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Boys Wear Blue and Girls Wear Pink - The Evolution of Masculinity

Connor Plant

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Title Page:

Boys Wear Blue and Girls Wear Pink- The Evolution of Masculinity

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Project Proposal:

- 1. Provide your name and area of concentration:** Connor Plant, area of concentration-communication major with an emphasis in journalism and media studies.
- 2. Focus:** The issue and topic I would like to research and further explore is how has the history of masculinity evolved. I would like to go down the timeline of human interactions and explore the psychological “whys.” Why have men always been the hunter/gathers, why have men always been labeled as the financial providers, why have men never been accepted to demonstrate emotional vulnerability, etc. I am choosing this topic because I feel it is incredibly crucial for humankind to break down these ideas in order to progress in the right direction. Households have experienced negative impacts of men not feeling able to speak freely about how they’re feeling, until evidently it is too late and has since escalated.
- 3. Alignment with common theme and HCOM:** I feel this topic perfectly fits this year's theme; hidden histories. Men have typically shunned their emotions and feelings throughout history creating a negative impact on their social, personal, and professional lives. Through education, this ideology can change, creating more accepted views and eliminating pressures.
- 4. Purpose:** For the purpose of my research paper, I want to further my knowledge of why men have bottled up their emotions. I can be the vessel to help men accept that it is healthy and accepted to be emotional and vulnerable. I want to show all the stereotypical alpha-males that being “tough” is multidimensional and isn’t restricted to one singular definition. The specific humanities and research question I will be pursuing is: “Why

have humans deemed it acceptable and normal for men to hide from their feelings/emotions?” or “What events in human history have molded the sociological norms of masculinity.”

- 5. Capstone title:** The Evolution of Masculinity.
- 6. Working summary:** For my project, I really want to first and foremost allow the reader to understand the boundaries and limitations gender ramifications have on society. What the causes and effects have been creating emotional turmoil for the man while he is upholding these systemic ideologies. Firstly I will dive into the histories of masculinity and provide common examples of a stereotypical man during the given era. I will continue down this path, until I finally reach the current era, and begin to break down the why's. From here I will transition into the effects [start with cause, leading into effects (an A to B model)- suicide rates, physical abuse, emotional abuse, affairs, poor communication, self sabotage, etc]. My main goal with this project is to simply inform the reader of the negative impacts following these societal patterns, and in doing so, hopefully inspire a new wave of men opening up about their feelings, emotions, and through communication, create a more accepting outlook on defying trends. In doing so, hopefully it will improve all aspects of romantic, social, and professional lifestyles. I want to utilize specific examples within my own life, attempting to identify with the common man, to ensure that a man's-man can in fact convert.
- 7. Sources:** I anticipate needing a plethora of outside resources. First and foremost providing ample detailed examples from personal research will further my knowledge and provide me with a more in-depth understanding of the topic. Also, on top of the research, I would like to get in touch with a therapist that speaks to men and women often

about personal issues revolving around mens emotional capabilities and attempt to identify patterns. I would like to pick their brain about not only specifics, but also generalization and misconceptions made about men. Scholarly sources I have found so far are: Creation of Patriarchy (2/24 module),

<https://projects.history.qmul.ac.uk/thehistorian/2017/05/12/man-up-the-victorian-origins-of-toxic-masculinity/>, Stiffed the betrayal of the American man (library rental),

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/427126>,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2015registrations> . I know from furthering the

research process, more sources will organically be discovered.

- 8. Next steps:** The next steps I need to take are beginning the process of the research paper. I know that the research itself will be a large bulk of the work, so the sooner I begin that process the better. I also need to start reaching out to local professionals that have real-world experience speaking to men about their issues and how they cope with them.
- 9. Timeline:** 2/21-3/15 research and establish the majority of sources. 3/15-4/1 meet with a professional and be prepared before the interview to ask the right questions. 4/1 begin writing. Have approximately 5 pages written by 4/10. Reflect, edit, reassure myself I am going in the intended direction (important! Put the blinders on and stay on task). 4/10-4/25 have the bulk of the research paper written out (rough draft). 4/25-5/5 fine tune and polish/ make appropriate edits and corrections. Have multiple other people proofread and make revisions.

