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## The Enigmatic Nature of Toxic Masculinity: Utilizing Quasi-Photovoice Methodology to Make Distinctions between Hegemonic and Toxic Masculinity

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The Enigmatic Nature of Toxic Masculinity: Utilizing Quasi-Photovoice Methodology to Make  
Distinctions between Hegemonic and Toxic Masculinity

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Abstract

### The Enigmatic Nature of Toxic Masculinity: Utilizing Quasi-Photovoice Methodology to Make Distinctions between Hegemonic and Toxic Masculinity

Taylor E. Remsburg

Studies of masculinity are fraught by inconsistent and unclear definitions. A comparison of literature which uses either hegemonic or toxic masculinity as a framework reveals that toxic masculinity can be virtually indistinguishable from hegemonic masculinity. I posit that toxic masculinity is and should be distinct from hegemonic masculinity. Failure to distinguish toxic masculinity from hegemonic masculinity makes toxicity difficult, if not impossible, to operationalize. I designed a vignette survey to clarify the conceptualization and operationalization of toxic masculinity. My vignette survey, which asks participants to respond to prompts regarding both toxic masculinity and masculinity, uses quasi-photovoice methodology to allow participants to select, contextualize, and codify data. This research can contribute to the quantitative operationalization of toxic masculinity through the development of a scale.

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## **Introduction**

Discussions of toxic masculinity have proliferated in both scholarly and journalistic literature. Toxic masculinity is utilized as a framework in discussing mental health and depression in men (Kupers 2005; Oliffe and Phillips 2008; Parent et al. 2018), the academic and otherwise underachievement of men (Sax 2005), violence amongst men and toward women (Kupers 2005; Messerschmidt 1993; Messerschmidt 2004; Thacker 2019), and workplaces characterized by masculine contests rather than by quality of work (Alonso 2018; Berdahl et al. 2018; Kuchynka et al. 2018; Matos et al. 2018; Munsch et al. 2018). While toxic masculinity flourishes in the scholarly and otherwise literature, conceptualizations of toxic masculinity are inconsistently and ambiguously applied. Toxic masculinity can be loosely defined as the widespread negative consequences of certain male-associated traits, specifically the need to aggressively dominate and compete (Flood 2018; Kupers 2005). The use of traits in definitions of toxic masculinity, however, is not reflected in operationalization. For example, Berdahl and colleagues (2018) develop a scale to measure the presence of toxic masculinity in the workplace (what they refer to as Masculinity Contest Cultures or MCC). However, their scale includes items which are indicative of masculine workplace practices, rather than traits, such as whether taking time off is frowned upon by management or whether getting ahead requires working overtime (Berdahl et al. 2018). This lack of clarity in the level of analysis is reflected throughout toxic masculinity literature. That is, distinctions between traits and practices and thus between hegemonic and toxic masculinity lack clarity.

Conflating masculinity with individual traits is inherently problematic. When the negative consequences of masculinity are associated with individual men, we fail to acknowledge the systemic and institutionalized nature of masculinity which devalues femininity

and subordinates women on a large scale (Connell 1987; Connell 1989; Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This is not to say that discussions of masculine traits serve no purpose. Rather, discussions of masculine traits should take place in the broader context of institutionalized masculine practices. As long as discussions of hegemonic and toxic masculinity lack clarity and distinction, literature which utilizes either hegemonic or toxic masculinity as a framework fails to account for important distinctions between masculine traits and practices. Additionally, conceptual ambiguity between hegemonic and toxic masculinity contributes to individualized research practices which do not properly acknowledge the significance of the institutionalized nature of masculinity.

This research aims to make concrete distinctions between hegemonic and toxic masculinity. Additionally, the current literature suggests a lack of clarity both in definitions and distinctions regarding the level of analysis in operationalizing toxic and hegemonic masculinity. This research additionally aims to provide clarity by identifying distinct measures of both trait-based and practice-based elements of toxic masculinity and to assess the relationship between the two. I propose a vignette survey which utilizes quasi-photovoice methodology to make distinctions between conceptualizations of hegemonic and toxic masculinity. I develop an instrument which utilizes masculinity as a control prompt and toxic masculinity as a treatment prompt. The instrument was administered to a sample of 128 U.S. adults via Prolific, an online research platform. I posit that participants will make concrete distinctions between masculinity and toxic masculinity such that toxic masculinity will be more closely associated with traits such as violence, aggression, and dominance. Thus, those traits associated with toxic masculinity will be overtly negative whereas those traits associated with masculinity will indicate either mixed responses (both positive and negative) or neutrality. Photovoice methodology is used as it

engages participants in critical thinking and dialogue which is necessary for making distinctions (Wang and Burris 1997). The content analysis of results is conducive for both qualitative and quantitative analysis, maximizing the potential for operationalization following measurement. This research additionally serves as a means of quantitatively operationalizing toxic masculinity through the development of a scale.

I begin with a brief discussion of hegemonic masculinity followed by an overview of toxic masculinity and its association with masculine traits and practices. The methods section details my sampling procedures and my vignette design which incorporates quasi-photovoice methodology. I end with a discussion of my results which support my assertion that toxic and hegemonic masculinity are distinct. Further, I find that it is likely masculinity that is causing conceptual and operational confusion in the literature. The limitations of this research and directions for future research are also discussed.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

Hegemonic masculinity can be generally defined as the culturally dominant or prevailing form of masculinity in a given society (Berdahl et al. 2018; Connell 1987, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Definitions of hegemonic masculinity include language that is indicative of masculinity as a gender practice, "...guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 1987), "...most effective in maintaining power and privilege for men when enacted collectively" (Schwalbe 2014). Conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity also, however, include language indicative of traits. For example, the culturally dominant form of masculinity in the United States often includes *traits* such as "rich, White, heterosexual, tall, athletic, professionally successful,



confident, courageous, and stoic” (Berdahl et al. 2018; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985; Cuddy et al. 2015; Livingston and Pearce 2009).

As hegemonic masculinity is generally defined as the culturally dominant form of masculinity, any reference to “masculinity” as a control is meant to reflect hegemonic masculinity. For the purposes of this study, I am only interested in hegemonic masculinity insofar as toxic masculinity is often indistinguishable from hegemonic masculinity in the literature. Furthermore, it is clear in the literature cited above that there is conceptual confusion regarding whether hegemonic masculinity refers to gendered practices, traits, or both. This research serves to make distinctions primarily for the purpose of operationalizing toxic masculinity, but it can also serve to bring added clarity to conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity. It will become apparent that toxic masculinity suffers from conceptual ambiguity to an even larger extent than hegemonic masculinity.

### **Toxic Masculinity**

Terry Kupers, who has produced various literatures which outline the role of masculinity in the American prison system, describes toxic masculinity as the need to aggressively dominate and compete with others (Kupers 2005). According to Kupers (2005), toxic masculinity is directly linked to hegemonic masculinity such that it outlines the elements of hegemonic masculinity that are “socially destructive” (misogyny, homophobia, colonialism, etc.). Furthermore, he states that, in the United States “hegemonic masculinity accentuates male dominance, heterosexism, whiteness, violence, and ruthless competition” (Sabo, Kupers, and London 2001). He contrasts these negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity with those which he views positively, such as pride in sports, solidarity with friends, success at work, and providing for the home (Kupers 2005). He incorporates both traits and practices in discussing

toxic masculinity, however, making it clear that the level of analysis at which toxic masculinity is conceptualized is ambiguous and indistinguishable from hegemonic masculinity.

Michael Flood's work conceptualizes toxic masculinity as the norms and expectations associated with masculine ideals that have "toxic" or unhealthy implications (Flood 2018). His definition is similar to Kupers (2005) in that it acknowledges that toxic masculinity is not implying that *all* male associated traits are toxic. Rather, it is pointing to particular masculine ideals that have negative implications for both men and society (Flood 2018). Perhaps most importantly, Flood suggests that toxic masculine ideals include the following traits: active, aggressive, tough, daring, and dominant (Flood 2018). It is important to note that some of these traits, particularly active and daring, are not inherently negative in their connotation. It is the unreasonable expectations we have of men to be both active and daring that is "toxic" or negative.

While these conceptualizations of masculinity imply distinctions between "negative" and "positive" masculine traits, they do not make concrete claims about which masculine traits are "toxic" and which are not. Furthermore, Kupers (2005) discussion of toxic masculinity is derived from hegemonic masculinity, blurring the level of analysis, and making operationalization conceptually complicated. Thus, while journalistic and scholarly literature uses toxic masculinity to discuss the negative implications of certain male-associated traits, the existing literature reveals a lack of conceptual clarity regarding what "toxic" refers to and how it varies in traits and practices.

### **Conceptualizing Toxic Masculinity: Practices versus Traits?**

Prior to a discussion of the relevance of traits and practices to masculinity, it is necessary to lay out what is meant in terms of traits and practices in the current study. Psychological conceptualizations of traits take place at the individual level of analysis, specifically in reference to personality. Carr and Kingsbury (1938) define their conceptualization of traits as follows, “A trait is a conceptual attribute or definition of the reactive nature of an individual. The nature of the individual is defined on the basis of certain observable behavioral characteristics” (1938:497). To further explicate, they provide a brief example, “As an illustration, we observe that a given individual acts aggressively and persistently in his endeavors. We also judge that these two models of conduct are of some significance in accounting for the success of his endeavors. Let us also assume that we have observed these two modes of conduct under such a variety of circumstances that we are forced to conclude that they are expressions or manifestations of his constitutional nature” (1938:497). In essence, a trait is associated with an individual’s personality which is derived from their repeated observable behavior. While there is some disagreement about how traits are relevant to personality research (Fleeson and Jayawickreme 2015), it is clear that “traits matter to important outcomes” (2015:23; Duckworth et al. 2012; Ozer and Benet-Martínez 2006; Roberts et al. 2007; Turiano et al. 2013).

Sociological and psychological conceptualizations of practices take place at the structural level of analysis. Bourdieu’s theory of social practices is related to his theory of habitus—our internalization of external structures. In essence, a social practice is the structure of a society embodied within human action or “practices” (Bourdieu 1977). As Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes (2016) point out, Bourdieu explicated his theory of social practice in terms of class, “Taste, which might relate to a vast number of personal attributes, from cutting one’s hair in a certain

way to the sort of car which an individual buys, has relations with the division of labor, not in an unambiguous way, but mediated and moderated by social choice... This conception of class habitus provides a predisposition towards what can be called a social practice of class, a practice which has limits established to it, which are limits set by the division of labor” (2016:123). This conceptualization of practice makes sense in the context of Berdahl and colleagues’ (2018) discussion of practices within masculinity contest cultures. If the culture of the workplace values putting work first, individuals will engage in practices which reflect the tendency to put work first, such as avoiding taking time off from work or staying at work late.

Discussions of masculinity take place at both the individual and structural level of analysis. For example, West and Zimmerman (2002) discuss what it means to “do gender”. They define “doing gender” as, “a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (West and Zimmerman 2002:4). In other words, doing gender refers to the fact that certain social practices are considered emblematic of either men or women. As a result, attention shifts from viewing gender as an individually ascribed identity to viewing gender as something that is achieved by engaging in social practices associated with masculinity or femininity. Furthermore, Butler (2004:2) suggests that when we engage in “doing gender,” we are engaging in a performance “with or for another.” Hegemonic masculinity is conceptualized this way. This is perhaps most evident in operationalizations of hegemonic masculinity which gauge the prevalence of masculine social practices such as dominance, violence, and “pursuit of status” (Kahn, Brett, and Holmes 2011). However, toxic masculinity is also often conceptualized this way, as is evident in Berdahl and colleagues’ (2018) work on masculinity contest cultures. This

conceptual conflation results in operationalizations of toxic masculinity which are indistinguishable from those of hegemonic masculinity.

Toxic masculinity is also conceptualized in terms of traits. Kupers (2005) refers specifically to the need of men to *dominate* and be aggressive toward one another. He also distinguishes those *traits* of hegemonic masculinity which are desirable (pride, solidarity, success, providing) from those which are not (violence, dominance, whiteness, heterosexism). These traits, however, occur in discussions of both individual traits and institutional practices. While Kupers (2005) uses the term “traits” in describing violence and dominance amongst men and toward women, he falls short of making distinctions between individual traits and institutional practices. Discussions of both hegemonic and toxic masculinity emphasize dominance as masculine but fail to make distinctions between dominance as a practice and dominance as a trait. This lack of distinction translates to operationalizations of toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity literature is generally inconsistent, and the language used in toxic masculinity literature reflects both traits and practices. Making clear distinctions is significant as research framed by toxic masculinity tends to measure practices rather than traits, as is evident in Berdahl and colleagues (2018) masculinity contest culture scale.

### **Measuring Toxic Masculinity: Practices, Traits, or Both?**

Berdahl and colleagues (2018) develop a scale which measures the presence of masculinity contest cultures. Their 20-item scale is grounded in four “traits” of masculinity contest cultures which they derive from masculinity literature. These four traits are referred to as “put work first”, “show no weakness”, “strength and stamina”, and “dog-eat-dog”. These four characteristics are similar to those utilized in Brannon’s (1976) conceptualization of sex role theory in the sense that they refer to the prevalence of social practices, “no sissy stuff, the big

wheel, the sturdy oak, give ‘em hell.” Their questions are framed in terms of coworker interactions and cultural practices of the workplace. For example, they make statements such as “taking days off is frowned upon,” “to get ahead you need to be able to work long hours,” and “expressing any emotion other than anger or pride is seen as weak.”

