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Grab 'em by the Pussy: How Hegemonic Masculinity Encourages Locker Room Talk and Sexual Violence against Women

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Grab 'em by the Pussy: How Hegemonic Masculinity Encourages Locker Room Talk and Sexual Violence against Women

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Exercise and Sports Science

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Grab 'em by the Pussy:

How Hegemonic Masculinity Encourages Locker Room Talk and Sexual Violence against

Women

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Abstract

Locker room talk refers to the degrading and sexist narrative about women that is typically

exhibited by heterosexual males of all ages. The instance of locker room talk is not just confined

to actual locker rooms, but invades our politics, educational institutions, and service industries.

By researching the origins of how boys are socialized in Western culture, I have seen a

correlation between engaging in locker room talk and perpetration of sexual violence. In my

extensive analysis, I pieced together how socialization of boys can turn into a hegemonic

masculine gender identity which in turn predisposes men to engage in locker room talk that

increases their probability of inflicting sexual violence upon women. I searched for supplemental

research to support my claims about how toxic masculinity, and locker room talk specifically,

can indirectly put women in danger through dehumanizing speech and objectification. This

research is important because it could potentially give insight to people on how detrimental

words truly can be. This research could be used to help change the overall narrative of what it

means to be a man.

Keywords: toxic masculinity, sexual violence, locker room talk

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"Carefully watch your thoughts, for they become your words.

Manage and watch your words, for they will become your actions.

Consider and judge your actions, for they have become your habits.

Acknowledge and watch your habits, for they shall become your values.

Understand and embrace your values, for they become your destiny."

– Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

"Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything." – Donald Trump, 45th POTUS (Makela,

2016). When one of Mr. Trump's infamous derogatory conversations about women resurfaced

during his 2016 campaign, he justified the undeniable, taped conversation by claiming it was

simply locker room banter[1] (Keneally, 2017). Does this 'simple locker room talk' end there or

does it translate to more? In academia, there is research about sexist derogatory/objectifying

language used against women, as well as correlations between hegemonic masculinity and sexual

violence, but there is not a lot of research about how the use of locker room talk can influence

sexual violence. To further advance my point about how locker room talk could encourage

sexual violence, Trump has been publically accused by 21 women, as of February 25, 2019 of

having sexually assaulted them (Mindock, 2019). Trump refuted the claims by saying that none

of the women who came forward were attractive enough for him to sexually assault anyway

(Mindock, 2019). Mr. Trump's careless comments have sparked a global #MeToo movement,

bringing about awareness to survivors of sexual assault. Survivors took to social media to

support other survivors and to come out of the woodworks to show the world that sexual assault

is alarmingly common, by simply claiming #MeToo. You are probably wondering why I have spent my entire introduction talking about Donald Trump but I will leave you with this: If the man who has the most power, influence and responsibility in America has no repercussions for his careless words or deeds towards women, what precedent does that set for the rest of the male population? Is locker room talk an outlet for boys to be boys, or is it laying the ground work for objectifying, degrading and potentially harming women?

Description of the Problem

Violence against women is not only a booming problem in Western societies, but in every other part of the world (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2014). Garcia-Moreno et al. (2014) states that, "one in every three women will experience physical violence, sexual violence, or both, from an intimate partner, or sexual violence from someone other than a partner in her lifetime". All women cope with sexual violence in different ways, but the most common reported feelings are "shame, shock, isolation, confusion and guilt" (Sexual, 2017). This leaves many women in deep depressions, more apt to develop unhealthy coping habits, and can even lead to suicide (Sexual, 2017). Throughout a girl's life, we teach them how to avoid being raped or how to avoid being targeted by men when we should be teaching young boys not to rape or target women. If we continue to neglect to educate boys and young men about how serious sexual violence is and how it can be avoided, we will continue to breed men who claim that 'boys will be boys'. Excusing violent and aggressive behavior by using the phrase 'boys will be boys' not only communicates that those negative behaviors are what we expect and accept from boys, but also that boys are biologically hardwired to be that way, which is scientifically untrue (Clemens, 2017). On another note, if we allow negative behaviors to be exhibited by young boys and

excuse their behavior solely because of their biological sex, we are communicating to these young children that there is "only one way to be a boy" (Clemens, 2017).

