WGS Capstone:

Hegemonic Masculinity and Internalized Homophobia Are Harming Young Gay Men

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Section 1 – Introductions and Background

The members of the LGBT+ community face hatred and ignorance that has impacted their individual sense of identity. The form of hatred can range from blatant homophobia or transphobia, to advocating against equal rights, to everyday microaggressions because heterosexuality is seen as the only correct option; however, in recent years as public opinion within the United States has started to become more accepting of LGBT+ rights, there are still social factors that impact the LGBT+ community. A major issue that is often overlooked is the impact that hegemonic masculinity and internalizing homophobic rhetoric can have on young gay men. The overall goals for this paper include: First, defining hegemonic masculinity as it is present within gay men. This paper will refer to R. W. Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity, which is defined as, "the pattern of practice that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell has distinguished hegemonic masculinity from other forms of masculinity and argues that it is not viewed as statistically normal; however, hegemony relies on masculinity being normative and it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily require violence, although it can be supported by force or violence, but rather it acquires significance within society through culture, institutions, and persuasion (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is arguably represented differently when present in queer identities than when in someone who is not part of the LGBT+ community, despite the power struggle from the gay liberation movement possibly playing a role in the development of hegemonic masculinity. The second goal for this paper is to clarify the impacts of hegemonic masculinity and internalized homophobia on young gay men within the overall LGBT+ community. Through showcasing the impacts of these issues, this paper is aiming to showcase

that there is not one singular harm against queer individuals, but instead that these issues are multifaceted and will differ based on a person's intersecting identities. Queer is used in this paper to refer to all individuals who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender even if they do not identify as a member of the LGBT+ community. An example of harm against queer individuals includes trans men who have constantly been told that they are not considered to be "passing" and might react to the concept of hegemonic masculinity by trying to present as hypermasculine in order to please society's expectations of masculinity for men.[1] This incites a deeper issue by fostering harmful rhetoric about masculinity against queer identities that can ruin the person's self-esteem, identity, and/or their personal relationships. This paper showcases some examples of harmful masculinity through examinations of previous research that would fit Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity if it were expressed by a heterosexual man. The third goal of this paper is to find solutions to help mitigate the harm caused by hegemonic masculinity and issues of internalizing homophobia. While obviously the goal is to end hegemonic masculinity and homophobia, it would take a miracle for these issues to end overnight. Instead, society needs to focus on aiding individuals to cope with the societal expectation that they must follow hegemonic masculinity and allow them to find a sense of resolution. As such, this would help prevent some of the negative emotional, behavioral, and psychological effects that result from hegemonic masculinity and internalizing homophobic rhetoric. Finally, the last goal of this paper is to highlight methods that can work toward diminishing hegemonic masculinity and homophobia within the LGBT+ community. While working to prevent the negative effects of these issues would be a step in the right direction, it cannot be the only step taken. As such, measures must be taken to work toward ending hegemonic masculinity and homophobia within

[1] **Note:** Passing is not a universal goal for all transgender individuals. Individuals will express their gender identity in a number of different ways and should not be confined to how they present themselves.

the LGBT+ community, even if it is a gradual process.

Relationship to Feminist and Queer Theories

This paper will focus specifically on how queer theory and feminist theory have examined issues of masculinity and homophobia. Queer theory and feminist theory utilize critical analysis to examine issues such as racism, capitalism globalization, and other forms of domination. Additionally, a specific component of queer theory is to challenge the widely held societal assumptions about gender, sex, and sexuality (Marinucci, 2016). Within one analysis, a scholar named Mary McIntosh, suggested that homosexuality was not a condition inflicted on individuals, but rather a societal role that is assigned onto people. Specifically, she notes that homosexual men are cast into a societal role that has several expectations, including but not limited to, "the expectation that he will be effeminate in manner, personality, or preferred sexual activity; [and] the expectation that sexuality will play a part of some kind in all his relations with other men" (Marinucci, 2016). These expected gender roles are generally part of a binary that creates a distinction between the dominant group and those excluded from the dominant group. Masculinity is often considered to be the diametric opposite to femininity; however, gay men are expected to be feminine in manner due to their sexuality while simultaneously showcasing the masculine traits expected of men. When homosexual men seek to defy the societal role that demands they be more effeminate, they often will seek to mimic masculine or dominating traits from their peers, this can lead individuals to have unhealthy expectations for their identity and lead to exaggerated characteristics within homosexual men (Marinucci, 2016).