Berdahl and colleagues (2018) posit that their work on masculinity contest cultures centers on toxic masculinity. Their literature review contradicts this assertion and focuses almost exclusively on concepts related to hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. For example, in their introduction they state that “Our framework centers on toxic masculinity, which involves the need to aggressively compete and dominate others (Kupers, 2005, p.713)”. They utilize hegemonic masculinity as the primary framework which results in an operationalization of toxic masculinity which is indistinguishable from those operationalizations of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, their MCC scale measures masculine workplace practices as opposed to traits, reflecting Kupers (2005) lack of distinction between practices and traits. As a result, their distinction between toxic traits and practices is unclear and each paper corresponding to the subject of work as a masculinity contest is consequently unclear (e.g., Alonso 2018; Glick, Berdahl, and Alonso 2018; Kuchynka et al. 2018; Matos, O’Neill, and Lei 2018). Let me be clear, my intention is not to offer a critique of Berdahl and colleagues’ (2018) work on masculinity contest cultures. Rather, existing conceptual ambiguities have informed the development of their scale and, as a result, it is unclear whether their intent is to measure traits or practices or both.

While the association between hegemonic and toxic masculinity is relatively clear, the line of distinction between the two is not. There is a lack of clarity in terms of what “toxic” is referring to—practices, traits, or both. This lack of clarity is significant such that it makes toxic

masculinity difficult, if not impossible, to operationalize as an entity independent of hegemonic masculinity. The literature on work as a masculinity contest supports this assertion. Berdahl and colleagues posit that toxic masculinity is their framework and yet defend and validate the development of their scale using hegemonic masculinity literature. Furthermore, Kupers (2005) contrasts the negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity with those he views positively. His distinction would support the notion that toxic masculinity encompasses both traits and practices, but he does not make this clear. Thus, it is not that hegemonic and toxic masculinity are meant to be conflated, rather, it is unclear where toxicity begins and what is meant by “toxic”. The current study aims to make explicit distinctions between hegemonic and toxic masculinity as well as distinctions between the measurement of trait-based and practice-based elements of toxic masculinity.

## **Methods**

### *Photovoice:*

I developed a survey to clarify the conceptualization and operationalization of toxic masculinity in contrast to masculinity. My survey used a quasi-photovoice methodology to allow participants to select, contextualize, and codify data. Photovoice is a participatory action method of research which enables participants to engage in each step of the data collection process via visual representations of their communities and experiences (Wang and Burris 1997). Photovoice methodology has three primary goals: “1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns 2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge.... 3) to reach policymakers” (Wang and Burris 1997:370). Making distinctions between toxic and hegemonic masculinity requires that participants engage in the promotion of “critical dialogue and knowledge” (Wang and Burris 1997:370). Photovoice methodology fosters a research

environment in which participants are actively engaged in critical thinking and writing about what toxic masculinity and masculinity entails. This level of participant engagement was necessary for the discussion of complex conceptualizations of masculinities to be fruitful. Similar to “reaching policymakers,” the goal of this research is to inform conceptualizations of toxic masculinity. Furthermore, making distinctions between toxic and other masculinities requires a comparison. This quasi-photovoice design engages critical dialogue and makes comparisons simultaneously by asking participants to 1) take some time to think about what masculinity and toxic masculinity means to them, 2) choose from a series of nine images those which most accurately reflect their perception of masculinity and toxic masculinity, 3) give those images titles and descriptions which reflect how they are thinking about masculinity and toxic masculinity, and 4) rank those images on scales which reflect both masculine and feminine coded traits and practices.

#### *Sampling Procedures:*

I used Prolific’s platform to recruit research participants. I used a matched pairs design to limit the amount of participants necessary for sufficient data as well as control for respondent heterogeneity. I recruited 120 participants which was sufficient for analyzing each of the groups and making comparisons between the two as the matched pairs design allowed all participants to participate in both conditions. Given that I had a small amount of excess funds in my Prolific account following initial data collection, I was able to recruit a few extra participants for a total of 128 participants for 256 observations. While I am ultimately interested in creating a quantitative scale for the purpose of studying how women internalize toxic masculinity, for this research I was interested in the perspectives of both men and women. As the importance of gender to perceptions of masculinity is evident in the literature, I recruited 60 male participants



and 60 female participants by requesting a balanced sample on Prolific (Alonso 2018; Berdahl et al. 2018; Bridges 2014; Bridges 2010; Connell 1987; Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Kahn, Brett, and Holmes 2011; Kuchynka et al. 2018; Kupers 2005; Matos et al. 2018). Of the 128 total participants after data cleaning, 59 (46.10%) identified as women and 61 (47.70%) identified as men with 1 participant identifying as a transgender woman (0.78%), 1 participant identifying as a transgender man (0.78%), 5 participants identifying as gender non-conforming (3.91%), and 1 participant identifying as another gender identity (0.78%). All participants, regardless of gender identity, were included in analyses.

On the first launch of the survey with the initial 123 participants, the median time to complete the survey was 22 minutes with the average pay for participants being \$11.66 an hour. Initially, we paid participants \$3.50 or \$10.50 an hour as, based on the pre-test, we estimated that it would take approximately 20 minutes for participants to complete the survey. We addressed the underestimation of the amount of time it would take participants to complete the survey by offering each participant a \$1 bonus, resulting in our \$11.66 an hour compensation. In the second smaller launch of the survey with the additional 6 participants, the median time it took to complete the survey was 25 minutes with the average pay for participants being \$10.80 an hour. In this second launch, we accounted for the additional time it took participants to complete the initial study by offering the 6 additional participants \$4.50, rather than \$3.50, for their participation. After data cleaning, there were 128 total participants.

#### *Ethical Concerns:*

There are various ethical concerns regarding sample recruitment through platforms like Prolific. There are concerns that participants will lie about their demographic characteristics to fit certain research requirements. There are also concerns that the voluntary nature of participation

is put into question given that participants on Prolific receive monetary compensation for their participation. For the current study, I did not prescreen participants so that they fit particular demographics. Rather, I requested a balanced sample based on participant gender on Prolific which means that Prolific attempted to get relatively equal numbers of male and female identifying participants, but the study was not limited to only men or women. Further, Prolific makes suggestions for what Prolific participants should be paid for your study based on what they are paid for other studies. We made sure that the pay we were offering was considered “okay” or average for Prolific rather than “poor” or “excellent”. In other words, we abided by Prolific guidelines and did not provide incentives that were considered either poor or exorbitant.

Additionally, there are concerns about the generalizability of non-probability samples as well as the ability to test causal relationships utilizing online non-probability samples. Research partially alleviates these concerns as it finds that non-probability samples are sufficient for testing causal relationships (Simmons and Bobo 2015; Weinburg et al. 2014). Mullinex and colleagues (2015) argue for the generalizability of survey experiments as they were successful in replicating nationally representative survey experiments using a non-probability sample via MTurk. Further, research suggests that the Prolific platform, compared to other potential platforms such as Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), provides higher quality data specifically in terms of participant’s attention to prompts, comprehension of prompts, honesty in response to prompts, and reliability in addressing prompts (Eyal et al. 2017; Eyal et al. 2021; Manago, Misc, and Doan 2021; Palan and Schitter 2017). Finally, using Prolific allows participants to remain anonymous. Typically, photovoice methodology engages participants at each stage of the research process, specifically in terms of backchanneling. As a result, I am sacrificing my ability

to clarify/confirm participant responses for the sake of anonymity and randomization. I consider this a limitation of my research.

*Instrument:*

Participants were first prompted to read a cover letter which reminded them what the survey will ask of them and that they can end their participation at any time (see Appendix A). Participants were then asked to mark that they either consent or do not consent to the study. If they consented, they were randomly assigned to either the toxic masculinity or masculinity prompt first. Whichever prompt they did not initially receive, was given to them second. If they did not consent, their Prolific ID was recorded but they were sent to the end of the survey and no other data was collected. Non-consenting participants were not paid for their time.

For both the toxic masculinity and masculinity conditions, individuals were first asked to think about what the term means to them. The survey utilized a timer to keep participants on this initial prompt page for 15 seconds to encourage thought about either toxic masculinity or masculinity. After reflecting on the concept, participants were shown a series of nine images (see Appendix B). A pre-test determined the validity of images and informed which images were included in the instrument. The pre-test showed participants a series of eighteen pre-selected images and participants were asked to rate how accurately masculine traits and practices were reflected the images shown. The three images most associated with distinctly *negative* masculine traits and practices, such as aggression and dominance, were coded as negative and used in the final instrument. The three images most associated with *neutral* traits and practices (neutral meaning those traits which could be realistically perceived as either positive or negative, such as competitiveness and confidence) were coded as neutral and used in the final instrument. The three images least associated with any of the traits provided (all of which are either negative or

neutral) were coded as *positive* and used in the final instrument. Participants were not aware of the coding of images.<sup>1</sup>

After viewing the images, participants were asked to rank the three images that most closely reflected how they were thinking about either toxic masculinity or masculinity. The image that best encompassed their thinking should be ranked first, followed by the next most relevant image second, and the third most relevant image third. After submitting these rankings, participants were asked to 1) title each image and 2) provide a brief description (approximately 250 words) for each chosen image. Thus, the titling and description questions were asked three times, once for each of the top three ranked images. Finally, participants were given a series of seven-point Likert scales to rate the prevalence of masculine and/or feminine traits and masculine and/or feminine practices they associated with the images representing toxic masculinity or masculinity (see Appendix C). To end the survey, participants were asked a series of demographic questions about their age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, level of education, household income, political ideology, and religious affiliation (see Appendix C). These questions will inform future designs and allow for demographic comparisons.

## **Results**

### *Rankings by Condition:*

See Appendix B for a full list of images and their codes and Appendix C for the full instrument. Chi-square test results for the ranking of images in the masculinity or control condition were not significant which indicates that there is not a statistically significant

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<sup>1</sup> I used the same race (white) for each image to control for differences based on the race of the man in the image. Future instruments will consider differences based on the race of the man in the image.

association between the rankings and images. This lack of significance is evidenced in the distribution of frequencies seen in Table 1 for the masculinity condition. For example, Image 6 (coded positive) was ranked first most frequently in the masculinity condition with 24 (18.90%) participants ranking the image first, but Image 9 (also coded positive) was not far behind with 22 (17.32%) participants ranking the image first.

The same pattern is evident in the columns for the images ranked second and third. Image 8 (coded positive) was ranked second most frequently in the masculinity condition with 30 (23.62%) participants ranking Image 8 second, but only one less participant (29 or 22.83%) ranked Image 9 (also coded positive) second. Image 7 (coded neutral) was ranked third most frequently in the masculinity condition with 24 (18.90%) participants ranking Image 7 third, but again only one less participant (23 or 18.11%) ranked Image 9 (coded positive) third. These results are not necessarily surprising given the inclusion of neutral images which could be perceived as either positive or negative. Additionally, the first three images, which are coded negatively, were overall ranked least frequently in the masculinity condition, supporting my observation that in the masculinity condition the images coded either positive or neutral were those most frequently chosen but not in any discernable or significant pattern.

**Table 1: Frequency of Images Ranked #1-3 in the Masculinity Condition**

<b>Images</b>	<b>Ranked 1<sup>st</sup> Frequency (%)</b>	<b>Ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> Frequency (%)</b>	<b>Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> Frequency (%)</b>
Image 1 (Neg.)	3 (2.36)	2 (1.57)	7 (5.51)
Image 2 (Neg.)	5 (3.94)	4 (3.15)	7 (5.51)
Image 3 (Neg.)	6 (4.72)	5 (3.94)	9 (7.09)
Image 4 (N)	14 (11.02)	14 (11.02)	7 (5.51)
Image 5 (N)	15 (11.81)	16 (12.60)	13 (10.24)
Image 6 (Pos.)	<b>24 (18.90)</b>	9 (7.09)	18 (14.17)
Image 7 (N)	17 (13.39)	18 (14.17)	<b>24 (18.90)</b>
Image 8 (Pos.)	21 (16.54)	<b>30 (23.62)</b>	19 (14.96)
Image 9 (Pos.)	22 (17.32)	29 (22.83)	23 (18.11)

**Total:**            127 (100.00)                            127 (100.00)                            127 (100.00)

Chi-square test results for the rankings of images in the toxic masculinity or treatment condition were significant with a  $p$ -value less than .01 and a Pearson statistic of 92.20, indicating that there is an association between images and rankings in this condition. These results are evidenced in Table 2 where 43 (33.59%) participants ranked Image 3 (coded negative) first, 57 (44.53%) participants ranked Image 2 (coded negative) second, and 58 (45.31%) participants ranked Image 1 (coded negative) third. Even where the frequencies are somewhat similar, such as the frequency with which Images 1 (58 or 45.31%) and 2 (46 or 35.94%) were ranked third, the three images that were coded negative were overwhelmingly selected by participants for all three rankings. These results indicate that, unlike masculinity, toxic masculinity is definitively perceived negatively as rankings are associated with the three images coded as negative.

**Table 2: Frequency of Images Ranked #1-3 in the Toxic Masculinity Condition**

<b>Images</b>	<b>Ranked 1<sup>st</sup> Frequency (%)</b>	<b>Ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> Frequency (%)</b>	<b>Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> Frequency (%)</b>
Image 1 (Neg.)	29 (22.66)	38 (29.69)	<b>58 (45.31)</b>
Image 2 (Neg.)	21 (16.41)	<b>57 (44.53)</b>	46 (35.94)
Image 3 (Neg.)	<b>43 (33.59)</b>	31 (24.22)	15 (11.72)
Image 4 (N)	5 (3.91)	-	5 (3.91)
Image 5 (N)	3 (2.34)	-	-
Image 6 (Pos.)	3 (2.34)	2 (1.56)	1 (0.78)
Image 7 (N)	12 (9.38)	-	-
Image 8 (Pos.)	6 (4.69)	-	1 (0.78)
Image 9 (Pos.)	6 (4.69)	-	2 (1.56)
<b>Total:</b>	128 (100.00)	128 (100.00)	128 (100.00)

\*\*\*Significant at  $p < .01$ ; Pearson Chi2 = 92.20

#### *Traits & Practices:*

Table 3 contains the results of paired sample  $t$ -tests for trait scales in both conditions. Paired sample  $t$ -test results for the trait scales in masculinity and toxic masculinity conditions were all significant at an alpha of .01. These results indicate that participants' perceptions of masculine traits were significantly different in the masculinity and toxic masculinity conditions. Images in the masculinity or control condition were rated higher for the following traits: affection, cheer, compassion, confidence, courage, empathy, gentleness, success, and sympathy. Affection, cheer, compassion, empathy, gentleness, and sympathy are all feminine coded traits,

indicating that feminine traits were more prevalent in the masculinity condition. Further, confidence, courage, and success were neutral coded masculine traits, meaning they could be interpreted either positively or negatively by participants. Images in the toxic masculinity or treatment condition were rated higher for the following traits: aggression, dominance, competition, and emotionlessness. Aggression, dominance, and emotionlessness were all negative coded masculine traits. Competition was a neutral masculine coded trait. These results suggest that images in the toxic masculinity condition were more closely associated with definitively masculine traits, most of which were negatively coded masculine traits. The results for the toxic masculinity condition are in stark contrast to those for the masculinity condition as the masculinity condition rated higher for all feminine coded traits and included only neutral coded masculine traits.