Authors note: The topic of men's mental health holds a near and dear space in my heart. One of the most selfless and caring friends I know tragically lost his brother to suicide in April 2020. This paper is dedicated to him, his brother, and the entire Burr family. Let's allow ourselves to never let a day go by where our mental health is taken for granted. Love yourself, love your family, love your friends, and most importantly, Love Like Josh.

Boys Wear Blue and Girls Wear Pink- The Evolution of Masculinity

From the earliest ages of adolescence, societal norms have shaped everything humans engulf themselves with. From boys being represented by the color blue and girls by the color pink, constructed ideologies are at the forefront of media conglomerate agendas today more than ever before. Naturally, opinions have organically formed, and arguments via Facebook with your uncle's twice-removed cousin have occurred more than many of us would like to admit. One ideology that is undeniable in most standard United States households is gender normative roles, and what they look like. Men oftentimes fear emotional diversity, which can lead to long-term mental health issues. Humans have created a regime for what is acceptable and normal behavior, and what I will be focusing on in this research paper is the history and evolution of masculinity, primarily focusing on men's mental health. What common coping mechanisms can do to men and their effects on mental health, and why they are so uncomfortable for men to speak about. Through extensive research, personal experiences, and interviews with industry professionals, this paper will demonstrate what society has accepted as normal, and the turmoil it has created on families, individuals, and peers alike. In addition, this essay will touch on difficult topics for many to read and talk about, and will not follow the systemic stuffy tone of a standard research

paper. There will be a lighter, softer tone at times from a once wanna-be alpha male jock turned into a big, loveable emotionally intelligent man that has accepted the healthy benefits of crying and cuddling. If you have gotten this far into the introduction, I sincerely hope you enjoy it; thank you.

Both men and women have characteristic labels placed on them that they are supposed to exemplify. Women have always had to demonstrate a specific set of mannerisms such as nurturing, motherly, caring, kind, beautiful, compassionate, understanding, and passive, along with many other adjectives. For men, it couldn't be more opposite. Society has told us that in order for a man to be manly they must also be tough, emotionless, stern, suave, strong, athletic, alpha, etc. And if you don't follow these guidelines for what a man or woman should look or act like, then you're cast out and labeled as a misfit.

All genders have always had a standardized set of constructed roles each gender is supposed to abide by. In recent years, these ideologies have drastically shifted into a nuance of views, thoughts, and feelings. In this essay, I will be focusing on United States households starting around the twentieth century. Commonalities have mirrored similar tendencies prior to 1900, with simply more structured and concrete ways.

Money money money, 'moneeeey'. Money is the root of all evil. It is a monetary device constructed to hold a particular level of value. It controls our everyday lives, and decisions, and drives our beautiful cognitive brains crazy. "C.R.E.A.M, Cash Rules Everything Around Me"- Wu-Tang-Clan. Financial expectations for men to provide for themselves and their families have always been an added stressor in men's and women's lives, particularly for men at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the U.S. economy was improving, and thoughts and ambitions were rapidly shifting. In a Standard U.S. household,

it was common that the man would go to work, and the woman to stay home during the day and focused her attention on household responsibilities. According to the *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 81% of the labor force that was age-eligible were men (Donald M. Fisk, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, paragraph 5). This was common, and rarely challenged during the early 1900s and into the mid-1900s. The man needed to provide financial stability for himself and his family in order to stay afloat. The thought of women going out into the workforce and making money hadn't yet materialized, so that left almost all the financial burden on the man.

The thought that your entire family could sink into a financial burden if you don't succeed is a heavy emotional weight for anyone to carry on their shoulders and is even worse for someone living in poverty. "Financial stress has been proposed as an economic determinant of depression... financial stress is found in both high-income and low-and middle-income countries but is generally stronger among populations with low income or wealth" (Pedro Vieira da Silva Magalhaes, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8863240/> , paragraph 1). Naturally, someone must have thought that speaking about how you feel because of X, Y, and Z would be able to help the situation, causing less stress and resulting in a higher quality of life right?