Physical and sexual violence against women is pervasive in many cultures, but there is a gap in scientific literature that talks about the effects of sexist language on women's health and well-being[2] (Swim & Hyers, 1999). Women come in contact with sexism every single day, especially in their homes, workplaces, and even on the street (Swim, Hyers, Cohen & Ferguson, 2001). Locker room talk perpetuates sexual objectification and social dominance hierarchies within Western culture by purveying negative attitudes towards gender equality (Swim & Hyers, 1999). Locker room talk normalizes typical gender stereotypes that convey that women are supposed to be subservient and property of men (Douglas & Sutton, 2014). Locker room talk reflects beliefs and cultural practices within society that "serve to keep women in their place" (Douglas & Sutton, 2014) and allow men to exert their privilege and power over women.

By taking all of the aforementioned points into consideration, through critical analyses of the socialization of boys, hegemonic masculinity, possible explanations of why men rape and how locker room talk puts women in harm's way, this project will identify the gaps in academia where literature on locker room talk and sexual violence unfortunately do not really exist. Sexual violence against women is a global issue, so the goal of this project is to bring about awareness to look at boys' behavior instead of focusing on what she was wearing, why she was alone with him, or asking how much she had to drink. It is time to change the narrative to reflect that society will not accept 'boys will be boys' but instead will take action to change the way we socialize young men in order to keep our women safe.

Literature Review

Socialization of Men

Understanding how men are socialized helps us understand why certain behaviors surface in the ways that they do, particularly violent behaviors. According to Tony Porter's personal experience, growing up as a boy, he was taught that men were to be physically, mentally, and emotionally tough, show no signs of fear, and to not exhibit any sort of emotion except for anger (Porter, 2010). Porter also recalls being taught that men are meant to lead while women are expected to be quiet and follow. Women are inferior, sexual objects, and property of a man at all times (Porter, 2010). Porter learned these traits from his most esteemed role model, his father, so he had no doubt as to why these messages could be untrue. Many researchers agree that in Western culture, many young boys have the same socialization as Tony Porter had. Amin, Kagesten, Adebayo & Chandra-Mouli (2018) claim that male culture fosters an environment where physical strength, emotional detachment and heterosexual sex escapades measure one's ability to be a man. On the flip side, if boys experiment with their gender identity and express ideals that are more feminine or support a feminist agenda, they face the potential of being ostracized from their social group and on a larger scale, being stigmatized by society as being homosexual (Amin et al., 2018).

Researchers have recognized that early adolescence is a critical period for young men in learning how they relate to the world around them. During this period they "develop semi-abstract thinking, empathy for others and the ability to understand fairness and equality" (Amin et al., 2018). By instilling in young men that they are less of a man if they express feminine qualities, what are we saying about girls and women? We are communicating to young boys that

being feminine or having female traits (defined by stereotypical gender roles), makes them weak,

inferior and unworthy of power (Amin et al., 2018). By bringing the demons of gender

socialization and masculine norms to light, we are able to find solutions to better socialize boys

so that we can ensure the safety and well-being of the women in our society (Amin et al. 2018).

Hegemonic Masculinity

The idea of hegemonic masculinity is one that developed a few years after the women's

liberation movement[3] (Connell & James, 2005). Around the early 1980s, the first studies about

masculinity really took off due to this new idea in America of active, empowered feminists.

These studies basically concluded that masculinity runs on a spectrum; there is no black or white

system to it (Connell & James, 2005). Connell & James (2005) also states that, "[masculinities]

are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and therefore can differ

according to gender relations in a particular social setting". This statement helps uncover that

masculinity is not an identity per say, but a pattern of behaviors that men position themselves to

in order to embody ideals, fantatsies, and desires to achieve what it is to be a man (Connell &

James, 2005). This ideology can be taken to the extreme and that is when it is coined 'toxic

masculinity'.

The Good Men Project defines toxic masculinity as this: "a narrow and repressive

description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by violence, sex, status and aggression.