**Table 3: Mean Ratings of Traits by Condition**

<b>Traits</b>	<b>Masculinity</b>	<b>Toxic Masculinity</b>	<b><i>t</i>-Statistic</b>
Affectionate	<b>3.19 (1.32)</b>	1.12 (0.56)	17.54***
Aggressive	2.34 (1.32)	<b>4.73 (0.52)</b>	-19.71***
Dominant	2.85 (1.35)	<b>4.44 (0.87)</b>	-11.98***
Cheerful	<b>3.20 (1.25)</b>	1.24 (0.61)	16.31***
Compassionate	<b>3.32 (1.37)</b>	1.13 (0.59)	16.93***
Competitive	3.27 (1.30)	<b>4.15 (1.02)</b>	-6.20***
Confident	<b>4.33 (0.80)</b>	3.04 (1.46)	8.66***
Courageous	<b>3.81 (1.20)</b>	1.87 (1.13)	15.25***
Emotionless	1.52 (0.93)	<b>2.91 (1.52)</b>	-9.50***
Empathetic	<b>3.04 (1.42)</b>	1.20 (0.66)	13.09***
Gentle	<b>3.09 (1.35)</b>	1.11 (0.51)	16.80***
Successful	<b>3.80 (1.11)</b>	2.20 (1.20)	11.70***
Sympathetic	<b>3.12 (1.38)</b>	1.17 (0.56)	15.92***

Notes: Standard deviation in parentheses. \* $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Data had issues of non-normality which was addressed by testing the robustness of results using a sign test. Results remained the same regardless of issues of non-normality.

Table 4 contains the results of paired sample *t*-tests for the practice scales in both conditions. Paired sample *t*-tests for the practice scales in masculinity and toxic masculinity conditions were all significant, with two statements being significant at an alpha of .05 and the remaining nine statements being significant at an alpha of .01. These results suggest that participants' perceptions of masculine practices were significantly different in masculinity and toxic masculinity conditions. The masculinity or control condition was rated higher on the following practice statements: "Successful people consider all viewpoints and perspectives"; "I can think of no good reason for hitting a person"; "Showing emotion builds community with others"; "It takes a strong person to admit they do not know something"; and "The most respected people work well with others". These practice statements rated higher in the masculinity condition all directly juxtapose the practice statements derived from Berdahl and colleagues (2018) Masculinity Contest Culture scales which reflect toxic workplace practices. In other words, the practice statements rated higher in the masculinity condition counter those statements which reflect toxic workplace practices.

**Table 4: Mean Ratings of Practices by Condition**

<b>Practices</b>	<b>Masculinity</b>	<b>Toxic Masculinity</b>	<b><i>t</i>-Statistic</b>
One person's loss is another person's gain.	1.96 (1.25)	<b>3.71 (1.29)</b>	-12.50***
Successful people consider all viewpoints and perspectives.	<b>3.32 (1.45)</b>	1.53 (1.00)	12.24***
It is important to be in good physical shape to be respected.	3.05 (1.34)	<b>3.34 (1.41)</b>	-1.86**
I can think of no good reason for hitting a person.	<b>2.78 (1.55)</b>	1.48 (1.04)	7.85***



The most respected people do not show emotions.	1.71 (1.15)	<b>3.15 (1.59)</b>	-9.01***
Admitting you do not know something looks weak.	1.78 (1.24)	<b>3.63 (1.57)</b>	-11.25***
Showing emotion builds community with others.	<b>3.22 (1.42)</b>	1.47 (1.00)	12.07***
Lack of success is often a result of lack of effort.	2.76 (1.35)	<b>3.30 (1.44)</b>	-3.35**
It takes a strong person to admit they do not know something.	<b>3.44 (1.43)</b>	1.46 (0.97)	13.61***
The appropriate response to being hit is to hit back.	2.22 (1.35)	<b>4.15 (1.21)</b>	-12.85***
The most respected people work well with others.	<b>3.63 (1.30)</b>	1.66 (1.13)	13.69***

Notes: Standard deviations are in parentheses. \* $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ <sup>3</sup>

The following practice statements were rated higher in the toxic masculinity or treatment condition: “One person's loss is another person's gain”; “It is important to be in good physical shape to be respected”; “The most respected people do not show emotions”; “Admitting you do not know something looks weak”; “Lack of success is often a result of lack of effort”; and “The appropriate response to being hit is to hit back”. These practice statements rated higher in the toxic masculinity condition are all statements which reflect toxic masculine workplace practices derived from Berdahl and colleagues (2018). These paired sample *t*-test results would suggest that definitively toxic masculine workplace practices are associated with toxic masculinity while

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<sup>3</sup> Data had issues of non-normality which was addressed by testing the robustness of results using a sign test. Results remained the same regardless of issues of non-normality.

those statements that counter toxic masculine workplace practices and reflect feminine practices are associated with masculinity.

### *Qualitative Findings*

**Coding Scheme.** Qualitative results reflect the quantitative findings for both traits and practices. Table 5 displays the frequency of fourteen qualitative codes for masculinity and toxic masculinity conditions (see Appendix D for codebook). Half of the codes were based on the trait scale I developed for both conditions (aggression, dominance, competition, confidence, courage, emotionless, success). After combing through the qualitative data twice, I developed an additional seven codes based on participant responses (ambition, anger, strength, provider, positive, negative, and balance). Ambition, anger, strength, and provider were all added to the codebook due to the frequency with which they were used and/or implied in the qualitative data. For example, for both Images 4 and 9 the men were consistently described as providers for either themselves or their families which was not an initial trait or practice included in my scales. Additionally, Image 5 mentioned strength in the large majority of entries and used language such as “worked hard to reach a goal” to imply that the men were ambitious. The word anger was utilized more often than aggression in participant descriptions of images ranked for the toxic masculinity condition, necessitating its addition to the codebook.

Positive, negative, and balance were added as codes due to how often they were implied in the data. Participants’ often implicated that there is a right and wrong way to practice masculinity and made moral judgements regarding the men in the images and masculinity. Participants’ descriptions were coded as positive if they described the type of masculinity as positive or if they made moral judgements that their description of masculinity was “good” or “the right way” to be masculine. Contrarily, participant descriptions were coded as negative if

they described the type of masculinity as negative or if they made moral judgements that their description of masculinity was “bad” or “the wrong way” to be masculine. Participant descriptions also often implied balance by pairing two opposite traits, usually pairing a masculine coded and feminine coded trait. For example, many participant descriptions of Image 9 in the masculinity condition note that men should be both strong and gentle/loving/kind.

As seen in Table 5, and similar to the results of the paired sample *t*-tests, most neutral masculine traits (with the exception of competition) were utilized more frequently in participant descriptions of images in the masculinity condition. Ambition, confidence, courage, success, strength, and provider were all utilized more frequently in titles and descriptions for the masculinity condition. Strength was the most frequently utilized code in the masculinity condition with 120 counts or 23.26% of the total codes for that condition. Positive was also utilized more frequently in the masculinity condition, with 74 counts compared to 0 counts in the toxic masculinity condition. Also similar to the results of the paired sample *t*-tests, the definitively negative masculine traits were utilized more frequently in participant descriptions of images in the toxic masculinity condition. Anger, aggression, dominance, and emotionless were all utilized more frequently in the titles and descriptions for the toxic masculinity condition. Dominance was the most frequently utilized code in the toxic masculinity condition with 177 counts or 30.41% of total codes for that condition. Competition was the only neutral coded masculine trait to be utilized more frequently in the toxic masculinity condition which makes sense given participant descriptions for Image 3 (coded negative). Negative was also utilized more frequently in the toxic masculinity condition, with 121 counts or 20.80% of the total codes for the toxic masculinity condition.

**Table 5: Frequency of Qualitative Codes by Condition**

<b>Qualitative Codes</b>	<b>Masculinity</b> <i>Frequency (%)</i>	<b>Toxic Masculinity</b> <i>Frequency (%)</i>
Ambition	<b>42 (8.14)</b>	1 (0.17)
Anger	9 (1.74)	<b>102 (17.53)</b>
Aggression	15 (2.91)	<b>95 (16.32)</b>
Dominance	33 (6.40)	<b>177 (30.41)</b>
Competition	5 (0.97)	<b>35 (6.01)</b>
Confidence	<b>43 (8.34)</b>	3 (0.52)
Courage	<b>28 (5.43)</b>	0 (0.00)
Emotionless	1 (0.19)	<b>13 (2.23)</b>
Success	<b>48 (9.30)</b>	4 (0.69)
Strength	<b>120 (23.26)</b>	19 (3.26)
Provider	<b>80 (15.50)</b>	2 (0.34)
Positive	<b>74 (14.34)</b>	0 (0.00)
Negative	3 (0.57)	<b>121 (20.80)</b>
Balance	<b>15 (2.91)</b>	10 (1.72)
<b>Total:</b>	516 (100.00)	582 (100.00)

*Notes:* Totals reflect the total amount of codes per condition (i.e. 120/516 codes in the masculinity condition were for strength)

In addition to supporting the quantitative results discussed above, participant titles and descriptions for images supplement quantitative results by providing additional context.

Qualitative results will be discussed by image and condition. See Appendix B for full list of images and their codes. (See Appendix E for all titles and descriptions)

**Image 1.** In the masculinity condition, qualitative results suggest that the presumed age of the man in the image was a significant factor in participant's interpretations of Image 1 (coded negative). Many of the titles and descriptions for Image 1 in the masculinity condition noted that it appeared the man in the image was "talking down to" or "yelling" or "disciplining a child harshly". Some participant descriptions, for example, noted that "men who are masculine discipline their children harshly", "men who consider themselves more masculine will tend to be more aggressive in that they will yell more often and are more likely to yell at their children", "this shows masculinity because it shows someone older talking down to someone younger... the

stance and placement of the older guy just shows that he is in charge of the situation”. While some participants describe this behavior as harsh, aggressive, and assertive, other descriptions provide context which suggests participants are perceiving this man as a father or grandfather figure due to his age and size compared to the person he is speaking to: “The end stage of a man’s life should be the most celebrated. He should be teaching younger males and making an impact on the lives of his grandchildren”, “an older man will seek to impart the wisdom he has gained to younger people...”. Participant descriptions also suggest that the man in Image 1 is being perceived as a father or grandfather due to his apparent age. Some examples include “Passing down wisdom to younger generations”, “Teaching kids”, “Taking care of the vulnerable”, and “Grandfatherly love”.

In the toxic masculinity condition for Image 1, the apparent age of the man in the image is still a major factor, but the titles and descriptions participants provided are definitively negative. In contrast to some of the titles used in the masculinity condition, the toxic masculinity condition includes some of the following titles: “Kid yeller”, “Angry Grandpa”, “Horrible father”, “Guy is a dickhead to a kid”, “Arrogance not experience”, “Lecturing”, and “Bully”. As opposed to the masculinity condition, participant descriptions in the toxic masculinity condition describe the man in the image as “mansplaining”, “condescending”, “talking down to”, and “belittling” another person or child as a means of asserting power, dominance, and control. Many participants describe this behavior as toxic either because they interpret the behavior as being directed towards a child or because they believe that the behavior is unwarranted, “Scolding a child is physically and emotionally abusing and is NEVER appropriate”, “Again aggression and speaking at a loud volume are often seen as masculine traits and I think they are toxic especially when there are children involved”, “this to me is toxic because it is someone older talking down

onto someone younger. It displays a toxic behavior that is not needed...”, “This displays toxic masculinity to me because he is neglecting feelings of care for this obviously young and impressionable child and giving into anger that is unrightfully wielded against a young kid who is still growing and learning. He is using anger and aggression for unhealthy and unwarranted reasons”, “The image reminds me of how some men think that they can talk down towards people around them based on some particular trait that they possess that others do not (e.g. gender, race, wealth, education, status, etc.)”.

Finally, the perceived age of the man in Image 1 also prompted participants to think about and discuss how toxic masculinity is passed down from generation to generation. In the masculinity condition, this “passing down” was considered a teaching moment for younger generations. In the toxic masculinity condition, participants describe the negative implications of passing down toxic masculine traits and behaviors to younger generations, “[Title] The cycle continues [Description] I see this picture as a parent telling their son that boys do not cry... once the boy grows up, chances are he will be telling his son the same”, “The ideas of toxic masculinity are gender stereotypes that have been built up and passed down through generations, so these ideas are often things that are learned from ones' parents, either explicitly through what they say or implicitly through their actions”, “This is another example of how bullying comes to be a social norm with boys”.

**Image 2.** In the masculinity condition for Image 2 (coded negative), participants used language such as “stern”, “authority”, “scolding”, “angry”, “dominant”, and “power and control”. Like in the masculinity condition for Image 1, participants note that the most masculine men will be easy to anger and lose their temper and feel the need to be in charge and assert dominance over others: “when a lot of people think of the word authority, they think of a man”,

“but it’s also about the way men are encouraged to handle conflict—assertively, which can mean telling someone off..”, “men who are masculine yell and are angry”, “men who consider themselves more masculine will argue their points harder, being much more stubborn and condescending than a normal man”. In the masculinity condition for Image 2, participants use definitively negative masculine traits and practices to describe masculinity but did not make moral judgements about whether these masculine traits and practices are wrong. The traits and practices utilized by participants are simply described as masculine in the masculinity condition.