Wrong. Men so desperately want to fit this image of a man that they are afraid to speak up about how they truly feel. Money can be a taboo subject to talk about, and men will go to the furthest extremes just to flash the money they don't have in society's face through materialistic items such as sports cars, big lifted trucks, watches, jewelry, and high-end designer clothing. Social media has amplified this image-driven society, creating more depression suffocated by that shiny gold coin.

Recently, I visited my doctor for a normal checkup and she told me my blood pressure is slightly high for my age, weight, and athletic stature. She proceeded to ask me about dietary and

stress levels. I then asked her “Dr. Harrington, what socioeconomic class doesn’t experience stress? Whether you’re broke, in debt, living in poverty, in a middle-class blue-collar and suburban family, or in the top one percent of wealthy billionaires, at every level, there is always going to be stress. So she then discussed some positive coping strategies I could do to help lower my stress levels and get my blood pressure to where it needs to be. Do you know what she specifically told me not to use as a mechanism? I’m sure you guessed it; alcohol.

Just as my double Ph.D. doctor explained to me, alcohol acts as a crutch. It provides a temporary short-term fix to mask and hide the problems people don’t want to face head-on. Men in particular love drinking alcohol as a social escape. When the drinks are flowing and intoxication levels are on the rise, men tend to be more openly free with emotions that are deemed unmanly like smiling. “Smiles are contagious in a group of men sitting around drinking alcohol, according to a study announced Tuesday in the journal *Clinical Psychological Science*. This suggests that booze serves as a social lubricant for men, making them more sensitive to social behaviors, like smiling, and freeing them to connect with one another in a way that a soda can’t” (Denver Nicks, <https://time.com/3449789/men-drinking-together-smiling/> , paragraph 2). But drinking in public isn’t intended just for a few laughs and smiles with the boys. Oftentimes men drink to take a little stress off and relax. But becoming adapted to the feeling of taking the edge off with a drink is a slippery slope and can lead to further problems down the road. “...drinking alcohol as a coping strategy works... until it doesn’t. It numbs feelings, such as anxiety, depression, or shame, without addressing them. Alcohol can also intensify negative feelings and make [co-occurring conditions like depression](#) worse. Even if we recognize this, it’s easy to revert to what we know will temporarily heal the pain or soothe the negative emotion that may be overwhelming us” (Sabrina Spotorno, <https://joinmonument.com/resources/alcohol-as-a->

[coping-mechanism/](#) , paragraph 3). Not only does alcohol have short-term negative effects on mental health and wellbeing, but the long-term effects can have detrimental outcomes, especially when you start to regularly consume alcohol so your body builds up a tolerance needing more to feel a buzz. “In the long-term, alcohol uses up and reduces the number of neurotransmitters in our brains, but we need a certain level to ward off anxiety and depression. This can make you want to drink more to relieve these difficult feelings – which can start a cycle of dependence” (<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/alcohol-and-mental-health> , paragraph 6).

A large contributor to men's mental health is how society has socialized and valued men appearing strong. The idea of what strength really is has skewed over time, but still holds its core made-up definition. This polluted idea of what a strong male needs to exemplify starts in childhood. I know myself, along with many other of my male friends, who grew up with their fathers, coaches, and mentors telling them common phrases like “toughen up, don’t act like a sissy.” Unfortunately for us all, being taught that crying is a weakness, or being vulnerable is a weakness has caused much of the drug abuse epidemic in contemporary masculine society. “Starting in childhood, boys are often told never to show weakness or vulnerability, which makes it difficult for males to reach out for help when they experience loss or mental health issues like depression or anxiety. Shutting down like this can lead to the use or abuse of drugs in order to numb negative feelings” (<https://www.altaloma.com/drug-use-in-men-may-cover-up-emotional-struggles/> , paragraph 2). Men using drugs to mask and hide from their feelings isn’t surprising. They have been told from an early age that they are required to uphold this standard of being tough. So when times get tough, and they always do at some point, men have reverted to a substance that masks reality. “Among adults aged 18 or older in 2019, those with past year SMI

or AMI were more likely than those without mental illness in the past year to be past year users of illicit drugs (49.4 percent for SMI and 38.8 percent for AMI vs. 16.6 percent for adults with no mental illness), past year users of marijuana (39.8 and 32.5 percent vs. 14.2 percent), past year misusers of opioids (13.8 and 8.8 percent vs. 2.5 percent), past month binge alcohol users (32.7 and 30.9 percent vs. 24.5 percent), or past month cigarette smokers (33.0 and 27.2 percent vs. 15.8 percent)” (Beth Han,