The binaries that define social and sexual opposites between feminine and masculine identities, which in turn leads to an additional binary that regulates the way that the forms of

sexual expression reinforce the binary between feminine and masculine identities (Marinucci, 2016). The field of sociology has utilized feminist theory and queer theory to shape the societal understanding of gender and sexuality. Sociologists have recognized the binaries discussed in previous research to see that individuals are defined as either men or women, masculine or feminine, and gay or straight (Valocchi, 2005). These binaries have been ingrained into the most basic aspects of society and are enforced to the extent that individuals generally learn of the gender binary at a young age. People seek to understand the concept of gender; however, that interest becomes harmful when society only acknowledges two genders and defines strict gender expectations for individuals to follow. Queer theorists have examined how social institutions have utilized the concept of heteronormativity to define heterosexuality as the dominant societal sexual norm and homosexuality as its binary opposite. Sociologists have historically seen that individuals internalize the societal norms and seek to defend this structure. Men can internalize the dominant culture of heterosexuality and seek to showcase the dominant traits that are often associated with men (Valocchi, 2005).

When homosexual men are placed by society into a role that is typically expected to be feminine and different from heterosexual men, then these individuals seek to conform to the dominant culture associated with heterosexuality. As homosexual men attempt to exhibit masculine traits, they often also seek to distant themselves from feminine or submissive characteristics. By doing so, these individuals seek a solution to escape the rigid gender roles and the methods of polarization that seek to define a person based on the strict gender binaries. As a result, these men express a form of masculinity that is commonly known as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity within the LGBT+ community impacts individuals differently than among heterosexual cisgender individuals. There is not a lot of research that

specifically defines the impact of hegemonic masculinity on the LGBT+ community; however, this paper explores the impact that hegemonic masculinity can have on LGBT+ youth by examining previous research regarding the experiences with hegemonic masculinity.

Part 2 - Hegemonic Masculinity is Present in Our Daily Lives

When examining hegemonic masculinity through the lenses of queer theory and feminist theory, this topic often fails to take into consideration the aspects specific to LGBT+ individuals. While combing through the secondary literature, it becomes clear that hegemonic masculinity has not been well defined within the LGBT+ communities. The lack of a fitting and appropriate definition that encompasses queer identities implies the need for further research on how hegemonic masculinity is experienced by and impacts LGBT+ individuals. This need might stem from scholars assuming the concept of hegemonic masculinity to be similar for homosexual individuals as presented within research for heterosexual individuals. This belief seems to be flawed with different fallacies, where scholars assume that because homosexual men identify as men that they respond to hegemonic masculinity similarly as heterosexual men. However, it seems more likely that there is simply not enough research regarding the impacts of hegemonic masculinity on the LGBT+ community for scholars to fully examine the impacts on communities outside of societal expectations.

Hegemonic Masculinity Starts at Conception

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that can begin during pregnancy. When families hold an extravagant gender reveal party for a baby boy, they often utilize fireworks or explosives to announce the gender of their child. These families are expressed as having the “need to explode something because simply enjoying a baby party is for sissies,” but not only have these gender

reveal parties started multiple fires, killed several people, and wounded others, they also impose the family's idea of the strict gender roles onto the young male (Sparks, 2020). Gender reveal parties are commonly used by parents to associate and impose qualities such as rugged or tough to males and fragile or soft to females. This is significant when compared to the twenty-five percent of parents who lashed out in violence or kicked their child out of the house and roughly fifty percent of parents who told their child that they did not support them after learning that their child did not identify with the parent's concept of gender (James et al., 2016). Research showcases that the individuals who exhibit hegemonic masculinity are likely to harm those who do not conform to society's understanding of masculine or feminine identities (James et al., 2016). Evidence also reveals patterns of mistreatment and discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming individuals which results in startling disparities between transgender individuals and the general U.S. population when it comes to basic elements of life (James et al., 2016). Additionally, these aspects and ways of viewing gender are based on a child's biological sexual organs, which ignores the possibility that the baby may be born as intersex.