In the toxic masculinity condition for Image 2, titles and descriptions centered around anger, aggression, and a “my way or the highway” masculine philosophy. The toxic masculinity condition for Image 2 included the following titles: “Mansplaining”, “Angry man”, “Do what I say”, “Control”, “You will do what I say”, “Real men are aggressive when they talk”, “My way or the highway”, “Angry male projecting his feelings through threats”, and “I’m male therefore I must be right”. Similar to the results in the toxic masculinity condition for Image 1, participants seemed to make moral judgements regarding the apparent behavior of the man in the image, noting that the behavior is unnecessary or unwarranted which is why it is described as toxic. “Stern”, for example, was also used to describe Image 2 in the masculinity condition, but in the toxic masculinity condition stern behavior is described as both masculine and unnecessary, “this to me is toxic because if someone has to point like that and potentially get in your face, that is toxic and not needed”. Other behaviors, such as anger, are also described as being unnecessary or unwarranted and therefore toxic, “he has an air of condescension, he is lecturing and not listening, and he has let feelings of anger overtake him for what seems like unwarranted reasons”, “an angry man is mad for no reason”, “Anger is a tool. It can be used to create change, or it can be abused for the sake of power and shows of toxic masculinity. In this image, with no

context for what he may be angry at, it is presumed he is not using a righteous anger to fight against a cruel injustice, but rather, is using his anger to get his way”, “I chose this image because it involves behavior that is unnecessary and generally fits the description of toxic”. Participant’s are making moral judgements regarding masculinity by suggesting that anger, in and of itself, is not necessarily negative and is actually justified when fighting an injustice or standing up for others. Rather, it is the use of anger for the purpose of dominating or controlling others that is negative.

Participants further describe how dominating and controlling behavior is toxic due to the fact that it stifles and silences the perspectives of others: “They, and they alone know anything. Your feelings, opinions, and truth mean nothing if it isn’t in line with their agenda”, “Only the thought and opinions of the male are valid and this is not open to discussion or debate”, “This image makes me think about toxic masculinity in the sense that it reflects a man appearing to try and prove his point, but with no other party in the image. This represents how I believe ‘toxic masculinity’ is most corrosive, in that it often reflects back upon the single party expressing it; I believe the trait(s) to be a projection of one's inner conflicts outward, without any regard to how that may affect another party. It is an expression of a lack of empathy and compassion for other individuals (in the context of toxic masculinity)”. The need of men to always be right described by the participants means there is no consideration of or empathy toward the perspectives of others.

Further, and again similar to the toxic masculinity condition for Image 1, participant descriptions assign motivations for what they describe as angry, dominating, and controlling behavior. Participants suggest that men who are insecure in their masculinity are those who engage in toxic masculine practices: “While he is not being violent, he is still lashing out and



talking down to someone, which again shows a sign of someone being insecure about their own masculinity”, “I really think deep down anger in relation to toxic masculinity can stem from anger toward oneself because it probably builds off of insecurities stemming from inadequacy specifically from the idea that one isn't performing well enough in relation to others”, “some men feel the need to yell and get upset over nothing, usually if their masculinity is threatened”. It is the feeling of insecurity in ones masculinity and a belief in the need to prove ones masculinity that motivates what participants describe as toxic behavior (lashing out at and dominating and controlling others).

Finally, participants used the term “mansplaining” often for Image 2 in the toxic masculinity condition. Participants describe the man in Image 2 as looking as though he is angrily explaining something, or explaining why he is correct, to a woman who likely does not need an explanation: “This image seems to describe the phenomena of men explaining basic things to women, thinking that they are the experts on a subject that women might otherwise already know things about”, “This image represents a man explaining or ‘mansplaining’ the reason he is correct and that his beliefs and/or opinions are correct”, “Men that feel the need to explain what things mean, especially to women when no one asked. This comes from a place of thinking they are more intelligent than everyone else”. The emphasis on “mansplaining” throughout descriptions for Image 2 in the toxic masculinity condition reflect other participant descriptions mentioned above which suggest that toxic masculinity means not considering the viewpoints of or having empathy towards others.

**Image 3.** In the masculinity condition for Image 3 (coded negative), participants note that the men in the image are being physically aggressive toward one another. Participants do not necessarily make moral judgements regarding whether the aggression in the image is justified—

instead, they note that fighting is not always justified but it is always masculine, “With extra testosterone men are more likely to get into physical altercations, and this pictures two men doing just that. While part of it is biological, men fighting more and being aggressive is something that has been prominent in many cultures for a long time”, “Plenty of people who are not masculine fight, sure, but a tendency toward aggression would most likely be found in a masculine individual”, “When I think of the concept of masculinity, I think about aggression”, “Men who are masculine also are aggressive when confronted I think. This image portrays that the man is trying to show his masculinity by being aggressive”, “Fighting can be a good thing or a bad thing. But nevertheless, it’s a manly thing”. Further, one participant notes that it is not the presence of men in the image that makes it masculine, rather, it is the fact that they could not imagine a feminine person engaging in the aggressive behavior pictured in the image, “These dudes are fighting in the workplace, which is pretty masculine, not due to the fact they are men but because I cannot imagine a feminine person doing that”. One participant’s description in the masculinity condition describes the two men fighting in the image relatively positively, suggesting that it displays the masculine quality of courage or standing up for what you believe is right: “This photo make me think about how to have masculinity you are willing to fight for what you believe is right. Fighting for your beliefs can be physical or verbal but you will not go down without a fight. Masculinity makes you believe you need to stand up for yourself and not just let someone walk all over them”. This comment is the only comment in the masculinity condition for Image 3 that does not describe the behavior as aggressive or dominant.

Participant titles and descriptions in the toxic masculinity condition for Image 3 describe the behavior in the image as aggressive, controlling, dominating, and violent. Participant titles and descriptions in the toxic masculinity condition for Image 3 reflect participant titles and

descriptions in the toxic masculinity condition for Images 1 and 2. Participant's see the "physically aggressive" and "fighting" behavior as toxic because it is perceived as being unnecessary or unwarranted. Some participants describe the fighting behavior as toxic and unwarranted because they interpret the fight as taking place in a workplace setting: "... it's very toxic to bring your unprofessional spats to those you work with, as you are all colleagues and should be working towards the same mission", "Aggression could be a good aspect of masculinity in some contexts but the workplace attire leads me to believe this is not one of those contexts", "This seems to be someone ready to fight and being held back because something upset them. Since this is in a workplace it is never appropriate to have this behavior", "Conflicting parties is a totally natural occurrence; however these guys seem to be doing it in an inappropriate setting, expanding their conflict beyond the parties involved, and seeking attention from such".

Other participants describe the behavior in the image as unnecessary due to the fact that they believe there are other more appropriate means of addressing conflict: "It becomes toxic because people always disagree to each other and intent to their own idea without thinking alternatively", "Picture 3 shows two men who look like they are about to start fighting and it fits the idea of toxic masculinity because there is this idea that every problem needs to be fixed with fighting. Toxic masculinity has gotten people use to fighting problems out and not taking the time to talk about the problem and view the issue from different perspective", "From the image, it looks like the two men are fighting instead of discussing their emotions in a healthy and respectful way", "They both chose violence instead of just a basic conversation to get over their misunderstandings", "The unwillingness or inability to use calm, rational discourse to solve

problems is a pillar of toxic masculinity to me”. These descriptions suggest that participants are making a moral judgement and believe the “right” way to handle conflict is through discourse.

Participants also made a moral judgement regarding masculinity by suggesting that physically fighting is appropriate in some situations, but not the situation they are inferring from the image: “Fighting is toxic masculinity because while defending people you care about is fine, starting fights for little to no reason is not fine”, “Aggressiveness and violence definitely have their place, particularly when used to protect others, but in most situations, is just a display of toxic masculinity to try and prove a point”, “Physical touch and getting into someone's personal space is the biggest indicators here as it is unacceptable in most situations”. These participant descriptions suggest that fighting in defense of yourself or others is not necessarily toxic, but the men in the image are perceived by some participants in the toxic masculinity condition to be performing their masculinity in a show of dominance and control.

Finally, and again similar to the toxic masculinity condition for Images 1 and 2, participants in the toxic masculinity condition for Image 3 assigned motivations for the behaviors they associated with the image, describing it as dominating, aggressive, and competitive. Participant descriptions discussed a “fragile ego” or “masculine insecurity” as a motivation for competitive behavior in particular: “People (mainly men) who are insecure about their masculinity feel the need to overcompensate by being violent and lashing out”, “This makes me think of the ‘fragile male ego’ and how men are taught to believe themselves great and anything that goes against that belief is bad and needs to be eradicated”, “[Title] Masculine insecurity”. Other participant descriptions noted a need to prove ones masculinity to others as a motivation for competitive and domineering behavior, “They probably don't have a good reason to be fighting but the need to prove something and show they are the ‘top dog’ is causing the situation

to become a good example of toxic masculinity in one image”, “It kind of illustrates the way two men might get caught up in the need to appear tough/masculine and become overly confrontational”, “Excessive competition and dick-measuring contests are related to toxic masculinity”, “Instead of talking out issues, many men decide to prove their manhood by fighting”, “Men who cannot get over their masculinity complex will engage in arguments just for the sake of winning and being right”. Thus, in all three images coded negative participant descriptions acknowledge masculinity as a performance for others, whether motivated by an insecurity in one’s own masculinity or the need to prove ones masculinity to others.

**Image 4.** In the masculinity condition for Image 4 (coded neutral), participants most often used language like “successful”, “provider”, “hard work”, “independence”, and “businessman” to describe the man in the image. Success is often discussed in tandem with being a business/professional man and a provider. A few participants note that you do not have to be masculine or a man to be successful in business, but that is who they associate with business/professional work: “You don't have to be a man to be successful in business anymore (it's the 21st century) but traditionally this is the domain of men”, “I believe this image represents masculinity. I understand that a woman could do the same exact job, but I don't believe others would refer to it as masculinity”. Others simply state that this career path is a “stereotypical” one for men or one that they usually see men in: “He is wearing a suit and in an office, which is a typical career image for a man. Stereotypically, men are expected to work in offices like these”, “I see a lot of men in business and in leadership roles. This causes me to associate businessmen with being very masculine”, “Often business and work with a dress code like that of the man in this photo is considered to be a man's job”. Participant descriptions further describe success in masculine terms as being in charge or in a position of power, “Often when

you picture a man you think of them setting goals, being high up in a company and making money”, “This person looks like someone of high status, who is productive and has reached a high level in his career. I associate that with masculinity, because there are probably a lot of people he competed against to attain his position”.

Participant descriptions of the man in Image 4 in the masculinity condition almost always mentioned the man’s role as a provider in the context of his success. Some participants discussed the provider role in more traditional masculine terms, using language such as “breadwinner” and “wife and kids”: “This image represents the mindset of masculinity as a provider, someone who works to help take care of the family and earn money to go toward anything they may need”, “He will become the leader and provider when he marries and has a family. This will be especially important when his wife is pregnant with his children that he is able to meet the needs of the family financially and provide some work relief to his wife later in her pregnancy”, “This image represents the man being the breadwinner and provider for his family”, “He is sitting in a beautiful office setting which shows he has a good job and can probably bring home a good paycheck and save for his future, and provide housing, food, and needs for a potential”. One participant who spoke more traditionally about a masculine provider role described this role as being a “healthy” form of masculinity, making a moral judgement regarding which masculine practices or roles are acceptable/good: “Having a fulfilling purpose and job to help the family should be a core element of a healthy masculinity if one chooses that role within the family. This is a healthy display of masculinity because it allows those who identify with the term to have something to strive for and put their energy into”. Even in saying this is a healthy display of masculinity, this participant specifies that the role should be a chosen one. Other participant descriptions regarding a provider role discussed independence, being able

to provide for yourself (and potentially others), as masculine: “When I think about masculinity the first thing that comes to my mind is a man who works in order to provide for himself or others”, “The man brings home the money for the family and provides for himself and others that may need it. The man is always the one working to support himself”, “A man provides for himself and/or his family. He works hard and provides what is needed for his situation to thrive”, “I was thinking how being masculine means having a job and providing for yourself and not having to rely on others to get you through your life”.

Participant titles and descriptions in the masculinity condition for Image 4 further define “hard-working” as a masculine trait: “Being hardworking is something a lot of men identify with so I feel that’s why I associate this with masculinity”, “: I chose picture number two because when I think of masculinity I think of someone who likes to work and is constantly working. Putting work first, going above and beyond at work, and constantly attending to things involving work are traits of someone with masculinity”. Similar to participant descriptions of success in a business/professional context, a few participants note that women can be hard-working but they associate the trait “hard-working” with masculinity: “I find hard working as a masculine trait as well. I know men and women can both work hard, but with men, I just deem it as masculine”.

Participant descriptions for Image 4 in the masculinity condition are in stark contrast to those in the toxic masculinity condition for Images 1, 2 and 3 (all coded negative). In the toxic masculinity condition for Images 1, 2, and 3, men in leadership roles were described as dominant and oppressive—leaving no room for the perspective of or empathy toward others. In the masculinity condition for Image 4, participants describe men in leadership roles as successful and powerful, but also open-minded respectful: “This is a masculine image because the man is successful and powerful, but also congenial. He appears to respect others and work well with

them as a team, instead of asserting absolute dominance. This shows masculinity because he is making the most of his traits as a man and not giving into bad temptations to use fear or intimidation to be successful. He looks like a good leader because he knows how to relate to others with empathy”, “In this example I see someone who may be using traits of strong communication to complete tasks. Communicating with others while working and creating a network of people relying on each other to enable greater success... . The ‘masculine’ trait here is being able to navigate those complex needs to create a cohesive team”, “He had a genuine looking smile on his face and appears amiable and professional. This guy makes an effort to get along with the people around him and doesn’t bully his colleagues”. Additionally, one participant describes the man in Image 4 as having “masculine self-assuredness” as opposed to the “masculine insecurity” and “fragile ego” discussed in the toxic masculinity condition for Image 3 (coded negative).

