

How The Patriarchy Harms Men And Boys, Too

Oftentimes it's a lot more subtle.

By Terri Coles, Huffington Post, 11/10/2018

Every day there's another story about a powerful man who has been using his influential position to get away with serial sexual harassment, or worse. (See [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).) And as a result, we're getting regular reminders in the news about the ways the patriarchy harms women and girls.

But men and boys — especially those who fall outside the accepted gender norms — are also harmed by the patriarchy in ways that are both obvious and more subtle.

"It's a myth that violence in a culture only affects those it specifically targets, and patriarchy is a form of cultural violence," says Amanda Lindamood, director of training and community engagement at the [DC Rape Crisis Center](#) (DCRCC). "When how you are allowed to engage in relationships, how you are able to relate to your body, and how you know to feel powerful is tied up in not feeling anything, you lose a lot of authenticity. You also lose your ability to have your emotional needs affirmed and met within your relationships, and lose out on developing those skills which are crucial to maintaining your relationships."

The DCRCC, along with [ReThink](#), an organization that works with young men and boys to "break down the cultural norms that underpin sexual violence," and [Collective Action for Safe Spaces](#) (CASS), an organization that "mobilizes the community to end public sexual harassment and assault," partnered on a program called [Rethink Masculinity](#), a consciousness-building group where people who identify as men learned about how the social constructs of masculinity harm themselves and the people around them.

Here are ways the patriarchy affects men and boys.

1. It can reinforce rigid gender norms

It's not always clear when men and boys are being harmed by gender-based violence because that violence may not be physical and may not be overt, says Jessica Raven, executive director of CASS.

"I was at the supermarket with my three-year-old son the other day when an employee teased him and said, 'You don't want flower stickers,' as though there was something wrong with boys who like flowers," Raven says. "Everyday interactions like these reinforce rigid gender norms that harm people of all genders."

These interactions have lasting effects on boys, who may grow up believing they can't express how they feel, or pursue a hobby or job that's not typically "masculine." It will also influence their future relationships, their self-worth, and their mental health.

2. It can encourage toxic masculinity

You may have heard the term "[toxic masculinity](#)" used to explain some of the negative norms and expectations that are placed on men and boys in our society. "Toxic masculinity is the way that boys and men are socialized to perform masculinity — through suppressed emotions, dominance, and aggression," Raven says.

"To be excruciatingly clear, toxic masculinity is a specific model of manhood, geared towards dominance and control. It's a manhood that views women and LGBT people as inferior, sees sex as an act not of affection but domination, and which valorizes violence as the way to prove one's self to the world," [writes Amanda Marcotte in Salon](#).

She adds, "Toxic masculinity aspires to toughness but is, in fact, an ideology of living in fear: The fear of ever seeming soft, tender, weak, or somehow less than manly. This insecurity is perhaps the most stalwart defining feature of toxic masculinity."

3. It can force young boys to adhere to harmful masculine stereotypes

A lot of these harmful masculine stereotypes are placed on even the youngest kids. Insensitivity to emotions, pressure to act mean or competitive to fit in, pressure to reject things that are "for girls," and pressure to be attracted and attractive to girls are some of the ways Lindamood has observed boys and young men are harmed by the stereotypes of masculinity.

"Young boys are taught early that expressing their emotions is taboo. This causes long-term harm to their relationships with each other and with people of other genders," Raven says.

4. It makes it difficult to move beyond these stereotypes

"Patriarchy is always contextual, and its lessons accumulate over time," Lindamood says. "The longer you internalize something the harder it is to gain distance from its influence over your behaviour."

And the longer someone has been living with the consequences of these internalized and externalized expectations, the harder they will be to move past, she says.

5. It encourages violence

The negative effects of the patriarchy aren't just emotional. Toxic masculinity can result in violence — both physical and sexual — [against women](#), and can [often be fatal](#).

"In toxic masculinity we have rationalized and justified the use of control, violence and force to get your needs met, and we defend that rationality on a societal level," Lindamood says.

"We see it in our narratives about protection, about heroism, about nationality, about family values. We have tangled violence into our value systems, and then identified those value systems as inherently masculine."



And we see real-life examples of the fatal results of toxic masculinity all the time, from [mass shootings](#) to domestic violence, and even [suicide](#).

6. It can lead to mental health problems

[According to the CBC](#), toxic masculinity may be quadrupling the suicide rate for Canadian men. A study conducted by Dr. Joel Wong revealed a clear link between gender norms and poor mental health in men.

"It supports and confirms research done in the last 60 years that people who conform to masculinity have poor mental health," Wong noted.

Because men have to uphold these toxic gender norms throughout the course of their life, men can end up repressing their feelings, which can harm them and those close to them.

Researchers found that men who subscribed to societal gender norms saw their mental health decrease and their tendency to find help drop. [Eight men commit suicide every day in Canada](#), reports the CBC.



7. But there are ways to move beyond toxic masculinity

Programs like Rethink Masculinity help men identify these negative stereotypes and learn to move past them, and call them out when

they see other men adhering to them.

"Rethink Masculinity seeks to build nurturance culture — offering a healing space to men who have both caused and experienced harm and providing them with specific strategies to end gender violence," Raven says. "Research shows that having the tools to interrupt gendered violence also has the effect of decreasing the likelihood that men will engage in everyday sexist behaviours themselves."

Although it can be tough for men to identify how the patriarchy, and toxic masculinity, affects them, it's up to them to recognize the signs, understand where negative behaviours come from, and learn how to address them

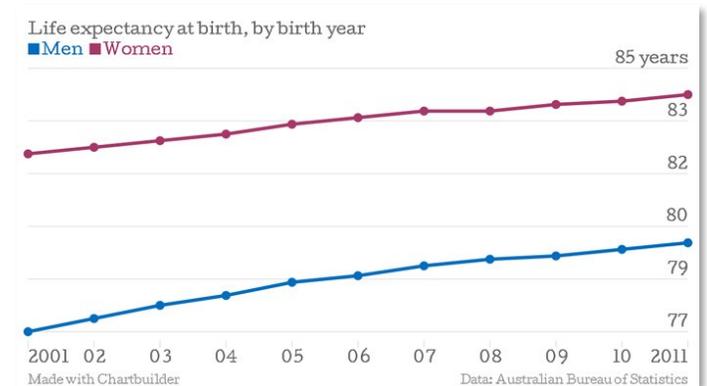
"For men in particular, when the patriarchy says that it's OK to grab a woman's ass, or tell her what to do, or watch too much porn or deny her space — and you accept this as a way of treating another human being — you deny yourself the opportunity to understand

why you desired that comfort of power in the first place. The ego wants dominance and control. And the male ego is currently everywhere," [writes Jordan Stephens in The Guardian](#).



He adds: "Accepting the patriarchy from a place of false benefit will prevent you from ever truly loving yourself or understanding others. It's OK to feel sad. It's OK to cry. It's OK to have loved your mum and dad growing up. It's OK to have missed them or wanted more affection. It's OK to take a moment when you're reminded of these truths. When you allow your brain to access these emotions, it knows exactly what to do. So nurture yourself. Talk honestly to the people around you, and welcome the notion of understanding them more than you have ever done before."

With files from Chloe Tejada



Despite the status benefits of patriarchy, the consequences can be dire. Men have lower life expectancies and are more likely to die from unnatural causes than are women. Men are more likely to be incarcerated, more likely to have untreated physical and mental health issues and more likely to commit suicide.