Society currently has a heavy focus on genitalia when examining the relationship between a child's biological sex and their gender expression. Most families would not feel comfortable identifying their intersex child as male or female. Intersex children defy the parents' predefined standards of gender that they established before birth. The concept of hegemonic masculinity pushes the parents to put these intersex children into either a male or female identity with genitalia usually being the determining factor for the sex of the child. However, many intersex individuals have grown up to develop gender dysphoria, and this predetermined gender identity causes significant distress as some intersex individuals feel that their gender identity does not fully align with their parent's concept of gender (Furtado et al., 2018). The famous

example of David Reimer, who was assigned male at birth, was forced into predefined identity because of his genital abnormality. During a failed circumcision, Reimer had irreparable damage to his penis. Reimer's doctor, John Money, encouraged Reimer's family to have him undergo surgery, take female hormones during puberty, and raise him as a female (Gaetano, 2017). The reasoning was that without a functioning penis, Reimer would struggle with his identity as a male. However, this would imply that a male's gender identity is reliant on either his sexual organs or his reproductive abilities. Reimer was not told that he was assigned male at birth until he was 14 years; however, he suffered from issues of depression, anxiety, severe distress, and gender dysphoria throughout his childhood that extended into his adult life. Money took advantage of Reimer's situation "to justify thousands of sex reassignment surgeries for cases of children with reproductive abnormalities," such as being intersex or having damaged genitals (Gaetano, 2017). Eventually, once David knew that he was assigned male at birth, then he transitioned back to a male identity. However, due to mental health issues that he faced; David Reimer committed suicide at the age of 38. As long as hegemonic masculinity pushes people to correlate genitalia with gender, individuals who do not neatly fit on the male/female binary will continue to suffer.

While gender reveal parties may seem like a proper method of announcing the sex of a child, male gender reveal parties have been polluted by hegemonic masculinity to have a party surrounding the birth of a male appear more manly. As a result, male gender reveal parties have inadvertently caused several injuries, deaths, and wide-scale damages. Additionally, gender reveal parties force children who do not meet the specific anatomical qualifications onto one side or the other of the gender binary and labeled as female or male for the entertainment of the family. The exclusion of children born as intersex is problematic as it enforces polarization

towards the extremes of the gender binary and causes significant psychological harm by requiring masculine-presenting individuals to uphold dominant and aggressive behaviors.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Adolescence

Even after birth, young men are told that "'little boys don't cry,' 'pink is for girls,' [and] 'only girls play with dolls,'" which only reaffirms the expectation that men are expected to be tough and there is no room for qualities that people consider feminine (Clements, 2018). When a young boy hits a young girl, many people use the phrase, 'he only does it, because he likes her' to justify these acts of aggression. There are obvious parallels between this justification at a young age and the excuses that men give for intimate partner violence, such as saying, "I do this because I love you. Hurting you hurts me too" (Clements, 2018). In the United States, men are frequently situated into a position where acts or expressions of aggression are essential to their masculine identities. Hegemonic masculinity seeks to accept and enforce the oppressive nature of these interactions where men utilize physical dominance to demand control of those around them. To this extent, hegemonic masculinity specifically harms men by pushing them to feel that violence or physical aggression is the only way to help them feel secure in their relationships. Clements asserts that homosexuality is also viewed as a threat to masculinity for young children to the extent that those who embrace hegemonic masculinity are likely to lash out in violence claiming that homosexuality threatens masculine gender roles for those assigned as male at birth (Clements, 2018). In our current society where men are pushed away from exploring different gender norms outside of the feminine/masculine binary, it is important to recognize that hegemonic masculinity is not simply an issue that only impacts males (or male-identifying individuals). The harm that stems from hegemonic masculinity affects everyone and it is an issue

that needs to be addressed before we can attempt to help mitigate the harms (Clements, 2018). This is especially visible when homosexuality is viewed as a feminine characteristic.