Participant titles and descriptions in the toxic masculinity condition for Image 4 reflect a distrust for men in authority positions, distrust in the corporate/business world, and a sense that the man in the image is arrogant or has a feeling of superiority over others (confidence to an extreme). Most commonly, participant descriptions in the toxic masculinity condition for this image described the man in the image as representing arrogance or a belief in ones superiority over others: “I think the word vain, or vanity can be used as a form of toxic masculinity, no matter the gender. It is another way of showing that you are more superior”, “I chose this because he looks very smug and I automatically associate arrogant men with toxic masculinity. I feel like men who feel they have a right to show dominance over another person are usually very arrogant in general because of their entitlement”. Other participant descriptions indicate a distrust of men in authority positions, specifically in the context of the business or corporate



world and when it comes to women in business: “In the work fields there tends to be a high percentage of male bosses who have this masculine innate desire to be defiling and vile to women”, “The guy shown is a white male who obviously takes great pains to present a strong, dominant position... so I think his position was won either by knowing the right people or asserting dominance. Either way, I think he might be abusing his power”, “This person looks like he is very casual and in a high up position because of his office view and technology. He seems like a dishonest person”. One participant specifically notes a distrust in the corporate world in general: “this might be toxic masculinity because it is a man in a typical workplace. there are issues with toxic masculinity within the corporate world, as women are being paid less for doing similar work, face issues in differences with parental lead, and are treated differently based on their positions”. Here, the participant is associating discrimination against women in the corporate world with toxic masculinity. Finally, one participant describes the “false equivalence between masculinity and wealth” as toxic, implying that toxic masculinity is a function of capitalism, “By creating the idea that one's level of masculinity is determined by their level of wealth effectively creates a huge motivation to continue working for a large percentage of the population that will never actually acquire any real wealth”.

**Image 5.** In the masculinity condition for Image 5 (coded neutral), participant titles and descriptions most often made mention of “strength”, “success”, and “achievement”, “celebration”, or “ambition”. Many participants mentioned strength in a traditional masculine context, describing masculinity as being strong, having muscles, and showing those muscles: “this picture has a person flexing their strength. I usually associate masculinity with strength”, “This looks like a physically fit and healthy adult male. I associate that with masculinity because being a fit male, increases your masculinity. Things like more muscle mass, muscle definition

and a prominent jawline, are masculine features”, “I think of masculinity as having a strong physical body that is in good shape and having strength to do many manual labor jobs”, “I personally believe masculinity can be many things, however, in terms of traditional definitions, I would say the act of flexing could be seen as masculinity”, “Posing outside in the sun showing off your hard work in the gym is one of the most masculine things a man can do”. One participant description of strength in a masculine context specified that this strength is about being in control and showing others you are capable of dominating them if necessary: “Masculine people probably work out and value looking buff, butch, and large, as if they could triumph over another easily. The ‘alpha’ aspect of masculinity is about being in control, triumphing, and having authority over others”.

Other participants in the masculinity condition made sure to clarify that the motivation for strength is not and should not be dominating or intimidating others: “Showing strength without being aggressive. Showing strength in a non-threatening manner is how it should be”, “He is standing in a powerful pose but not trying to look powerful to intimidate or dominate others”, “I was thinking of masculinity as physical strength, but in a non-threatening manner”, “The man appears confident in himself (alone) without degrading another”. These descriptions regarding strength in Image 5 in the masculinity condition suggest that participants are making moral judgements about what kind of strength is acceptable or “positive” and indicating that strength is only toxic when it reaches an “extreme”: “This fits masculinity with the idea of muscles/buffness, being outdoors, and the general physical ideals of masculinity. It borderlines into toxic when taken into an extreme”, “This image to me shows triumph, victory, and power over oneself - not over others. Self-mastery, discipline, and willpower are perhaps traditionally or symbolically masculine traits, but are keys to a positive, healthy, and successful lifestyle”,

“There is nothing toxic about having strength and confidence, it's how you choose to use it”. Further, some participants directly contradict descriptions in the toxic masculinity conditions for the negatively coded images by specifying that masculinity is strength that does not need to be performed for others: “One can be ‘masculine’ without having to display power or strength or physique for all to see. Masculinity involves being confident in one's body, even if one's body does not present what many believe masculinity is all about”, “His posture is strong, his arms are held at dynamic angles signifying strength and male power. This lone silhouette stands before the horizon alone - no need for conflict or validation from others to prove how powerful he is”.

Participant descriptions of strength also sometimes clarify that the strength they perceived as masculine is not just muscular or physical, but mental or spiritual as well: “Having masculinity also means being strong physically and emotionally, being ready to face any issues or problems that may come up and being strong enough to handle them”, “In this image this person is taking the time to exercise while, in my opinion, doing so in a spiritual manner of self-love”, “I believe that a man can be masculine when he also has a spiritual aspect of him. I believe that believing in a higher power, force, or god makes a man stronger. I believe a man can be strong by acknowledging his spiritual strength and physical strength at the same time”, “Being strong not physically but strength of character, in touch with inner thoughts and feelings, not insecure about what others think”. These descriptions would suggest that participants view physical (muscular), mental/emotional, and spiritual strength as masculine.

A few participant descriptions describe Image 5 in the masculinity condition as representing a “positive” form of masculinity, stating that exercising or running is a healthy means of processing emotions for men: “This guy appears to be just getting done with his morning run. That is a positive form of masculinity because he's doing something positive to

handle his emotions”, “This display of strength and determination is a healthy display of masculinity, one that encourages those who identify with the term to fulfill their potential. They are consistently being able to overcome the challenges coming their way”, “The man in this photo looks like he might be running or exercising on the beach, which seems like a healthy hobby that can help him relax and the start/end of a day. Those types of physical hobbies can be a good time to think and process emotions, and I think it's good for men to have hobbies like that they can turn to when they need to think for a bit or just to try to relax for a while”. These participant descriptions are in contrast to those in the toxic masculinity conditions for Images 1 through 3, where men are more often described as “emotionless” or not being able to show emotions other than anger.

Participants further describe the man in Image 5 in the masculinity condition as successful and ambitious, noting that it appears he is raising his arms in celebration of an accomplishment: “What struck me about this is that it fits what I think of as the ambition of masculinity. Men are encouraged to strive and to push themselves... Men run, push themselves, sweat, take on challenges, and emerge victorious or get up and try again tomorrow”, “This seems to be someone who has made it to a goal and been successful”, “This photo looks like achievement and success. It is not exclusive to masculinity, but achievements and success are often what males are valued for”, “He looks as though he is alone and is flexing possibly just for himself as though he accomplished something that he is excited about”, “This man seems to have maybe accomplished a fitness goal of some sort and has his arms raised to celebrate that”. One of the above participant descriptions also notes that achievements and success are what men are valued for which reflects participant descriptions of Image 4 in the masculinity condition that suggest men are valued for their ability to provide to others. While this participant did not

indicate whether men being valued for their achievements and success is positive or negative, it has implied that one's masculinity is based on what they are able to provide themselves (success, achievements, accomplishments) and others (financially, materially, emotionally).

Finally, in the toxic masculinity condition for Image 5, participant descriptions indicated that the man in the image is “flexing” in order to show off and give a performance for others, again assigning a motivation for the behavior inferred from the image: “I think there is a bit of a showy aspect to toxic masculinity. Someone trying to show off muscles can come off as toxic. While part of masculinity is strength there can be a line where it goes from normal to toxic”, “This picture depicts a man who thinks he is more powerful than others”, “This displays an ‘I’m king of the world’ type of behavior. It’s an ‘I’m at the top and dominant over everyone and everything and everyone else is beneath me’ kind of behavior”. These descriptions, like those in the masculinity condition, suggest that “there is a line” or a point at which masculine strength becomes toxic. Additionally, participant descriptions in the toxic masculinity condition for this image reflect a belief in male superiority, with descriptions suggesting the man in the image thinks he is better than others.

**Image 6.** Participant descriptions in the masculinity condition for Image 6 (coded positive) were similar to participant titles and descriptions for Image 5 in that they consistently mentioned strength. Like the masculinity condition for Image 5, descriptions in the masculinity condition for Image 6 distinguished between traditional masculine strength (e.g., having muscles and the ability to work hard and lift heavy objects) and masculine strength that is not centered around power and dominating others: “This man is masculine as he feels strong and being strong means he feels more masculine” “I think this image is number one because to me, it describes the physical attributes of being ‘masculine.’ Most masculine men like to flex their muscles or show

off their build”, “he is flexing in a nice shirt but still has to flex to show he is superior to everyone else. I’m thinking that girls don’t go around flexing but men do”, “Shows strength, a little bit of playfulness and silliness and he is handsome”, “Again, this image is about someone showing their strength, though in a non-threatening way. They feel good, they feel healthy, they feel strong”, “this guy gives off not only masculine vibes but he also looks like a fun person to be around. Masculinity does not mean a macho guy to me. It means more like a person who is confident and comfortable in their own skin and can also make fun of themselves sometimes”. Participant descriptions like those mentioned here suggest that the man in Image 6 in the masculinity condition is perceived as strong but not serious. He is masculine, but his masculinity does not prevent him from getting along with others and he is perceived as funny and charming as opposed to the men in Images 1 through 3 in the toxic masculinity conditions.

Participant descriptions for the masculinity condition for Image 6 also describe the man in the image as confident: “Confidence is another core character of masculinity”, “I think about masculinity in this image as being confident and male”, “Standing in a way showing confidence, a sense of comfort at belonging in a position of success and showing off some physical attributes”. They further emphasize that the man in the image is masculine because he is confident in a way that “does not impede” on others: “This guy is displaying masculinity because he’s confident in himself, strong in his identity, and proud in a way that’s not impeding on others”. A few participants also mentioned that similar to Image 5, the man in Image 6 appears to be celebrating a success or achievement. Like participant descriptions of strength and confidence, participants specify that the man in Image 6 is not performing or showing off his accomplishments for others, “This person is proud of themselves for achieving a goal... It’s about making themselves happy and not expecting what other people expect from them”.

In the toxic masculinity condition for Image 6, similar to the toxic masculinity condition for Image 5, the man in the image is perceived as showing off which is considered by participants to be toxic. Some participant titles, for example, include “Showboat”, “Overt display”, and “Narcissistic guy flexing”. Participant descriptions describe the behavior of “showing off” as a means of proving ones strength or power, and therefore masculinity, to others: “In the context of toxic masculinity, it would be done to show off their size and make other people feel weaker and inferior to them”, “This person is showing off his muscles. It’s typical of men to want to be stronger than anyone else as to them that’s how you can be more masculine. Usually it’s about outdoing another person rather than being proud of yourself and where you are at”.

**Image 7.** Similar to the masculinity conditions for Images 5 and 6, participant descriptions used language like “strong” and “confident” to describe the man in Image 7 (coded neutral). Participants once again distinguished between traditional masculine strength that is intended as a display of power or domination and masculine strength that is not motivated by a desire for power/control. One participant description associated strength and physical fitness with masculinity and power/domination: “People who want to show their masculinity also want to be the toughest and show how physically fit they are, also because they want to assert dominance”. Most participants discuss strength as masculine without assigning a motivation to dominate/control and actually contrast the comments above by stating that the motivation is *not* power/domination: “This person is showing strength but is doing so in a vulnerable way. They are not showing power, but rather that they understand what is going on and are happy to show you the same thing”, “This picture represents ‘masculinity’ in the sense of strength but not dominance. This man’s posture and physical presence inspires thoughts of usefulness and

willingness to help. Having access to someone in the position of literal physical power who is also non-threatening is a great experience”, “He looks strong and fit, but unlike a lot of the other pictures he doesn't look aggressive”.

In addition to “strength” and “confidence”, participant descriptions for Image 7 tended to describe the man in the image as “friendly”, “happy”, and “funny” or “goofy”: “The man displayed here is both casual and playful. I think he is a good definition of the word. Being masculine to me also means being comfortable in your own skin and he definitely gives off that vibe”, “love the smile, the wry humor the openness of his body and the kindness of his eyes. he looks like someone who is comfortable in his own skin and someone who leads with his brain not his brawn”, “I chose this image because the dude looks happy but also confident and personable. I thought that the confidence and joy give a positive masculine air”, “They are confident and self-assured. They also are assertive without being aggressive. They are usually good natured and don't let little things bother them”, “I chose this image for ‘masculinity’ because it shows a man being happy. The previous images regarding ‘toxic masculinity’ had men appearing angry, but this image appears more friendly”. These participant descriptions would suggest that masculinity in relation to Image 7 is associated not only with strength and confidence, but with amiability and humor, which was not the case for Images 5 and 6.

Participant descriptions for Image 7 in the toxic masculinity condition are very similar to those in the toxic masculinity conditions for Images 5 and 6. A few participants believed the man in the image was performing masculinity or “showing off” as a means of asserting dominance: “Men are constantly using and displaying their muscles to make others aware of how fit and strong they are”, “I chose this image because he is clearly showing his dominance and flexing and I think this is toxic masculinity because men think they have to have muscles to be



respected”, “Some men just cannot accept ‘no’ for an answer. They can become aggressive just to show off their muscles”. These descriptions echo those in the toxic masculinity condition for Images 5 and 6 which suggest that masculinity becomes toxic when strength is performed for others or used to intimidate and threaten others.