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt29393/2019NSDUHFFRPDFWHTML/2019NSDUHFFR090120.htm> , section: ‘Substance Abuse among People with Mental Health Issues).

Another large contributor to the idea of what represents strength is the cinematic industry. Every superhero is essentially a heterosexual man that is never seen showing their emotions or weakness. On top of standardized characteristic traits, just about every cinematic superhero has the same physical physique. Chiseled, appearing physically strong, and never showing emotional vulnerability is now what Hollywood has told the world a superhero exemplifies. They tend to always have some damsel in distress wrapped around their arm, waiting to get swooped off her feet and saved by the heroic ‘masculine’ man. Even the characters' names suggest that a male has to be in a position of heroism (SuperMAN, BatMAN, AquaMAN, Iron MAN, AntMAN, etc). I would imagine that after a long hard day of saving the world, even Superman could use a shoulder to cry on. But of course, men crying has been labeled as weak, so there is no possible way for a director to squeeze that scene in. I’m sure they’re thinking logically and assuming crying would make Superman less of a man for crying. Right..? Well, since young boys love to fantasize about superheroes, then maybe it would be a

great idea for one of them to have a scene where they cry a time or two, and MAYBE a young boy would one day follow suit and think that it is, in fact, okay to cry as a man.

We now know and understand there are many different reasons why men do not feel comfortable sharing their feelings very often. We also have identified some of the effects bottling up emotions can have on individuals. But what are the industry-leading professionals saying? One of the top marriage and family therapists in California agrees that “My male clients make many comments, along the lines of hearing their dad, other male figures, or just society telling them it is weak to share their emotions” (Jessica Pappas, Marriage and Family Therapist, oral interview). But what effects do bottling up these emotions have on individuals? Since it has been so normalized to do, many people assume there aren't any effects at all, but as we have learned, bottling up emotions can lead down the dangerous path of depression, anxiety, and self-destruction. Therapy is a proven safe space to speak about emotions and problems in an open manner with a professional. A common misconception professionals have noticed is men think they should only go to therapy when a problem occurs. Women oftentimes will have regularly scheduled appointments even if there isn't anything ‘wrong’. “The men that I have seen in therapy have come to therapy when issues arise in their lives/relationships. In my experience, there are far fewer men that come into therapy for regular check-ups” (Jessica Pappas, Marriage and Family Therapist, oral interview). Instead of society normalizing men bottling in their emotions because it makes them weak, society needs to normalize regular therapeutic check-ins for men. Whether it is in a conventional therapy office, yoga on the beach, or simply talking with a friend over a beer, I am not going to be the one to tell someone what works for them individually, I am just here to tell you what isn't working for men as a whole.

When addressing men's mental health, many people's minds initially go to suicide rates. Unfortunately, there is validity behind people's brains thinking in that manner. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "the suicide rate among males in 2021 was approximately four times higher than the rate among females. Males make up 50% of the population, but nearly 80% of suicides" (CDC, caption above graph number two). Furthermore, new studies are proving that men are more impulsive than women, and also are more than twice as likely to own a firearm, which is the leading cause of successful attempts at suicide. "This emotional reactivity, exacerbated by alcohol intake and coupled with much greater access to guns (men are [twice as likely](#) than women to own a gun), results in far more males taking their own lives. About [83% of suicide attempts](#) with firearms result in death, by far the most "effective" method" (<https://bigthink.com/health/why-american-men-suicide/> , Ross Pomeroy, Paragraph 7). Also, the majority of the cases discovered alcohol in the bloodstream. So there is a combination of alcohol, guns, impulsive behavior, depression, and not wanting to talk openly about internal problems, resulting in bottling everything up. After the pressure builds up to be insurmountable, an impulsive explosion of rage and irrationality happens, and guns are the ideal quick and accessible vessel to execute their action.