As young boys grow up with the expectation that men must be masculine and avoid feminine qualities, hegemonic masculinity can force them to respond to discrepancies with violence. Currently in our society, young men are trying to control and manipulate women's bodies to fit some specific image, and this translates to gay men as well. Fatphobia/Fat-shaming originated as a method for heterosexual men to express displeasure with a woman's weight, because higher levels of estrogen are associated with the tendency to accumulate more abdominal fat. The act of fat-shaming aligns with the previous definition of hegemonic masculinity, which has been used to allow men an avenue to assert their dominance over women and feminine individuals (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, as many gay men have internalized the negative rhetoric against women, they associate excess weight with being feminine. Thus, when men do not fit into a specific body image, it is "considered simultaneously weak *and* feminine" (Lang, 2016). Homosexual men who showcase hegemonic masculinity likely feel great distress when they appear as feminine or non-masculine. They likely experience internalized homophobia that drives them to extreme measures to ensure that they avoid appearing overweight or as overly feminine. As a result, the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) claims that despite only representing less than five percent of the overall population, homosexual men represent around forty-two percent of men with a history of disordered eating (Lang, 2016). The negative stigma for overweight individuals is reflected in the gay community through methods, such as gay dating apps behind a veil of potential anonymity. These apps use specific language and slurs, such as "'fairy' and 'sissy' [which] have a dual meaning rooted in anti-gay and anti-woman bias: [t]hey prize masculinity by demonizing femininity" (Lang, 2016). Hegemonic masculinity hurts

gay men in other ways than just by focusing on weight, but it applies to all men who do not meet specific traits associated with masculinity. The combined influence of hegemonic masculinity and internalized homophobia are enough to create significant harm for homosexual men who When hegemonic masculinity and shame are harbored within an individual, they experience exposure that keeps them from trusting others.

Additionally, hegemonic masculinity also impacts young gay men by influencing aspects of masculinity in their gender identity, but also by creating harm for other gay men. There is a negative stigma surrounding weight within the United States and it is generally amplified among young gay men. The same men who are viewed as skinny or muscular within the heterosexual community are often considered overweight on gay dating apps. As a result, "some big men confess that they want to dissociate themselves from other people who are fat, as if fatness were contagious" (Lang, 2016). Many gay men believed that body positivity has limits, and when people exceed these limits, they should be shamed instead of praised. The author contends that fatphobia originally was used by straight men to express hatred and to control women's bodies, because higher levels of estrogen are associated with a tendency to accumulate more abdominal fat (Lang, 2016). Many young gay men have grown up internalizing the negative and homophobic messages, such as only women should have sex with a man, so when this concept of policing a person's weight translates to gay men, there is a subconscious association that being overweight is both feminine and not masculine. This showcase of hegemonic masculinity within the gay community creates significant harm on individuals.

This lack of trust can be harmful for gay men when discussing the recent #MeToo movement. Society needs a cultural change away from how masculinity shames men and offer a separate space outside of the #MeToo movement for men to tell their stories of sexual assault

without hegemonic masculinity forcing them to feel emasculated (Purnell, 2019). Researchers argue that to be a male survivor of sexual assault violates male gender norms, which adds to male silence of abuse. Men are often imagined to be the perpetrator of sexual assault and are rarely considered to be a survivor of sexual assault. There are common misconceptions that men cannot be forced or coerced to have sex against their will and that men feel less emotional distress from sexual assault than women (Purnell, 2019). While there is currently little research that examines sexual assault on men, it is important to realize that how society views masculinity and hegemonic masculinity pushes men to suppress and hide their experiences out of fear of being shamed for being a lesser man. When men do feel comfortable in sharing their experience, it is often followed by a "vulnerability hangover" where they feel a deep enough connection with someone to share their personal feelings and experiences, but then feel shame and regret for being vulnerable, which goes against the defined and hegemonic definition of masculinity in society (Purnell, 2019). This article is significant as it discusses the importance of the #MeToo movement, showcases the need for male voices to also speak out against sexual assault without taking away the spotlight from women, LGBT+ members, and people of color who are disproportionally affected, and explains how hegemonic masculinity shames and silences men who survive sexual assault and rape. However, the issue of hegemonic masculinity is not specific to the gay community.

Hegemonic masculinity impacts nonbinary and gender non-conforming youth as well. Scholars have noticed hegemonic masculinity hindering acceptance for masculine-presenting individuals who identify as gender non-conforming or gender fluid. Society has seen young celebrities like Miley Cyrus and Jaden Smith announce that they identify as gender fluid and gender non-conforming, respectively. Miley Cyrus was praised by fans and media outlets for

being courageous while Jaden Smith was criticized (Lang, 2016). When Jaden wore leggings and a skirt to the prom as a statement of their identity, people reacted by calling them "an insult to black masculinity," and stating that they must just be confused and going through an identity crisis (Lang, 2016). This has been argued to be a combined result of hegemonic masculinity and white supremacist patriarchal ideals of what black masculinity should be. In the previous example with Jaden Smith, they expressed feminine traits that felt natural to them; however, people viewed their identity as a threat to the male/female gender binary and hegemonic masculinity pushed people to see this as a threat to masculine ideals. This hate stemming from hegemonic masculinity hinders individuals in the LGBT+ community from feeling safe to express their identity out of a fear for their safety.