It's the cultural ideal of manliness, where strength is everything while emotions are a weakness;

where sex and brutality are yardsticks by which men are measured, while supposedly "feminine"

traits—which can range from emotional vulnerability to simply not being hypersexual—are the

means by which your status as "man" can be taken away" (Clemens, 2017). Few men may

engage in the patterns of toxic masculinity, but socially in Western culture, it is the expected

norm (Connell & James, 2005). This allows for an acceptable, overarching, global subordination

of women to men (Connell & James, 2005). Toxic masculinity as a norm in our culture

authorizes aggressive male behavior as an explanation for why men do what they do, or why

boys will be boys. Gender activists' current struggle with masculinity is to try and find a new

'ideal' masculinity to replace long-standing hegemony, but gender is a dynamic and fluid

performance that is experienced differently by everyone (Jewkes et al., 2015). There is no right

or wrong way to be male/masculine but if society can redefine what it means to be a man and

have a healthier, more realistic measure to compare to, it will leave the most profound and long

lasting impact on our society (Jewkes et al., 2015).

   The concept of hegemonic masculinity, found in the early 1980s, helped solidify

connections among conventional and serious crimes (Connell & James, 2005). The data that was

gathered concluded that globally, more men and boys commit more serious and conventional

crimes, but in America there is a very strong link between serious crimes and behaviors that

support toxic masculinity and violence against women – physical and sexual (Connell & James,

2005). Men's violence toward their female counterparts is often not recognized or even focused

on in critical research on men and masculinities because even those researchers may be under the

false impression that violence is ingrained the male genome (Hearn, 2012). Rigid masculine

ideals are presented to children at a very young age, challenged by them, and later engaged by

them as they continue to grow older (Connell & James, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity as a

subculture, disproves of exhibiting behaviors that help to advance or succumb to the desires of

women (Connell & James, 2005). Masculinity does not define any one man, but instead

determines how they will align themselves in society with their values and behaviors.

Possible Explanations for Why Men Rape

Jewkes, Fulu, Roselli & Garcia-Moreno (2013) states that research pertaining to why men rape is severely lacking. From the research that is present in North America, critical factors that predispose men to violence against women includes: "child abuse, attachment and personality disorders, social learning and delinquency (e.g. gang membership), prevalent sex-inequitable ideals of masculinity that emphasize heterosexual performance, control of women, substance abuse and absence of empathy" (Jewkes et al., 2013). Many of the aforementioned critical factors are developed within the private spheres of men's lives and heavily revolve around home life. If a child grows up in an environment where domestic abuse is regular and/or have been exposed to child abuse (especially sexual abuse), developmental processes in their brains can steer them to have aggressive tendencies towards women (Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss & Tanaka,1991). Children who turn to delinquency and migrate towards peers who exhibit the same characteristics will also engage in "antisocial behaviors that support aggression towards women" (Malamuth et al., 1991). Other elements identified by Malamuth et al. (1991) suggest that rape proclivity increases in young men due to the following: rape-supportive attitudes, sexually aggressive friends, forced sexual fantasies, and sexual activity level, mild sexual aggression or both.

Sexist Language

Locker room talk and sexist language go hand-in-hand and can be used interchangeably. Sexist language is used to exclude, demean and devalue someone based on their gender identity (Douglas & Sutton, 2014). Research shows that men tend to be more opposed to gender neutral or nonsexist language than are women, most likely because sexist language is less frequently directed at men (Douglas & Sutton, 2014). Locker room talk can exist of sexist derogatory slurs

(SDS) or sexist objectifying slurs (SOS). In an Italian study conducted by Fasoli, Carnaghi & Paladino (2015) found that SDS (e.g. bitch) were deemed more offensive and less socially acceptable than SOS (e.g. hot chick) but SOS are used more than SDS in conversation. Fasoli et al. (2015) also found that the context in which the slurs are being used, who is saying the slurs, and in what environment the slurs are being communicated all factors in to how offensive words and phrases come across to different people. Men and women also seem to use the same slurs to refer to women, but women find it more offensive when men use them compared to women (Fasoli et al., 2015). Men also tend to believe and uphold more traditional stereotypes toward women (Douglas & Sutton, 2014). Since these beliefs are rarely challenged by anyone other than women, men who use sexist language feel entitled to speak that way to either mock, belittle or dehumanize women because they believe that men are superior (Douglas & Sutton, 2014).

