. Whether it is in the context of domestic violence or sexual assault, or the glorification of criminal street gangs with images of young men surrounding themselves with money, guns, respect, and women, or whether it is a road rage incident or the proverbial “bar brawl” – toxic masculinity is the structure of thinking that perpetuates many of these societal ills.

Not all masculinity is toxic. I have also witnessed the positive side of masculinity. Those fathers, brothers, and sons who, with patience, dignity, professionalism, and compassion, stand behind their daughters, mothers, sisters, and significant others as they go through the trauma of being a victim of crime and navigate their way through the court system to attain justice are examples of positive masculinity. Men who take responsibility for their communities, evoking change in a positive way for the betterment of their neighborhoods, their social groups, and their overall communities are positively expressing masculinity through stewardship. Men who take responsibility in providing their children with strong emotional support, and a strong moral foundation with the values of good judgment over violence, misogyny, and aggressive sexuality, demonstrate positive masculinity in fatherhood.

While sexual harassment laws that are aimed at eradicating violence against women are a great leap forward in combatting the evils of toxic masculinity, my experience shows that laws are not enough to end the ill effects of toxic masculinity. The change must begin in the minds of men. Study after study has shown that the socialization of masculine ideals begins with our male children at an early age. Young boys are taught to be tough, stoic, heterosexual, and self-reliant (Wall & Kristjanson, 2005). Children are taught these ideals with a lack of discernment or context. To further expand the problem, mass culture and the media reinforce these stereotypes in movies, music, imagery, and marketing, thus perpetuating the cycle (Katz, J., 2011. Advertising and the Construction of Violent White Masculinity: From BMWs to Bud Light. In: G. Dines and J. M. Humez, eds. 2011. Gender, Race and Class in Media. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications). Even certain vehicles are designed with “aggressive lines” or angles in their framework to appeal to the toxic, aggressively aesthetic side of masculine energy (On Men and Cars, An Ethnographic Study of Gendered, Risky, and Dangerous Relations, Dag Balkmar, 2012). It is no wonder that this subtle influence of toxic masculine energy heightens the potential for boys to engage in general acts of violence including, but not limited to, bullying, assault, and/or physical and verbal aggression (Feder, Levant, & Dean, 2010; American Psychological Association, Harmful Masculinity and Violence, September 2018).

The solution to toxic masculinity is for men to acknowledge its existence and to not simply dismiss it as political rhetoric. It is a basic truth embedded in the history of humanity that toxic masculine energy, left uncontrolled, unchecked, and unbridled, has had and will continue to have vast far reaching implications, if we do not become aware of its potential to cause harm. The solutions are raising awareness, committing to focus on the positive qualities of masculinity, and abandoning those aspects that no longer serve the interests of one’s life, one’s family, one’s community, and our society collectively.

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