Additionally, while some of the harms on LGBT+ youth are a clear result of hegemonic masculinity, there are certain situations where it is unclear if this is a direct result of hegemonic masculinity or some other driving force. A contemporary example of this confusion is the Orlando nightclub shooting. The devastating Pulse Nightclub shooting was studied by many scholars who wanted to examine the societal influences. Some authors claim that this was an act of homophobia and others claim this was simply an act of Islamic terrorism that coincidentally happened to be at a gay nightclub. However, Haider argues that it is not one or the other, but rather a result of hegemonic masculinity which is present in both communities. By examining previous gender expectations for men over several generations, men have been expected to showcase some level of violence. The prime example of this is how American men have been raised with the expectation that joining the military was a "natural rite of passage from boyhood to manhood" (Haider, 2016). Even today, men are still automatically enrolled in the national draft and when violence plays such an important role in a masculine identity for men, the author

asserts that expressing violence can extend outside of war and into our everyday lives, whereas women were just recently allowed to serve in combat positions for the military. This showcases how society emphasizes the gender binary and forces individuals into these predetermined identities. The Orlando nightclub shooting was one of the worst shootings in the nation's history that claimed the lives of forty-nine people and wounded fifty-three more at a gay nightclub. While the shooter died during the incident, we have no way to know of his true intentions; however, there are conflicting reports as to the true reason (Haider, 2016). Reports claim that he posted on Facebook and told 9-1-1 that this was in retaliation to the American airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. However, many people who knew the shooter before the incident claim that he not only attended the nightclub semi-regularly, but he also utilized gay dating apps such as Grindr, Jack'd, and Adam4Adam where he posted pictures of himself and went on a couple of dates with men. Despite these conflicting reports, Haider claims there is only one similarity to their claims: beliefs associated with hegemonic masculinity pushed him to use violence to assert his masculinity (Haider, 2016). As long as masculine-identities continue to rely on physical aggression and dominance, individuals can always reflect the principles of hegemonic masculinity. Progress needs to be made regarding how masculinity is viewed as to remove the violent nature that many consider to be a necessity to some.

While hegemonic masculinity continues to shape and enforce the societal gender expectations within the male/female gender binary, it is an issue that has persisted through history, even when that harm is unclear. Sex abuse scandals and homophobic murders occurring in the military have historically raised awareness around the role of hegemonic masculinity in the military, a location where scholars have noticed a history of allegations surrounding internal abuse and sexual assault. Webster claims that his examination of gendered violence within

military services remains an ongoing problem within and outside of the military service. He explains that top ranking officials, who were usually male, "sanctioned the use of torture and brutal interrogation techniques, debasing treatment, psychological maltreatment and sexual violence in Iraq and Afghanistan," which granted immunity to perpetrators of these acts (Webster, 2019). The individuals who perpetrated these acts without repercussions would internalize these behaviors as appropriate and exhibit them outside of military service. During the Iraq war, several women died at the American base in Texas of "non-combat related injuries" where sexual assaults occurred prior to at least two deaths. Additionally, there are several instances where women in military service have spoken out against sexual assault by their fellow soldiers and then ended up dead within days. LGBT+ individuals have historically been prohibited from contributing to military service because of the nation's fear of AIDS and arguments that homosexuals will assault their fellow heterosexual soldiers (Webster, 2019). Like women, gay men were argued to be too feminine and weak to be able to effectively accomplish the mission of the US Army. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT)" was a compromise for LGBT+ individuals to serve in military services (Webster, 2019). However, despite hegemonic masculinity defining LGBT+ individuals as too feminine or weak, they argue that these same individuals would sexually assault and/or rape their fellow cadets. Coincidentally, hegemonic masculinity in the military utilized the sanctioned use of sexual violence and granted immunity for heterosexual soldiers who raped or sexually assaulted and then killed innocent victims of war. These unpunished behaviors contributed to the idea that sexual violence against women is normal for heterosexual men. Webster argues that this mentality within military services uses hegemonic masculinity, which has driven male soldiers to sexually assault and kill the female cadets, or sexually assault them and then kill them after they report (Webster, 2019). This is a