As I was furthering my research on the correlation between suicide and men, I stumbled across another site, <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/most-male-suicides-show-no-mental-health-link> , and was drawn to it for a particular reason. Prior to visiting this website, nearly everything I found was in regard to mental health correlating to suicide. The *Newsroom UCLA* caught my attention though because their headline read "Most male suicides in the U.S show no link to mental health issues." I was astonished by this so I decided to visit their site and find out what led them to this claim. After reading through their information, I finally realized why they

stated that men's suicide doesn't relate to mental health issues. Firstly, the site continuously contradicts itself, but more importantly, the site must've forgotten to mention how infrequently men speak up about having a mental health issue. When men have been told to shun their emotions and mental health from a young age, it leaves a huge void in statistical data. "Other reasons that may impact a man's mental health journey are culture, fatherhood, race, and socioeconomic status. These stigmas are real and deeply affect men as nearly 1 in 10 men experience depression or anxiety but less than half will receive treatment and more than 4 times as many men as women die by suicide every year" (<https://adaa.org/find-help/by-demographics/mens-mental-health> , paragraph 2). A massive reason why men's mental health is so greatly underrepresented is the simple fact that men are afraid and embarrassed to speak about what's going on inside their heads. Because so many men don't speak up about their issues, it is hard to fully grasp how many of us are going through similar experiences. That is why I can't stress enough how imperative it is for men to feel safe and unjudged when talking about difficult issues.

As a child growing up, I had one main focus and that was to one day play professional baseball. My dad was my coach from 5 years old until I was about 14 or so and I was very fortunate to share that dream with him. His personality is stern and direct, but also loving, caring, and empathetic. Because of the way he was raised, naturally, parenting tendencies from his father rolled over into our relationship. Unfortunately, my grandfather passed away before I turned 1 so I didn't have the privilege of knowing him. My father has taught me countless life lessons, and I love him and appreciate everything he has always done for me my entire life. Since he grew up in such a different time period, his morals and values are different from my contemporary views. He is very "old school" in how he thinks about politics, work ethic, and

how to save a dollar, along with other generic life ideologies. Because of his upbringing, and the different time period he grew up in, we have different ways of expressing our emotions. He bottles everything up, tries to act like nothing is ever wrong, and always feels as though since he is my dad, he can't be vulnerable and demonstrate his emotional needs. This was a very common practice for men born in the late 50s. Men were constantly reminded that in order to be the 'man' of the house, they can't cry or be seen as 'weak' otherwise society would chew them up and spit them right out. He is turning 70 years old this upcoming June, which is wild for me to think about. My dad turned the page in his life of older adulthood and onto the next chapter of essentially the beginning of being an elderly person. Because of his Irish dissent, power belly, and a massively thick mustache that is most likely to become home to some leftover dinners, it can be hard for me to try and explain to him that it is okay to be vulnerable at times (especially coming from his 28-year-old son). I try my best to explain contemporary ideas to him in a language that is easily identifiable, but most of the time it goes unnoticed. He may nod his head in agreement, and acknowledge what I'm saying is valuable and beneficial, but for some reason, what I try to explain to him is heard, but not listened to.

Though I may not be able to teach an old dog new tricks, there is still value to our conversations, and learning outcomes can always be made. I am not sure if it's through my father's stubbornness of not wanting to change, or his feeling of embarrassment after many men he looked up to in his life have scarred and given him trauma. I have come to grips with him not being able to fully buy into the idea that men crying is not a weakness, or men sharing their problems with another man is him being a 'sissy'. I also understand that he grew up in such a different era than I did, so that brings up variables that I'll never fully be able to understand, and that's okay. All these things are okay, and I would never be petty and hold them against him

because, well, he's my dad, and I love him. I just know that if I'm blessed enough to be a father myself one day, and I do in fact have a baby boy, I'm going to do my best to try and provide my son with the emotional intelligence that I have learned through school, life, studying, reading, shared experiences, and most importantly my own mistakes. This will hopefully help him one day be able to spread the knowledge and awareness of the importance of men's mental health.