Another type of verbal exchange that usually occurs between men is sexist humor. Sexist humor is also interchangeable with locker room talk, due to its crude nature and women being the butt of the joke. Sexist humor that is directed at women is also called women disparagement humor and it functions, on a deeper level, to maintain gender-based inequality within our society (Romero-Sanchez, Duran, Carretero-Dios, Megias & Moya, 2010). This type of humor also invites people to "subtly convey negative attitudes and emotions" towards other as if it some type of game (Romero-Sanchez et al., 2010). Sexist humor basically rationalizes a wide range of negative emotional responses and behaviors exhibited by men (Ford, Armstrong & Edel, 2008). Research done by Romero-Sanchez et al. (2010) also shows that the more exposure a man has to sexist humor and the less apathetic he is towards the joke, he has an increased proclivity to rape a woman. Proclivity in this study means that under perfect conditions and with no repercussions, a man would choose to rape a woman. Uncontested woman disparagement humor can encourage

"behavioral expressions of sexism without fears of disapproval" from the rest of society (Ford et al., 2008).

Analysis

To try and understand why men are more prone to commit acts of sexual violence, it is important that we dive deep into the origins of what it means, in Western culture, to be a man. As young children, boys and girls are influenced differently by their parents and peers that predominantly shapes their gender performance. Parents and peers administer direct and indirect cues to boys that either reinforce or penalize an action (Amin et al. 2018). By reinforcing a behavior, it increases the likelihood that the boy will continue that behavior (e.g. shoving another little boy on the playground and making him cry) because reinforcement makes him feel special, popular or allows him to be part of a social group that he had before been denied access to. If a performance is penalized by parents or peers (e.g. wanting to take ballet lessons) it is highly likely that piece of the boy's gender performance will cease due to teasing, being ostracized from his social group, or disapproval from his parents (Amin et al. 2018).

Secondary elements that influence gender attitudes include "ethnicity, race, social class, school/school teachers, and the time in which a boy goes through puberty" (Amin et al. 2018). The first characteristic I would like to touch on is puberty. Boys usually begin puberty around early adolescence (10-14 years old). This developmental period is critical in shaping gender attitudes since puberty puts boys in very vulnerable positions (Amin et al. 2018). Since vulnerability does not fall under what characterizes a man, gender expectations are intensified for boys to, in a sense, make up in manliness to cover where they are lacking (Amin et al. 2018). Another important reason why early adolescence is so important for young boys is because men's perpetration of sexual violence usually begins during this developmental period which in

turn burdens young girls with a number of physical and mental health issues at such an early age

(Amin et al., 2018).

One reason why early adolescent boys are more prone to being sexually violent during

this developmental period is largely in part due to what they have been taught about their

performance as a man up until this point in their lives. Tony Porter views the way we socialize

boys is by putting them in the "Man Box". If a boy steps outside of the Man Box, he is subject to

ridicule, bullying, being accused of being homosexual, or even worse, being called a girl (Porter,

2010). The Man Box consists of the following rules (Porter, 2010):

1. Don't cry or openly express emotions, unless the emotions is anger

2. No weakness or fear

3. Demonstrate power control at all times, especially over women

4. Aggression = Dominance

5. Be a protector

6. Do not be "like women"/"like a girl"

7. Must display heterosexuality/do not be like gay men

8. Tough-Athletic-Strong-Courage

9. Make decisions, don't help

10. View women as property/objects

Porter also gives us a very simple equation to convey how inequitable gender attitudes and the

Man Box play into sexual violence: less value + property + objectification = violence against

women. The health of adolescent girls is at risk due to "biological vulnerability and the

disadvantages they face due to gender inequalities" (Amin et al., 2018). Adolescent boys that

perform within the Man Box have long lasting effects on the psyche of girls and women,

especially their sexual health. Heterosexual prowess is a measurement used to determine how manly a boy is and if boys believe that women are objects solely used for the desire of sex, they will go to not-so-great lengths to obtain what they believe to be theirs (Porter, 2010).