**Image 8.** Participant descriptions in the masculinity condition for Image 8 (coded positive) describe the man as helpful, hard-working, independent, and courageous. Many participants infer that this man is a husband or father who is helping out and/or providing by doing chores around the house: “He’s taking care of his own needs (and possibly those of his family) rather than relying on someone else”, “This guy is masculine because he is taking responsibility for himself and his laundry, or he is doing someone else laundry and taking care of them, another masculine feature”, “Being able to step up and take care of yourself, and others. Doing things that no one wants to do because they benefit others and not just yourself. Leading by example for your kids”. Other participants describe the man as both helpful and courageous, acknowledging that he is going against gendered norms regarding cleaning and housework. They describe him as “secure in his masculinity” due to the fact that he is engaging in what is traditionally considered “women’s work”: “This guy is secure enough in his masculinity to help out around the house and doesn’t feel like he’s above doing what might traditionally be considered ‘women’s work’”, “The way I see this one as masculine is he has the courage to do things traditionally associated with women, like cleaning and doing laundry”, “This man is secure enough in his ‘masculinity’ to wear an apron and get the chores done”, “He isn’t afraid to help around the house and he doesn’t see it as a ‘women’s’ job”. One participant describes this form of masculinity as “positive” due to the fact that it challenges gendered norms. Participant descriptions for Image 8 in the masculinity condition contrast descriptions in the toxic

masculinity condition for Images 1 through 3 where the men are described as having “fragile egos” and “masculine insecurity”.

In the toxic masculinity condition for Image 8, it seems participant descriptions are reflective of “weaponized incompetence”. One participant suggests that the man is disorganized- “The person in the this picture appears to definitely be disorganized”-while another participant describes the man as a stereotypically “ignorant” or “incompetent” man-“That's relevant here because what I THINK this image is a goofy schlubby bearded guy who has made a mess while trying to do laundry. It's the According to Jim, Grounded for Life, dopey sitcom husband thing - duhhh, how do I laundry? how do I dishwasher? I guess my improbably hot wife will have to take care of it for me. It's this idea that there are things that it is somehow more masculine to be ignorant of, even though they are very practical skills”. Two participants suspect that the man in the image has ulterior motives and is therefore not actually being helpful: “Men who claim to do it all, to make their spouse look bad”, “I feel like there is something subconsciously insidious happening in men who proclaim to reject masculinity entirely. You cannot reject what you are hardwired to be, a man. And this produces toxic effects of a twisted sort, wherein the man himself might have a disordered personality, like a manipulator”.

**Image 9.** Participant descriptions in the masculinity condition for Image 9 (coded positive) overwhelmingly revolve around the masculine role of being a provider for oneself and one’s family, specifically in a fatherhood role. Some titles include “Fatherhood”, “Father”, “Dad”, “Family man”, and “Love”. Participants describe being a father (and provider) as masculine, with some saying it is the most masculine thing a man can do: “Fatherhood should be an important role for individuals who identify with the term masculinity. Fatherhood is a display of leadership, care, and being a good role model”, “Right or wrong, when I think ‘masculinity,’

one of the first concepts to come to mind is fatherhood”, “Nothing is more masculine than being a daddy”. For the first time for any condition and for all images, many participants use language such as “nurturing”, “loving”, and “kind” to describe the man in the image: “I was thinking how being nurturing and raising a child is masculine because you are being responsible for the life of another person and their survival depends on you”, “I chose this image because my idea of masculinity is a nurturing and caring father figure who has the ability to be not only strong but vulnerable”, “The man in this picture appears confident, loving, affectionate and prioritizes family”, “To care for someone and show love is masculine”. Additionally, “balance” is discussed and implied the most in the masculinity condition for Image 9 compared to all other images and conditions. Participants see the man in Image 9 as representing how masculinity should include both traditionally masculine coded and feminine coded traits. Participants, for example, discuss how a man should be both “gentle” and “strong”: “Masculinity should not only be thought of in terms of physical appearance and strength. ‘Masculinity’ also encompasses having warm and tender feelings for others, especially those who are weak and vulnerable, such as young babies and children”, “It’s not just about muscles and machismo. It’s also being man enough to recognize when it’s appropriate for the softer, gentler side of being a grown man comes into play”, “This is a good way to convey masculinity because it shows strength mixed with tenderness. The man appears to be a kind and gentle father”.

Finally, the toxic masculinity condition for Image 9 is the first toxic masculinity condition for any image that does not include descriptions that describe the image as being negative or toxic. Rather, it seems that the very few participants who ranked Image 9 in the toxic masculinity condition had not meant to rank it for toxic masculinity. The descriptions for the

toxic masculinity condition for Image 9 are all similar to those in the masculinity condition in that they describe fatherhood as a positive and masculine role.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to address a lack of distinction between hegemonic and toxic masculinity in the literature as they are often conflated, making toxic masculinity difficult to operationalize. More specifically, the current study addressed a lack of clarity in terms of what “toxic” is referring to—does it refer to practices, traits, or both? Are there specific traits or practices that are definitively toxic or hegemonically masculine? What is the valence of these traits and practices? It was my assertion that individuals do make distinctions between masculinity (or hegemonic masculinity) and toxic masculinity. The current study demonstrates that participants do make concrete distinctions regarding toxic masculinity, with certain traits and practices being clearly defined as toxic, while the conversation regarding masculinity is more complicated.

Chi-square analyses demonstrate an association between images and rankings in the toxic masculinity condition. Images 1 through 3, all coded negative, were those images most frequently ranked by participants in the toxic masculinity condition. These results suggest that participants make concrete distinctions regarding which images reflect toxic masculine traits and practices, and these images are overwhelmingly negative. Contrarily, chi-square analyses for the masculinity condition were not significant, suggesting that there was not an association between images and rankings in the masculinity condition. Instead, a few images (Image 6, Image 7, Image 8, Image 9), all non-negative, were ranked at relatively similar frequencies in the masculinity condition. These results would suggest that while there was less clarity or distinction regarding what is specifically masculine versus what is specifically toxically masculine,

participants clearly associated toxicity with negative while masculinity encompassed more neutral and positive coded images.

These results are not necessarily surprising given the literature, which suggests that both masculine traits and practices can be “positive” or “negative” (Kupers 2005; Flood 2018). Flood (2018), for example, discusses various “masculine” coded traits which are not inherently negative but may be perceived negatively when they reach a certain threshold or are performed to an extreme and due to the expectation that men achieve them (e.g., competition, confidence, success, and strength). It seems that participants are making concrete distinctions regarding when traits and practices become toxic and which traits and practices are inherently toxic but are not necessarily distinguishing between traits and practices within masculinity. That is, participants do not value one particular visualization or representation of masculinity over another (hence the relatively equal distribution of rankings of images coded neutral or positive in the masculinity condition).

The results of the paired *t*-tests for traits in masculinity and toxic masculinity conditions further suggest that participants are making distinctions between toxic and hegemonic masculinity. Most of the traits that are considered in the literature to be “neutral”, such as confidence and success, had significantly higher mean ratings in the masculinity condition. Further, the traits that were coded feminine had significantly higher mean ratings in the masculinity condition. Those masculine traits that are inherently negative, such as aggression and dominance, had significantly higher mean ratings in the toxic masculinity condition. Only one neutral trait, which could be considered either positive or negative, had a significantly higher mean rating in the toxic masculinity condition—competition. These results would suggest that those definitively negative masculine traits are associated exclusively with toxic masculinity

(dominance, aggression, and emotionlessness) and neutral masculine traits and feminine traits are more often associated with masculinity.

Results of the paired *t*-tests for practices in masculinity and toxic masculinity conditions also suggest that participants are making distinctions between toxic masculinity and hegemonic masculinity. Masculine coded practice statements are borrowed from and built upon the workplace practice statements developed by Berdahl and colleagues (2018). I developed a few additional statements which stand in opposition to their masculine coded statements as an attention check on participants. For example, “admitting you do not know something looks weak” is borrowed from Berdahl and colleagues (2018) while “it takes a strong person to admit they do not know something” is the counter statement developed for the current study. Toxic masculinity was overwhelmingly associated with those masculine coded practice statements borrowed from Berdahl and colleagues (2018) such as “one person’s loss is another person’s gain”. Masculinity, on the other hand, was associated with the counter statements I developed such as “the most respected people work well with others” and “showing emotion builds community with others”. These results regarding practices suggest that participants clearly associate toxic masculinity with the toxic masculine workplace practices developed by Berdahl and colleagues (2018) and masculinity with the counter practice statements—making concrete distinctions between toxic and hegemonic masculinity.

Qualitative data further bolsters the assertion that participants are making concrete distinctions between toxic and hegemonic masculinity. For the images ranked most often in the toxic masculinity condition (images 1 through 3), participant narratives included descriptors such as angry, aggressive, dominant, and negative (see Table 5 for the frequency of qualitative codes). Participants further described the behavior they inferred from the images in toxic masculinity

conditions as “bullying”, “talking down to”, “belittling”, “mansplaining”, and being “physically aggressive”. These behaviors are often also discussed in the context of what is “right” or “wrong” with participants making moral judgements and deeming the behavior unacceptable for a variety of reasons (e.g., it is unnecessary or not justified, it is *never* acceptable behavior, it negates the viewpoints of others, etc.). For example, participant narratives in the toxic masculinity condition for Image 1 noted that disciplining children or “being strict” is sometimes justified, but “yelling at”, “belittling”, or hurting a child is never justified. Thus, participants make concrete distinctions regarding toxic masculinity as toxic masculinity conditions are overwhelmingly associated with inherently negative masculine traits, practices, and behaviors which are usually judged by participants to be unacceptable or “wrong”. They also make clear distinctions between masculinity and toxic masculinity, with qualitative entries either stating or implying that (like Kupers (2005) and Flood (2018) suggest) there is a threshold of acceptability for certain masculine traits. Confidence is not inherently negative, but too much confidence or “arrogance” or confidence that is determined by performance for others *is* perceived negatively and considered toxic.

Masculinity conditions paint a much more complicated picture. While toxic masculinity is distinguished from masculinity in regard to all measures (images, traits, practices, and participant titles and descriptions), masculinity is generally associated with both neutral masculine and feminine traits. Furthermore, the varied rankings of images in the masculinity condition and the mixed qualitative results in this condition further support a lack of distinction *within* masculinity. While the masculinity conditions are significantly associated with neutral masculine and feminine traits and practices which contradict toxic masculine workplace practices, participant titles and descriptions in masculinity conditions still include and discuss

traits and practices which are definitively associated with toxic masculinity. Qualitative titles and descriptions for Images 1 through 3 (all coded negative and all ranked most often in the toxic masculinity condition) in the masculinity condition are not altogether that different from the toxic masculinity conditions for those images. For example, for the masculinity condition for Image 1, participants describe (like in the toxic masculinity condition for this image) the behavior in the image as “talking down to” and “belittling” with some even noting that masculinity means discipling your children harshly and being more aggressive. Other participant descriptions in the masculinity condition for this image describe the man as “fatherly” or “grandfatherly” and believe that the “discipline” or “yelling” they infer is for good cause (correcting a child’s behavior). In the masculinity condition for Image 2, participant’s used language such as “dominant” and “power and control” to describe the behavior inferred from the image—all language that is also used in the toxic masculinity condition for this image. However, participants did not make moral judgements regarding whether the “dominant” behavior was appropriate in the masculinity condition. Instead, they simply describe the behavior as masculine, with one participant noting that more masculine men tend to be more aggressive. In the masculinity condition for Image 3, participants describe the behavior inferred from the image as “physically aggressive”, again using similar language to what participant’s used in the toxic masculinity condition. In the masculinity condition, participants acknowledge that fighting is not always justified, but *is* always masculine.

The assertion that toxic masculinity and hegemonic masculinity are conflated in the literature but should not be conflated in practice is perhaps actually a problem of a lack of distinction within masculinity which makes both masculinity and toxic masculinity difficult to operationalize. Participants in the current study make clear distinctions regarding toxic



masculinity—they associate toxic masculinity with inherently negative masculine traits, negative masculine workplace practices, and even describe toxic masculinity qualitatively as “negative”. Therefore, while toxic masculinity is definitively associated with negative traits and practices, masculinity is associated with both negative and neutral masculine traits and practices as well as feminine traits and practices. Quantitative results regarding rankings demonstrate that perceptions of masculinity are complicated due to a lack of statistically significant association with any particular images in the masculinity condition—suggesting that participant’s do not have a concrete representation or visualization of generalized (or hegemonic) masculinity.

My assertion was that a lack of distinction between toxic and hegemonic masculinity in the literature has caused conceptual and operational conflation which makes toxic masculinity difficult, if not impossible, to operationalize as distinct from hegemonic masculinity. Berdahl and colleagues (2018) were primarily utilized as a demonstration of how a lack of distinction between toxic and hegemonic masculinity leads to operational confusion. Specifically, Berdahl and colleagues (2018) assert that their framework is toxic masculinity but utilize theories of hegemonic masculinity in operationalization. The current study has demonstrated that there are concrete distinctions being made between toxic and hegemonic masculinity and has further suggested that it is actually a lack of distinction within masculinity that has resulted in conceptual and operational conflation.