This poem is dedicated to anyone that has struggled themselves or knows a man that has struggled with mental health issues, which is everyone (and that's okay).

Love Like Josh

Men are supposed to be fearless,
but oftentimes fear emotions.

Sexually driven, drunken, and abusive,
lusting after promotions.

It's okay to cry, boy.

The only attire that is appropriate is camo or a dapper suit,
running from cops in a high-speed pursuit.

Macho man lift-kit on your truck,
subwoofers woofin', in the bed got a 9-point buck.

It's okay to cry, boy.

Physique chiseled and cut from a stone,
drink your milk son so you have strong bones.

Short hair and a deep voice for the public's eye,
don't you dare paint your nails man you're a guy.

It's okay to cry, boy.

Bottle it up young man, and put it away,
come on boy, don't be a pussy, it's the only way.

After you bottle it up, don't forget to hit the bottle,
only a mother is nurturing don't forget to caudle.

It's okay to cry, boy.

Don't cry me no river,
glistening glitter will make a grown man quiver.

That's what we're told, from such a young age,
bulk up kid, it's time to rage.

It's okay to cry, boy.

Spiraling downwards only suicide is a rifling crutch,
ease the emotional pain, taking my own life is that too much?

Yes, it really is too much for such a beautiful soul,
ease the pain, ease the suffering, and pack a bowl.

There's no need for tragedy you are not alone,
anytime, any place, anywhere I'll always answer the phone.

You have so much to live for, don't let it fall short,
playing catch in the driveway with their dad will be their favorite sport.

I know it's a lot to ask for, but we all need you around,
come back to earth where your heaven is found.

Our days are limited, so we must live them to the fullest,
till death do us part, over faster than a bullet.

The pain is now over, the sun setting over Mitchell's Cove, waves are awash,
goddamn everyone needs to live their lives and *Love Like Josh*.

It's okay to cry, boy.

It's okay to cry.

In today's world, there are so many pressures and expectations that it can have a serious strain on anyone's mental health. Why make life more complicated than it needs to be by following along with society's gender-normative agenda. From early adolescence and boyhood, men have been told to bottle up their feelings, toughen up, and not express emotional behavior time and time again. This has led many down a slippery slope of drug and alcohol abuse, depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts and actions. We know the causes and effects it can have, but we have still yet to normalize healthy activities in order to prevent such turmoil. Such activities can be simply talking to friends about how your mental health is doing, regular check-ups in therapy even if there isn't an apparent issue, or just doing what makes you happy, even if it isn't viewed as acceptable by the masses.

As I grow up and mature, I have learned a few things that have helped me personally get through difficult times, and potentially save my own life. It isn't always easy to speak about, especially placing yourself in a vulnerable position, but the more we normalize this, the better off we all will be. One of the main purposes for this paper was first and foremost to educate, but also I really wanted the common man to be able to identify with myself and know that it is indeed okay for them to open up. For someone that looks, speaks, and acts like me to read this, and know that because they fit a certain stereotype, doesn't mean they have to follow in that trend's footsteps. Being emotional has nothing to do with how manly a person is. In all honesty, having a proficient understanding of your own emotional intelligence is more manly than having a lack of emotional awareness outside of lust or anger which men have become so familiar with. Nothing would bring me more joy than to hear that by reading my paper, a man decided to take the leap of faith and open up about how they're feeling to his group of guy friends. Maybe it

could have a snowball effect and another guy within that group tells a different group of friends and so on and so forth.

Spreading awareness for mental health, especially men's mental health has been an important part of my own journey over the last handful of years. Going through tragedy will put life into perspective, and really tell you what is important. If you have gotten this far into the essay, I extend my utmost gratitude and sincere thanks for reading. I hope you enjoyed it and learned something new. In addition, my blessing is that you take a piece of information you read above into the real world and spread the love. Life is so fragile and we often take it for granted. Lastly, and by far the most important thing I want you to take away from this paper, never forget to *Love Like Josh*. Thank you.

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