Sexual violence can be an outcome of how men are socialized, especially if as boys they were placed into the Man Box. In 2010, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) informed the world that men's violence against women is at epidemic proportions and is the #1 preventable health problems for girls and women in the United States, as well as every other country on the globe (Porter, 2010). Research performed by Jewkes et al. (2013) included a UN multi-country cross sectional study of 9 different countries to find out more about men and sexual violence. Jewkes et al. found that 26-80% of men, based on the geographical location, admitted to sexually violating at least one woman. Most of these men also admitted to committing their first rape at 15-19 years old, right after the critical early adolescence period (Jewkes et al., 2013). Of the men who committed rape, 73.3% felt sexual entitlement to the women, 58.7% were seeking pure entertainment and 37.9% raped out of anger or punishment for the woman (Jewkes et al., 2013). Of all the men who admitted to raping a woman, only 27% admitted to being under the influence of alcohol (Jewkes et al., 2013). That is an extremely alarming statistic because to me, that communicates that the other 73% of rapists made a sober, conscious decision to sexually violate a woman because they can. Only about half (55.2%) of rapists felt guilty about what they had done while 32.5% were arrested for their actions, but a meager 22.9% were taken to jail – that is less than 1 in 4 perpetrators (Jewkes et al., 2013). After seeing how socialization of boys can influence sexual violence against women, it is important to note another byproduct of socialization that also fuels sexual violence against women. The masculine norms that are looked to as ideal in Western culture has been termed hegemonic masculinity. The definition of

hegemonic masculinity is a "set of values established by men in power that functions to include

and exclude, and organize society in gender unequal ways" (Jewkes et al., 2015). To break it

down, the definition basically means that men behave in a way to show that they identify with

other men who value remaining dominant over women in society. Researchers also agree that

men have a clear choice whether or not to actively occupy oppressive positions towards women

(Jewkes et al., 2015). While most men will not align themselves with hegemonic masculinity, it

remains the masculine norm due to a relative consensus, not force, that men should remain

superior (Jewkes et al., 2015). The consensus is made by those who benefit from promoting

masculinity. Males are more likely to endorse stereotypical gender roles, as well as gender

inequality than are females because gender inequality is a norm that continues to give men

privilege whether they know it or not (Amin et al., 2018). At the same time, those oppressed by

the promotion of hegemonic masculinity can also be supporting it by rewarding ideal manhood

with their attention and affection (Jewkes et al., 2015).

Masculine identities are formed based on the conditions of one's life. They are a

reflection of "poverty or power, culture, neighborhood dynamic and childhood experience"

(Jewkes et al., 2015). Once again, masculinities are a dynamic, fluid performance. The

conditions in which boys are raised are different under those to which girls are raised, and the

expectations are also different. By supporting inequitable gender roles and raising boys to follow

social masculine norms, it legitimizes violence (Jewkes et al., 2015). According to gender norms,

men are superior, strong, and leaders so if a woman is inferior, weak, and a disobedient follower,

due to what they are taught, men may feel the need to correct a woman through physical or

sexual violence (Jewkes et al., 2015). Not only do following social norms legitimize violence,

but boys raised in a home where they were physically and sexually abused as a child have a

greater propensity to use violence against women. Most of these abused boys develop toxic

schematics about heterosexual relationships (Malamuth et al.,1991). These schematics may

include feeling shameful about sex and self-conscious of their performance, especially in cases

of sexual abuse, but these feelings are "masked by self-protective tendencies like anger,

aggression and an exaggerated need to control intimacy" (Malamuth et al., 1991). Due to the

trauma of abuse as a child, there is an interference in the brain with the development of synapses

that foster critical development skills such as expressing frustration in a healthy way and

understanding how to delay gratification (Malamuth et al., 1991). This in turn can make young

boys perform adult sexual behaviors much sooner than their peers. Due to the lack of knowing

how to deal with frustration and delay gratification, it predisposes young boys to rape young girls

much more frequently (Malamuth et al., 1991). According to the UN multi-country cross

sectional study on men and sexual violence, 60.5% of men who admit to being victims of

physical/sexual childhood abuse have committed multiple rapes and 50.9% of men admitting to

being victims of childhood emotional abuse/neglect also admit to perpetrating multiple rapes

(Jewkes et al., 2013). These findings also suggest that sexual aggression blossoms out of a

combination of high levels of hegemony and high levels of sexual activity (Malamuth et al.,

1991). Sexual aggression also positively correlated to attitudes supporting violence against

women (Malamuth et al., 1991).