highly disputed argument as many scholars believe that the reported instances of violence are not representative of culture or masculinity within military services. The counter arguments typically claim that individuals utilize violence when they are traumatized by military combat. As such, some scholars believe that the instances of physical and sexual violence cited by Webster are a result of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and are not a result of hegemonic masculinity. However, despite how individuals feel about Webster's arguments, it is clear to see that hegemonic masculinity thrives in male-heavy and dominant cultures where masculine individuals feel their identities and/or safety are being threatened.

Section 3 - How to Mitigate Harm for LGBT+ Youth

Hegemonic masculinity has been ingrained into society through a multitude of ways. The harms of hegemonic masculinity are evident in society, but especially among the LGBT+ community. As society continues to dismantle hegemonic masculinity, a practical first step is finding solutions to mitigate the harms. There is evidence that shows that men's and women's aggression differ in motivations and consequences, and behavior scientists believe we should focus on the importance of integrating gender socialization and masculine-relevant processes into models for understanding and preventing men's violence (Berke and Zeichner, 2016). Incorporation of these methods when studying male aggression can help understand the interchangeable features that impact men's lives and help lead to greater violence prevention. The research found that the amount of strain and distress an individual feels stems from discrepancies in a perceived gender identity. This essentially means that when an individual believes that their identity does not align with society's gender expectations, they feel heightened rates of emotional distress. As society associates dominance and violence as traits of masculinity, men are more likely to react through violence when they experience emotional distress because

of gender discrepancies in their identity (Berke and Zeichner, 2016). Additionally, others support this claim by arguing that hegemonic masculinity often uses practices such as physical violence to reinforce male dominance over women. It was specified that these practices may not be obvious, because hegemonic masculinity can be presented in different ways (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell emphasizes her point by explaining that hegemonic masculinity has been distinguished from other types of masculinity, because it required men to follow the same expectations of other men but was rooted in the goal of seeking to remain in a dominant social position, which often pushes these individuals towards physical violence when they are no longer the dominant party.

It is important to understand the possible connections between hegemonic masculinity and increased rates of violence in men when discussing the harms of hegemonic masculinity. By conducting more research into the strain that these gender discrepancies can cause, scholars believe that psychologists can improve programs for understanding and preventing male violence. Some examples could include improved psychotherapy to help men manage emotional distress in a non-violent manner and improved workplace training and regulations against sexual violence (Berke and Zeichner, 2016). By pursuing current research, society can hope to address hegemonic masculinity and ultimately mitigate harm for young gay men who are attempting to figure out their identity.

Section 4 - There is a Societal Need to End Hegemonic Masculinity

There is no quick and easy solution to end hegemonic masculinity, but rather it requires a consensus of the population to abandon the harmful institutional ideas of masculinity in place of restorative concepts of masculinity. Institutional organizations, such as higher education, are actively contributing to dismantle hegemonic masculinity. Elliot argues that “hegemonic

masculinity supports and is supported by the gendered patterns of power and broad inequalities," and the education systems have an important role with their powerful social implications to challenge these inequalities (Elliott, 2018). LGBT+ advocacy within schools, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), are proven to be successful in educating students about homophobic language and behavior, which in turn has a positive impact on the school's overall culture (Elliott, 2018). This is partly contributed to the involvement of cisgender and heterosexual allies, as the voice of the majority within these institutions which "sends a stronger message than the voices of the marginalized alone" (Elliott, 2018). Additionally, by highlighting women's achievements and success in academia, schools can provide examples that work against the stereotype that women are meant to be submissive or soft. When educational institutions work to prove that individuals are not confined to the predetermined definitions of femininity or masculinity, it showcases to the broader community that gender is not confined by the predetermined hegemonic traits (Elliott, 2018). In the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, many men reacted defensively. Many men maintained a mentality that if they were never punished for sexual assault or rape that they were not contributing to, and practicing, hegemonic masculinity. As a result, more and more college campuses are addressing hegemonic masculinity's roles within sexual assault and rape culture. Colleges are offering programs which range from unlearning hegemonic masculinity present in sports to understanding male privilege, which generally yielded positive results in disestablishing the predefined gender expectations within these smaller communities (Scher, 2018). Men are also survivors of sexual assault, but because of hegemonic masculinity, these men do not feel comfortable seeking help because their male peers utilize 'locker room talk' to claim that it should be an accomplishment rather than a harmful event (Scher, 2018). Experts from a study done at Brown University identified