**Table 6. Summary of Results by Condition**

<b>Result Category</b>		<b>Masculinity</b> <i>Frequency (%)</i>	<b>Toxic Masculinity</b> <i>Frequency (%)</i>
Images	Ranked 1 <sup>st</sup>	Image 6 (Pos.) 24 (18.90)	Image 3 (Neg.) 43 (33.59)
	Ranked 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Image 8 (Pos.) 30 (23.62)	Image 2 (Neg.) 57 (44.53)
	Ranked 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Image 7 (N.) 24 (18.90)	Image 1 (Neg.) 58 (45.31)

Traits	Affectionate, Cheerful, Compassionate, Confident, Courageous, Empathetic, Gentle, Successful, Sympathetic	Aggressive, Dominant, Competitive, Emotionless
Practices	<p>“Successful people consider all viewpoints and perspectives.”</p> <p>“I can think of no good reason for hitting a person.”</p> <p>“Showing emotion builds community with others.”</p> <p>“It takes a strong person to admit they do not know something.”</p> <p>“The most respected people work well with others.”</p>	<p>“One person's loss is another person's gain.”</p> <p>“It is important to be in good physical shape to be respected.”</p> <p>“The most respected people do not show emotions.”</p> <p>“Admitting you do not know something looks weak.”</p> <p>“Lack of success is often a result of lack of effort.”</p> <p>“The appropriate response to being hit is to hit back.”</p>
Qualitative Codes	Ambition, Confidence, Courage, Success, Strength, Provider, Positive, Balance	Anger, Aggression, Dominance, Competition, Emotionless, Negative

### *Limitations and Future Research:*

The current study utilized quasi-photovoice methodology in combination with a vignette survey design to determine whether distinctions are made between toxic and hegemonic masculinity. First and foremost, as mentioned in the methods section of this study, I was limited in my ability to fully utilize photovoice methodology. Traditionally, photovoice methodology necessitates that participants are given the tools to gather their own data. In other words,

participants are typically given a disposable camera and a prompt and are able to capture, title, and describe images that they have collected themselves in regard to the prompt. Additionally, once the researcher has collected participant data, they are able to backchannel and discuss data and results with participants to ensure their interpretation is accurate. The current study provided images for participants so that participants could remain anonymous and participate online. Resource and time constraints did not allow for community engagement, provision of resources to the community, and appropriate compensation for a community participating in photovoice methodology. Future studies should consider replicating this study using traditional photovoice methodology. Engaging with different communities (rural versus urban, for example), providing them with cameras, utilizing a prompt regarding what difference (if any) there is between toxic and hegemonic masculinity in that community, analyzing data the community has gathered, and consistently communicating with the community regarding that data could add clarity to the current study.

Additionally, time, resource, and sample constraints meant that significant demographic comparisons could not be made in the current study. I plan to make demographic comparisons in regard to race, income, education, and gender identity in future discussions of the current study. I am particularly interested in making gendered comparisons as women and gender minorities are affected by masculinity from an “othered” perspective compared to men which may add to making gendered distinctions between toxic and hegemonic masculinity.

Further, future iterations of the current study should diversify the images. The current study did not include images with men of different racial categories which is significant for discussions of racialized masculinities as we know that Black men in particular are forced into a subordinate masculinity in order to survive both literally and financially (Livingston and Pearce

2009; Connell 1995; Connell 1987). It is necessary that future studies include images of men of various racial identities to make further distinctions between toxic and hegemonic masculinity as perceptions of what is “toxic” will likely differ based on the race of the man in the image.

Finally, future research making operational and conceptual distinctions between toxic and hegemonic masculinity should consider that the results of the current study which suggests that there are existing concrete distinctions between toxic and hegemonic masculinity. Further, they should consider that the results of the current study actually suggest that a lack of distinction exists within masculinity itself. Participant titles and descriptions suggested that, while masculinity was overall viewed more positively and associated with different traits and practices than toxic masculinity, conceptualizations and perceptions of masculinity included neutral (neither positive nor negative) masculine traits, negative masculine traits, and feminine traits. Future research should work towards further distinguishing between traits and practices within masculinity rather than between toxic and hegemonic masculinity.

## **Conclusion**

My assertion regarding the current study was that a lack of distinction between hegemonic and toxic masculinity in the literature has led to conceptual and operational conflation and confusion. Further, my assertion was that hegemonic and toxic masculinity are distinct and that participants will make distinctions between hegemonic and toxic masculinity. Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that participants are making distinctions between hegemonic and toxic masculinity and, rather, have difficulty making distinctions within masculinity.

Results of the chi-square tests of images in the masculinity and toxic masculinity conditions demonstrate that the images and rankings in the toxic masculinity condition are associated. In other words, participants clearly and consistently chose Images 1 through 3, the three images coded negative, to rank in the toxic masculinity condition. While these results would suggest that participants have a solid representation or visualization of toxic masculinity, the lack of association between images and rankings in the masculinity condition would suggest that participants cannot or do not have a solid representation or visualization of masculinity.

Results of paired *t*-tests for trait and practice scales were all significant, suggesting that participants again made clear distinctions between toxic and hegemonic masculinity regarding traits and practices. Toxic masculinity conditions rated higher on all negative masculine traits (aggression, dominance, emotionlessness) while masculinity rated higher on most neutral masculine traits (with the exception of competition) and all feminine coded traits. Similarly, toxic masculinity conditions rated higher on all practice statements developed by Berdahl and colleagues (2018) which are meant to reflect toxic workplace practices. Masculinity conditions ranked higher for all counter practice statements which are in direct opposition to those statements developed by Berdahl and colleagues (2018). These results would suggest that, while toxic masculinity is associated with definitively negative traits and practices, masculinity is associated with both positive and neutral masculine and feminine traits and practices. As Kupers (2005) and Flood (2018) discuss in the context of toxic masculinity, neutral traits such as “confidence” can become toxic when a certain threshold is reached—such as when confidence becomes arrogance or there is an *expectation* that men be confident. Thus, neutral, and feminine traits and practices being associated with masculinity means that masculinity is inherently

conceptually and operationally complicated in that it includes potentially negative, positive, and feminine traits and practices.

Participant titles and descriptions supplement and support quantitative findings that there is a lack of distinction within masculinity rather than between toxic and hegemonic masculinity. Coding of participant titles and descriptions again demonstrates that aggression and dominance, as well as anger and “negative”, are overwhelmingly prevalent in toxic masculinity conditions. Participant descriptions in toxic masculinity conditions also tended to make moral judgements regarding the behavior inferred from the images, often describing the behavior as “unnecessary”, “unjustified”, or “wrong”. In other words, participant titles and descriptions are clear that toxic masculinity is perceived negatively and is associated with definitively negative masculine traits and practices. Participant titles and descriptions in the masculinity condition include some negative traits and practices, especially for Images 1 through 3 which are coded negative, and also some neutral or positive traits and practices. For example, participant descriptions for Image 1 (coded negative) in the masculinity condition describe how masculinity is associated with being stern and disciplining children “harshly”. Contrary to the moral judgements participants made in toxic masculinity conditions, the masculinity condition for Image 9 (coded positive) included participant’s moral judgements that being a good father and being nurturing toward a child is associated with practicing masculinity in a “positive” or “right” way. Thus, both negative (disciplining harshly) and positive (nurturing a child) traits and practices are associated with discussions of being a father in the masculinity condition.

Overall, the results of the current study affirm that there are distinctions being made between toxic and hegemonic masculinity. Rather, it is masculinity that is conceptually and operationally complicated as it is associated with both negative and neutral traits and practices as

well as feminine coded traits and practices. Berdahl and colleagues (2018) stated that they were utilizing toxic masculinity as their framework in developing Masculinity Contest Culture scales but utilized theories of hegemonic masculinity in their operationalization and justification of scales. The current study suggests that it was their use of hegemonic masculinity in operationalizing their scales, rather than their lack of distinction between toxic and hegemonic masculinity, that led to conceptual and operational conflation and confusion. Future iterations of this study should focus on making distinctions within masculinity rather than between toxic and hegemonic masculinity. It is clear there is a threshold where neutral masculine traits become toxic—but what and where is this threshold? Can we define and operationalize it? The current study demonstrates that masculinity is associated with feminine traits and practices more often than toxic masculinity, but is this only due to the comparison to toxic masculinity? Are some feminine traits and practices accepted, maybe even welcome, within masculinity? If so, which traits are acceptable and which are deemed uniquely feminine? Answers to these questions will yield further clarity within masculinity which is necessary in order to conceptualize and operationalize masculinity as distinct from toxic masculinity. The current study demonstrates that toxic masculinity is distinct from hegemonic masculinity in terms of both traits and practices, but further conceptual and operational clarity within masculinity (or hegemonic masculinity) itself is necessary for future conceptualizations and operationalizations.

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## Appendix A: Cover Letter

Dear Prospective Participant,

This letter is a request for you to take part in a research project that is concerned with your perceptions of masculinity. This project is being conducted by Dr. Lisa Dilks, an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at West Virginia University.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your perceptions of masculinity. Your participation in this project will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

You may only complete this survey once. You will only be paid for your participation if you answer the attention check questions correctly and complete the survey in full in a reasonable amount of time (approximately 20 minutes) and with thoughtful responses. We expect you to read the prompts carefully and provide pertinent and thoughtful responses. If you are not willing to spend the time required to read carefully and reply thoughtfully, please do not take this survey. Your responses to the survey will be reviewed and if they meet these criteria you will be paid \$3.50 for your time. These funds will be deposited to your Prolific account.

Your involvement is anonymous. All data will be reported in the aggregate. You will not be asked any questions that could lead back to your identity as a participant. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer, and you may stop participating at any time. The West Virginia University Institutional Review Board's approval of this project is on file with the WVU Office of Human Research Protections.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at [lisa.dilks@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:lisa.dilks@mail.wvu.edu). Additionally, you can contact the WVU Office of Human Research Protections at 304-293-7073. I hope that you will participate in this research project. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, Dr. Lisa Dilks

**Appendix B: Finalized Images & Codes**

*Image 1 (Negative)*



*Image 2 (Negative)*



*Image 3 (Negative)*



*Image 4 (Neutral)*



*Image 5 (Neutral)*



*Image 6 (Positive)*





*Image 7 (Neutral)*



*Image 8 (Positive)*



*Image 9 (Positive)*





## Appendix C: Instrument

### Start of Block: Prolific ID



Q83 What is your Prolific ID?

*Please note that this response should auto-fill with the correct ID.*

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### End of Block: Prolific ID

Consent

- By clicking this box, I consent to participate in this study. (1)**
- By clicking this box, I DO NOT consent to participate in this study. (2)**

*Skip To: End of Block If = <strong>By clicking this box, I DO NOT consent to participate in this study.*

### End of Block: Survey Introduction

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### Start of Block: Masculinity

Q22 We often hear the term “**masculinity**” used in both popular culture and academic settings. Please take a minute to think about what the term “**masculinity**” means to you.

The button at the bottom right corner of the screen used to continue the survey will appear in 15 seconds.

Q23 Below are a series of images which may or may not reflect how you are thinking about the term “**masculinity**”. **Please scroll down to view all images before ranking.** Please rank your top three images based on how accurately they reflect how you are thinking about the term “**masculinity**” with your number one choice being the most accurate image, your number two choice being the next most accurate image, and your third choice being the next most accurate image. You can do this by clicking and dragging the image you would rank as being the most accurate to the top of the nine images, the second most accurate image below the most accurate, and the third most accurate below the second.

**Please remember the order of your top three images.** You will be asked to place them in the same order again on the following page.

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

Image 5

Image 6

Image 7

Image 8

Image 9

Q25 Now that you have chosen the images which best represent how you are thinking about "**masculinity**", please rank the three images you chose in order of their accuracy again. That is, please once again order the images you chose like you did in the previous question by placing the image that most accurately reflects how you are thinking about "**masculinity**" first, the second most accurate image second, and the third most accurate image third.

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

Image 5

Image 6

Image 7

Image 8

Image 9

Q81 Now that you have ranked the images which best represent how you are thinking about "**masculinity**", please title your images in a way which reflects how you are thinking about "**masculinity**".

Q62 Title for Image #1

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Q26 Please also provide a brief description (approximately 250 words) explaining your choice of image #1 and how you are thinking about **"masculinity"**.

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Q64 Title for Image #2

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Q66 Please also provide a brief description (approximately 250 words) explaining your choice of image #2 and how you are thinking about **"masculinity"**.

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Q65 Title for Image #3

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Q67 Please also provide a brief description (approximately 250 words) explaining your choice of image #3 and how you are thinking about **"masculinity"**.

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Q31 Please rate how accurately the traits listed below describe the images you have chosen to represent how you are thinking about "**masculinity**".

	Not accurately at all	Slightly Accurately	Moderately Accurately	Very Accurately	Extremely Accurately
Affectionate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aggressive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dominant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cheerful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Compassionate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Competitive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Courageous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotionless	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empathetic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gentle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Successful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sympathetic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q38 Please rate how accurately the statements listed below describe the images you have chosen to represent how you are thinking about "**masculinity**".

	Not accurately	Slightly Accurately	Moderately Accurately	Very Accurately	Extremely Accurately
One person's loss is another person's gain.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Successful people consider all viewpoints and perspectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to be in good physical shape to be respected.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can think of no good reason for hitting a person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The most respected people do not show emotions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Admitting you do not know something looks weak.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Showing emotion builds community with others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Lack of success is often a result of lack of effort.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It takes a strong person to admit they do not know something.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The appropriate response to being hit is to hit back.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The most respected people work well with others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Masculinity

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Start of Block: Toxic Masculinity

Q2 We often hear the term “**toxic masculinity**” used in both popular culture and academic settings. Please take a minute to think about what the term “**toxic masculinity**” means to you.

The button at the bottom right corner of the screen used to continue the survey will appear in 15 seconds.

Q80 Below are a series of images which may or may not reflect how you are thinking about the term “**toxic masculinity**”. **Please scroll down to view all images before ranking.** Please rank your top three images based on how accurately they reflect how you are thinking about the term “**toxic masculinity**” with your number one choice being the most accurate image, your number two choice being the next most accurate image, and your third choice being the next most accurate image. You can do this by clicking and dragging the image you would rank as being the most accurate to the top of the nine images, the second most accurate image below the most accurate, and the third most accurate below the second.

**Please remember the order of your top three images.** You will be asked to place them in the same order again on the following page.

Image 1  
Image 2  
Image 3  
Image 4  
Image 5  
Image 6  
Image 7  
Image 8  
Image 9

Q5 Now that you have chosen the images which best represent how you are thinking about "**toxic masculinity**", please rank the three images you chose in order of their accuracy again. That is, please once again order the images you chose like you did in the previous question by placing the image that most accurately reflects how you are thinking about "**toxic masculinity**" first, the second most accurate image second, and the third most accurate image third.

Image 1  
Image 2  
Image 3  
Image 4  
Image 5  
Image 6  
Image 7  
Image 8  
Image 9

Q82 Now that you have ranked the images which best represent how you are thinking about "**toxic masculinity**", please title your images in a way which reflects how you are thinking about "**toxic masculinity**".