Attitudes that support violence against women are created and empowered through the

use of words. Locker room talk "perpetuates male privilege, influences children's gender

schemas, influences perception of status and can make women feel dehumanized" (Douglas &

Sutton, 2014). Locker room talk helps keep the social dominance hierarchy erect and furthers the

gender inequitable divide between men and women. Men more frequently engage in locker room

talk than do women because the sexist nature of the language helps "keep women in their place" (Fasoli et al., 2015). Men perceive the existing social systems as fair because of their privilege so they feel no need to use non-sexist language (Douglas & Sutton, 2014). There are three different types of locker room talk that men can engage in: (1) sexist derogatory slurs (SDS), (2) sexist objectifying slurs (SOS), (3) women disparagement humor/sexist humor. SDS's refer to phrases or words that "stereotype women with a dimension of promiscuity and sexual looseness in which women's morality is denied" (Fasoli et al., 2015). SDS's are used to convey negative emotions like contempt or disgust towards women and are used as a distancing mechanism to make men seem like they are on a moral high ground that we cannot reach (Fasoli et al., 2015). SOS's are used to "stress women's physical appearance and attractiveness rather than promiscuity" (Fasoli et al., 2015). This type of locker room talk communicates that women are inferior to men by simply being objects of desire, sexual attraction, and affection. SOS's are more commonly accepted by women due to the approaching nature versus the distancing nature of SDS's. SOS's imply closeness, interest, and sexual intimacy, making the man seem less non-threatening (Fasoli et al., 2015). Research also shows that when women are encountered by a man who directs an SOS at them, they tend to feel uncomfortable until the encounter is over. The same research also shows that women who have SDS's directed at them, they feel unsafe during the encounter and the feeling of being in potential danger does not cease even after the encounter is long over (Swim & Hyers, 1999). This can cause anxiety in many social situations for women and could potentially impair their social lives due to the burden of feeling unsafe.

Women disparagement humor is possibly the most deleterious form of locker room talk on women's health and safety (Romero-Sanchez et al., 2010). Using humor to disguise sexual abuse makes it seem less harmful (Romero-Sanchez et al., 2010). This allows men who are

making these "jokes" to seem non-threatening so they are more easily able to escape social

criticism (Romero-Sanchez et al., 2010). Due to the lack of social criticism for women

disparagement humor, men tend to be noncritical of sexist jokes which enables the jokes to seem

normal and that sexism is tolerated (Romero-Sanchez et al., 2010). Men who are exposed to high

levels of sexist humor are more likely to discriminate women through the use of negative

behaviors. These same men are also likely to have an increased rape proclivity (Romero-Sanchez

et al., 2010). In this context, rape proclivity is defined as men's self-reported likelihood of raping

under perfect, hypothetical circumstances without running the risk of getting caught. Romero-

Sanchez et al. (2010) also noticed that men who self-report hostile sexism tend to perceive locker

room talk as funnier and they feel more comfortable expressing hostility towards women around

other men. Romero-Sanchez et al. (2010) defines hostile sexism as "an attitude of prejudice or

discriminating behavior based on women's supposed inferiority or difference as a group".

According to this study, the researchers claim that their experiment proves that men who are

exposed to high levels of women disparagement humor report higher levels of intent to sexually

violate a woman (Romero-Sanchez et al., 2010). The researchers also claim that it is worth

considering with confidence that exposure to women disparagement humor can lead to an

increase in cases of sexual assault (Romero-Sanchez et al., 2010).

Methodology

I pieced together how hegemonic masculinity fosters an environment in which locker

room talk and resultant sexual violence can thrive. I limited my data to only analyze men's

infliction of sexual violence upon women. I focused on the patterns of masculinity in Western

culture. Even though I used one research article that does not necessarily geographically match

Western culture, (e.g. UN multi-cultural cross sectional study of violence against women) many

of the same gender attitudes and hegemonic masculine norms are the same in these cultures as

well. I analyzed the behavior and data of men of all ages because sexual violence can be

perpetrated by any boy/man during any point of his life. Since there is a chasm in academia

where literature about linguistics and sexual violence should be, I brought together all points of

socialization of men, hegemonic masculinity, possible explanations to why men rape and sexist

language to look at the epidemic of sexual violence against women through a different lens.