hegemonic masculinity as a problem that contributed to the cause of the #MeToo movement. Hegemonic masculinity leads individuals to self-detrimental, sexist, and violent behaviors, which includes sexual assault. While hegemonic masculinity has contributed to these behaviors for years, as shown through allegations against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, we are just now seeing the results. Many men think that if they are not accused of sexual assault that they are not the problem with masculinity, but this is simply not true. Exploring healthy gender identities and redefining masculinity is essential for youth for a person's own growth, but also to help decrease cases of sexual assault (Scher, 2018).

While the current efforts to dismantle hegemonic masculinity within higher education is a beneficial initiative, it is not enough. The American Psychological Association (APA) explains that boys learn from "the men in their lives, from their own experiences navigating our social norms, and from the large social and cultural context" (APA, 2018). Based on psychological research, aggressive behaviors that tend to persist over time can emerge when a child is still developing their behavioral responses. They describe the socialization of the male characteristics being present at an early age for young boys, which can persist over time. The concept of manhood has been shaped into a dominant masculinity and defined by specific characteristics that men are expected to internalize into their lives. This morphed concept of manhood often expects characteristics, such as: violence, aggression, "emotional distancing", courage, above-average physical strength, competitive, achievement and success (Donaldson, 1993). Hegemonic masculinity seeks to maintain domination through various outlets and these values and expectations are often passed through families and the cycle continues. As childhood is the period where male characteristics are embedded into the boy's identity, early childhood intervention methods are pivotal to ending harmful hegemonic masculinity (APA, 2018). Society

should focus on implementing intervention strategies that aim to prevent aggressive behaviors associated with hegemonic masculinity. While more research is needed to prove the validity of some studies, some prevention strategies that appear to curb hegemonic masculinity include: "educating parents to create a safe, nurturing, healthy environments and relationships … and [to] teach [their children] to express and regulate their emotions," "promot[ing] healthy relationship skills that decrease adolescent's acceptance of traditional gender role norms and dating violence," and "hav[ing] multi-level programs that positively integrate boys/men into society in healthy, positive ways" (Berke & Zeichner, 2016). If several prevention strategies were implemented on a national scale, then we would expect to see a decrease in the amount of hegemonic masculinity among men.

Section 5 – Conclusion

The current definition of hegemonic masculinity, as offered by Connell, examines how harmful masculinity allows men to remain dominant over women while simultaneously forcing women into a submissive nature (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This research paper examined how hegemonic masculinity is presented in queer individuals despite not always being targeted specifically towards women. It seems clear that hegemonic masculinity is not simply limited to heterosexual men seeking to maintain power over heterosexual women. Additionally, while the goal of hegemonic masculinity (to assert dominance over another group and to keep them in a submissive state) would likely remain the same, it is important to recognize that queer individuals expressing hegemonic masculinity would not limit their focus to only heterosexual women. Instead, a more updated definition of hegemonic masculinity is necessary to highlight

that any individual can express hegemonic masculinity, and anyone can fall victim to hegemonic masculinity.

However, while this paper argues the definition of hegemonic masculinity should be revised it is impossible to ignore the harm presented by hegemonic masculinity. In an attempt to express their masculine identity, hegemonic masculinity has driven individuals to extreme measures. Despite not being the most common form of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity has resulted in the death of many and caused severe harm upon many communities. Hegemonic masculinity differs from other forms of masculinity because of its need to be recognized by individuals and relies on preconceived notions of masculinity. These issues continue to create harm within modern contexts, but the future is not hopeless. Reconstructing the concept of masculinity to become less restrictive and less oppressive and will require mass societal acceptance. By directly addressing hegemonic masculinity, society can anticipate the harms would be reduced as well. Different organizations have indirectly addressed hegemonic masculinity by harboring discussions of what is known as toxic masculinity, but that is not enough. Until hegemonic masculinity is addressed on a grand scale, the harm will continue to impede young gay men from being able to express their true identity.

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