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Q69 Title for Image #1

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Q72 Please also provide a brief description (approximately 250 words) explaining your choice of image #1 and how you are thinking about "**toxic masculinity**".

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Q70 Title for Image #2

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Q73 Please also provide a brief description (approximately 250 words) explaining your choice of image #2 and how you are thinking about "**toxic masculinity**".

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Q71 Title for Image #3

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Q74 Please also provide a brief description (approximately 250 words) explaining your choice of image #3 and how you are thinking about "**toxic masculinity**".

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Q75 Please rate how accurately the traits listed below describe the images you have chosen to represent how you are thinking about "**toxic masculinity**".

	Not accurately at all	Slightly Accurately	Moderately Accurately	Very Accurately	Extremely Accurately
Affectionate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aggressive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dominant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cheerful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Compassionate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Competitive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Courageous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotionless	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empathetic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gentle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Successful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sympathetic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q76 Please rate how accurately the statements listed below describe the images you have chosen to represent how you are thinking about "**toxic masculinity**".

	Not accurately	Slightly Accurately	Moderately Accurately	Very Accurately	Extremely Accurately
One person's loss is another person's gain.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Successful people consider all viewpoints and perspectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to be in good physical shape to be respected.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can think of no good reason for hitting a person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The most respected people do not show emotions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Admitting you do not know something looks weak.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Showing emotion builds community with others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Lack of success is often a result of lack of effort.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It takes a strong person to admit they do not know something.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The appropriate response to being hit is to hit back.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The most respected people work well with others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Toxic Masculinity

Start of Block: Demographic Questions

Q10 The following questions are about you. Please remember that your responses are completely confidential.

---

Q11 What is your current age?

---

Q12 What best describes your ethnicity? Please only choose one.

- Hispanic or Latinx
- Not Hispanic or Latinx
-

Q13 What best describes your race? Please only choose one.

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- More than one race (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Another race (not listed, please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q14 What is your gender identity or expression?

- Woman
- Man
- Transgender woman
- Transgender man
- Gender non-conforming
- Another gender identity (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_

-----

Q15 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than 9th grade
- 9th-11th grade (includes 12th grade with no diploma)
- High school graduate
- GED or equivalent
- Some college, no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM, JD)
- Doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, EdD)

Q58 What is your employment status?

- Employed full-time (40+ hours a week)
- Employed part-time (Less than 40 hours a week)
- Unemployed but currently looking for work
- Unemployed and not currently looking for work
- Student
- Retired
- Self-employed
- Unable to work

Q59 What general field of work best describes your current occupation?

- Administrative services (e.g. office, financial, administrative, educational, legal support services)
- Education (e.g. teacher, professor, educational assistant)
- Manufacturing (e.g. building, car, metal, semi-conductor production, installation, or repair)
- Medical services (e.g. doctor, nurse, personal care, laboratory technician)
- Professional (e.g. lawyer, judge, organizational executive)
- Sales (e.g. retail, pharmaceutical, insurance)
- Technology (e.g. programming, website design and construction)
- Other (please specify):  

---

Q78 What general field of work best describes your most recent occupation?

- Administrative services (e.g. office, financial, administrative, educational, legal support services)
- Education (e.g. teacher, professor, educational assistant)
- Manufacturing (e.g. building, car, metal, semi-conductor production, installation, or repair)
- Medical services (e.g. doctor, nurse, personal care, laboratory technician)
- Professional (e.g. lawyer, judge, organizational executive)
- Sales (e.g. retail, pharmaceutical, insurance)
- Technology (e.g. programming, website design and construction)
- Other (please specify):  

---

Q16 What is your household income?

- \$10,000 or less
- \$10,001-20,000
- \$20,001-35,000
- \$35,001-50,000
- \$50,001-75,000
- \$75,001-100,000
- \$100,001-150,000
- \$150,000 or more

Q17 How would you describe your political or ideological views?

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Q18 Do you associate your political or ideological views with a particular party?

- Republican
  - Democrat
  - Other (please specify):
- 

No political party

Q19 What is your present religion, if any?

- Christian
  - Jewish
  - Muslim
  - Sikh
  - Hindu
  - Buddhist
  - Atheist
  - Agnostic
  - Prefer not to say
  - Other (please specify):
-



Q20 How religious do you consider yourself to be?

- Not religious
- Slightly religious
- Moderately religious
- Very religious

**End of Block: Demographic Questions**

**Start of Block: End of Survey Message**

Q84 Thank you for participating in this survey. Please click the button below to be redirected back to Prolific and register your submission.

**End of Block: End of Survey Message**

## Appendix D: Codebook

### Masculine Coded Characteristics

*Ambition (0 = Ambition not mentioned, 1 = Ambition mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as ambitious if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) ambition/ambitious in their title or description. If a participant makes use of the word ambition but is noting that the image does NOT reflect ambition, the text entry should not be coded as ambitious.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as ambitious if the participant is describing an ambitious behavior or action. Ambitious behavior is behavior that shows a strong desire and determination to succeed. For example, a participant describing someone who is motivated to better themselves mentally or physically is describing ambition.

*Anger/Angry (0 = Anger not mentioned, 1 = Anger mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as angry if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) anger/angry. . If a participant makes use of the word anger but is noting that the image does NOT reflect anger, the text entry should not be coded as angry.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as angry if a participant is describing an angry behavior or action. Angry behavior would involve someone feeling or displaying strong annoyance, displeasure, or hostility. For example, a participant describing someone who is raising their voice, yelling, or screaming, they are describing behavior that should be coded as angry.

*Aggressive/Aggression (0 = Aggression not mentioned, 1 = Aggression mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as aggressive if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) aggressive/aggression. If a participant makes use of the word aggression but is noting that the image does NOT reflect aggression, the text entry should not be coded as aggressive.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as aggressive if a participant is describing an aggressive behavior or action. Aggressive behavior would involve behavior that is forceful, unprovoked, hostile, injurious, or destructive especially when the intention is to dominate or the behavior is caused by frustration. For example, self-report masculinity scales often measure self-reported masculinity with a 7-point scale ranking of agreement on the following statement: “If someone else starts it, a guy should be allowed to use violence to defend himself” (Levant et al. 2012).

*Dominant/Dominance (0 = Dominance not mentioned, 1 = Dominance mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as dominant if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) dominant/dominance/dominated/dominating in their title or description. If a participant makes use of the word dominance but is noting that the image does NOT reflect dominance, the text entry should not be coded as dominant.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as dominant if a participant is describing a dominant behavior or action. Dominant behavior would include “controlling other people, ‘making things happen’, eliciting deference, and resisting being controlled by others” (Berdahl et al. 2018). For

example, a person exhibiting dominance may refuse to accept “no” as an answer and they may resist collaboration, opting to take control of a situation.

*Competition/Competitiveness (0 = Competition not mentioned, 1 = Competition mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as competitive if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) competition/competitive/competing/competitiveness in their title or description. If a participant makes use of the word competition but is noting that the image does NOT reflect competition, the text entry should not be coded as competitive.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as competitive if a participant is describing a competitive behavior or action. Masculinity must consistently be “proven” through acts of dominance and aggression. It is hierarchical—with some men at the top and others at the bottom. Naturally, when there are men at the top and others at the bottom, there is competition to determine who is at the top. Competitive behaviors would include viewing one person’s loss as another person’s gain, viewing someone’s success as an impediment to yours, stepping on others to get ahead, etc. (Berdahl et al. 2018).

*Confidence (0 = Confidence not mentioned, 1 = Confidence mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as confident if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) confident/confidence in their title or description. . If a participant makes use of the word confidence but is noting that the image does NOT reflect confidence, the text entry should not be coded as confident.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as confident if the participant is describing a confident behavior or action. Masculinity is contingent on avoiding femininity (Levant et al. 2012). Being unsure of yourself and deferring to others are feminine coded behaviors. Masculinity requires dominance which is in stark contrast to deferent behaviors. Confident behaviors would therefore include someone feeling they have power over their circumstances or having/showing assurance and self-reliance. For example, self-report masculinity scales often measure self-reported masculinity with a 7-point scale ranking of agreement on the following statement: “Guys should always be able to figure out what they should do” (Levant et al. 2012).

*Courage (0 = Courage is not mentioned, 1 = Courage is mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as courageous if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) courage/courageous in their title or description. . If a participant makes use of the word courage but is noting that the image does NOT reflect courage, the text entry should not be coded as courageous.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as courageous if the participant is describing a courageous behavior or action. Masculinity is contingent on avoiding femininity (Levant et al. 2012). Fear is a feminine coded feeling and behavior. Courageous behavior would include an expression of mental, physical, or moral strength to persevere in the face of danger, fear, and difficulty. For example, self-report masculinity scales often measure self-reported masculinity with a 4-point scale ranking agreement on the following statement: “It is important for a guy to act like nothing is wrong, even when something is bothering him”. In other words, courageous behavior would involve putting on a brave face when confronted with a difficult and perhaps scary situation (Levant et al. 2012).

*Emotionless (0 = Emotionless not mentioned, 1 = Emotionless mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as emotionless if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) emotionless in their title or description. A title and description can also be coded emotionless if a synonym for emotionless is used, such as: unemotional, unfeeling, cold, controlled, restrained, expressionless, or stoic. A title and description can also be coded emotionless if the participant describes the image as lacking emotion. . If a participant makes use of the word emotionless but is noting that the image does NOT reflect being emotionless, the text entry should not be coded as emotionless.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as emotionless if the participant is describing an emotionless behavior or action. Masculinity is contingent on avoiding femininity (Levant et al. 2012). Emotions outside of anger are coded as feminine. Being “strong” in the context of masculinity means avoiding feminine coded emotions such as sadness, fear, concern, empathy, or sympathy. For example, self-report masculinity scales often measure self-reported masculinity with a 7-point scale ranking agreement on the following statement: “Guys shouldn’t cry, especially in front of others” (Levant et al. 2012). Emotionless behavior would involve a lack of empathy or sympathy towards others as well as the inability to personally express emotions other than anger. For example, my father expresses anger when he is scared, often lashing out at someone when they are hurt.

*Success (0 = Success not mentioned, 1 = Success mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as successful if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) success/successful/succeed in their title or description. . If a participant makes use of the word success but is noting that the image does NOT reflect success, the text entry should not be coded as successful.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as successful if a participant is describing a successful behavior or action. Someone who is successful at getting others to submit to them or defer to them, someone who is successful at controlling others, would be considered successful in a masculine context. As hegemonic masculinity values being athletic and professionally successful, someone who is athletically skilled or who appears physically fit/desirable could be considered successful. Professional success is indicated by wealth, so someone appearing to be wealthy could also be coded as successful. Additionally, for example, participants will often say a man in an image looks like he has just accomplished or achieved something. This phrasing should also indicate that coding for success is necessary.

*Strong/Strength (0 = Strength not mentioned, 1 = Strength mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as strong if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) strong/stronger/strongest/strength. If a participant makes use of the word strength but is noting that the image does NOT reflect strength, the text entry should not be coded as strong.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as strong if a participant is describing a strong behavior or action. Being strong or strength can be defined as having the power to perform physically demanding tasks, such as moving heavy weights, or being able to withstand great force or pressure. Therefore, a strong action could be both physical and mental. A physically strong behavior would be lifting weights or working out at the gym. A mentally strong behavior would be resilience—getting back up after you are knocked down either literally or metaphorically.

*Provide/Provider (0 = Providing not mentioned, 1 = Providing mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as providing if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) provide/provider/providing. If a participant makes use of the word provider but is noting that the image does NOT reflect a provider, the text entry should not be coded as providing.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as providing if a participant is describing a providing behavior or action. To provide, literally, means to make available for use or supply. In the context of masculinity, providing is also akin to “breadwinning” or being the “breadwinner”. In other words, going to work and financially providing for your family. Participants also describe how men provide protection for the weak and vulnerable. All in all, if a participant is indicating that an image reflects providing any kind of support to anyone else (financially, physically, mentally, emotionally) it should be coded as providing.

*Positive (0 = Not positive, 1 = Positive)*

A title and description can be coded as positive if the participant makes explicit use of the word positive in their title or description. . If a participant makes use of the word positive but is noting that the image is NOT positive, the text entry should not be coded as positive.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as positive if they make use of language or describe behaviors which are positive. “Positive” can best be defined as the presence or possession of features or qualities as opposed to their absence. For example, a participant saying that doing one thing is more beneficial over doing another may be an indication of the need to code positive (i.e. expressing your emotions is better than holding them in and I believe this person is expressing their emotions). A participant indicating that they believe this or that is the “right” way to act or go about things could also be an indication to code positive (i.e. expressing your emotions through exercise is the right thing to do and I believe that is what this person is doing, etc.).

*Negative (0 = Not negative, 1 = Negative)*

A title and description can be coded as negative if the participant makes explicit use of the word negative in their title or description. . If a participant makes use of the word negative but is noting that the image is NOT negative, the text entry should not be coded as negative.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as negative if they make use of language or describe behaviors which are negative. “Negative” can best be defined as the absence of rather than the presence of certain features. For example, participants who indicate that they think a particular behavior or thought is wrong should be coded as negative.

*Balance (0 = Balance not mentioned, 1 = Balance mentioned)*

A title and description can be coded as balanced if the participant makes explicit use of the word(s) balance/balanced/balancing in their title or description. If a participant makes use of the word balance but is noting that the image does NOT reflect balance, the text entry should not be coded as balanced.

Titles and descriptions can also be coded as balanced if a participant is describing behaviors or characteristics that reflect balance. For example, some participants describe how being both strong and vulnerable are important aspects of masculinity. As these are opposing traits, with

strong being coded as masculine and vulnerable being coded as feminine, their use in tandem reflects a balance of traits within masculinity or toxic masculinity.

**Appendix E: Link to Excel Spreadsheet Code Sheet**

**<C:\Users\remsb\OneDrive\Documents\Thesis data\Thesis Code Sheet Final 12-12.xlsx>**