There is very little research out there that correlates sexist language and sexual violence, but the

literature I did find supported my hypothesis that using sexist language can result in sexual

violence against women. I collected all of my references either through EBSCOhost, Google

Scholar, or Google. I also only incorporated the results of studies in my analysis that had large

sample sizes so that my results would be more accurate and reliable.

Conclusions

The results of my research can make people more cautious about what is acceptable

speech and what is not since they now can realize the severity words can carry. The results of

this thesis could be used to help change the narrative even further about what it means to be

masculine. People who have a large influence over boys/young men in society (i.e. educators,

parents, siblings, peers) could use this thesis as a stepping stone to learn even more about how

much of a responsibility they have in influencing gender attitudes and performance.

In order for women to be liberated and free from male oppression, society must first

redefine what it means to be male, to unleash men from the harsh expectations society can place

on them. Tony Porter asked a nine-year-old boy, "What would life be like for you if you didn't

have to adhere to the man box?" The young boy replied, "I would be free."(Porter, 2010). The

socialization of men and boys if often ignored, especially in research pertaining to women's and

men's health because of the long-standing belief that boys are biologically hardwired to be

hypersexual, aggressive and violent (Amin et al. 2018). How men and boys are socialized

obviously has physical, sexual, mental and emotional effects on women but can have very

deleterious effects on the boys and men themselves. The way that many boys are socialized is to

acquire a rigid masculine identity, called hegemonic masculinity. The good news is that

hegemonic masculinity can be changed. Since the performance of hegemonic masculinity comes

from ideals shared at a societal level, through awareness and change of social processes, we can

change the narrative about that it means to be masculine (Jewkes et al., 2015). A conversation

has already begun concerning the effects of hegemonic masculinity, more commonly called toxic

masculinity, because many "men's rights movements are painting themselves as victims in the

face of women empowerment because women are challenging [stereotypical masculine] ideals

that make [men] feel uncomfortable about changing" (Jewkes et al., 2015). As women, it is

important for us to understand that in order for hegemonic masculinity to not become the norm,

we need to watch our actions and affections toward boys and men who perform the typical

masculine norm because we are helping to keep hegemonic masculinity alive. By devaluing the

ideal of the "manly man" we can protect the well-being of young girls and young boys alike. On

the flip side, boys who make the choice to stay engaged in their hegemonic identity are more

likely to engage in locker room talk which is a sexualized, derogatory narrative about women

and their bodies. Men who have a heightened sense of hegemony and appreciate the nature of

locker room talk are at an increased predisposition to inflict sexual violence upon women.

     In my research, I realize that males can be victims of sexual violence but, more often than

not, at the hands of other men (Katz, 2012). I also recognize there is such a thing as hegemonic

femininity and that women can carry equally as toxic performances and attitudes towards the

opposite sex. I am extremely conscious that not all men are socialized the same way and that

most men will not engage in dangerous masculine identities. I understand that each culture has

their own definition of hegemonic masculinity, so the results of this study may not be applicable

to every culture worldwide. When looking at a deep rooted issue such as this, I am aware that

there are many other factors that come into play during socialization, development, and forming

a gender identity. I also realize that sexual violence is not about individual perpetrators, but is

instead a deep rooted, systematic issue within our society. I do hope that readers realize how

large the web of connections span when dealing with issues concerning violence against women

and that change in many social institutions needs to occur. I also understand that this can be

triggering material, not just for survivors of sexual assault but also survivors of childhood abuse,

neglect and trauma. My deepest condolences go out to all victims of physical, mental, emotional,

and sexual abuse.

Notes

[1]conversation took place with Billy Bush in 2005

[2] sexist language and locker room talk are interchangeable terms

[3]hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity are interchangeable; the phrase toxic masculinity

is triggering and could potentially cause backlash or personal offense

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