

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION



Challenging media

STUDY GUIDE

TOUGH GUISE

VIOLENCE, MEDIA & THE CRISIS IN MASCULINITY | FEATURING JACKSON KATZ
STUDY GUIDE WRITTEN BY JEREMY EARP & JACKSON KATZ

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USING THIS GUIDE

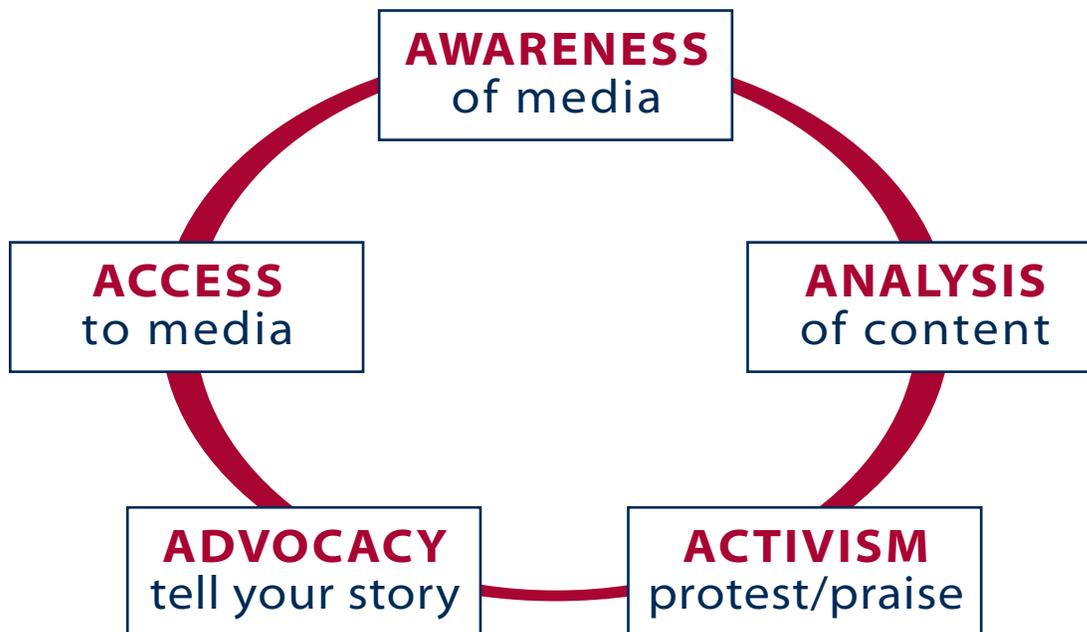
Two versions of *Tough Guise* are available: a **longer version** produced for college-level audiences, and an **abridged version** edited for length and content more suitable for use in high schools. This guide covers all of the material presented in the full-length (*college*) version of *Tough Guise*, but is designed to work with the abridged version as well, with one exception: one entire section, *Backlash*, is present in the college version and this guide, but not in the abridged version of the video.

The guide itself breaks down into three major sections: a brief overview; a series of summaries, discussion questions and exercises and suggestions for further reading that correspond to each section of the video; and a compilation of additional resources and related material. Summaries, discussion questions and exercises are provided for each section of the video – rather than for the video as a whole – to make it easier to manage the breadth of material presented in the video, to engage it in depth, and to enable teachers to focus on one section at a time.

USING THIS VIDEO IN THE CLASSROOM

- » View the video prior to showing it to your students.
- » Review the study guide and choose which exercises you will use with your students.
- » Use the previewing activities to help your students prepare for the ideas presented by the video.
- » Encourage *active listening*. Because the content of this video is likely to elicit emotional responses from the students, it is important that the students engage with each other in ways that ensure everybody has the opportunity both to speak and to be listened to. It is advised that you set guidelines or norms to ways to “actively listen” in advance of classroom discussions. Check out MEF’s handout, *Techniques for Active Listening*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdf/ActiveListening.pdf>)
- » Have the students keep a journal. It will be an effective place for them to explore their own attitudes and opinions and to record their observations about the media.
- » Review and discuss the handout *How to be a Critical Media Viewer*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdf/CriticalViewing.pdf>)
- » Incorporate activism and advocacy into your media literacy study. They are an important part of empowering students.

THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT¹



THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT EXPLAINED

AWARENESS

Students learn about the pervasiveness of the media in their lives.

ANALYSIS

Students discuss the forms and contents of the media's various messages as well as the intent of most media to persuade an audience.

ACTIVISM

Students develop their own opinions about the negative and positive effects of the media and decide to do something about it – this can be in the form of praise for healthy media, protest of unhealthy media, or development of campaigns to educate others with regard to the media, to change media messages, etc.

ADVOCACY

Students learn how to work with media and use their own media to develop and publicize messages that are healthy, constructive, and all too often ignored by our society.

ACCESS

Students gain access to the media – radio, newspaper, internet, television, etc. – to spread their own message. This in turn leads to further awareness of the media and how it works, which leads to a deeper analysis and so forth.

1. Diagram and explanation adopted from E.D.A.P.'s GO GIRLS! Curriculum, (c) 1999 (<http://www.edap.org/gogirls.html>)

SYNOPSIS

TOUGH GUISE: MASCULINITY, VIOLENCE, MEDIA & THE CRISIS IN MASCULINITY

The central argument of *Tough Guise* is that violence in America is overwhelmingly a gendered phenomenon, and that any attempt to understand violence therefore requires that we understand its relationship to cultural codes and ideals of masculinity and manhood. Central to the video's argument are the following:

- » Masculinity is made, not given – as opposed to one's biological sex;
- » Media are the primary narrative and pedagogical forces of our time;
- » Media images of manhood therefore play a pivotal role in making, shaping and privileging certain cultural and personal attitudes about manhood;
- » A critical examination of privileged media images of manhood reveals a widespread and disturbing equation of masculinity with pathological control and violence;
- » Looking critically at constructed ideals of manhood – at how, why and in whose interests they are constructed differently in different historical, social and cultural contexts – denaturalizes and diminishes the potential of these imagined ideals to shape our perceptions of ourselves, our world and each other.

This last point underscores one of the central claims of this video: that despite epidemic levels of violence in American culture, change is possible and violence can be prevented. Violent masculinity is no more "natural" than media imagery. Both rely on controlled performances. The conclusion of this video amounts to this: By recognizing, and naming, masculine identity as a process, an uneasy performance built on exclusion and policing, we might begin to learn how to break free of the confining demands of hegemonic masculinity on actual boys and men – while also challenging the traditional assumption that masculine credibility is linked to intimidation, power and control. Similarly, by looking critically at how institutions – from media outlets to political institutions to our schools – often play a role in reinforcing constricted, regressive notions of manhood that maintain an unacceptably violent status quo, we might begin to clear some space for individuals, male and female, to live freer lives.

INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY

The idea that manhood or masculinity represents a fixed, inevitable, natural state of being is a myth. What a culture embraces as “masculine” can be better understood as an ideal or a standard – a projection, a pose, or a guise that boys and men often adopt to shield their vulnerability and adapt to the local values and expectations of their immediate and more abstract social environments. This projection or pose can take myriad forms, but one that’s crucial to examine is the “tough guise”: a persona based on an extreme notion of masculinity that links the credibility of males to toughness, physical strength, and the threat or use of violence.

One of the most important places where boys learn to make sense of their world is the powerful and pervasive media system – which is arguably the great pedagogical force of our time. And one of the dominant features of this pop cultural curriculum is a steady stream of images that define manhood as connected with dominance, violence and control. Boys and men have a huge stake in looking critically at media representations of masculinity and in confronting these problems – even if it means that they have to allow themselves, and others, to pull back the curtain to reveal what’s really going on in their lives.

KEY POINTS

- » The myth of the “real man” is linked intimately with the phenomenon of the “tough guise,” wherein boys and men learn to show the world only those parts of themselves that the dominant culture has defined as manly.
- » Even at a remarkably young age, boys are likely to be well-versed in the rules of the macho game. Males absorb early on and from everywhere that not only is there such a thing as a “real” man, but also that there is a high price to pay for not qualifying as one.
- » For boys, across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines, being a real man often means being tough and strong, and fitting into the narrow box that defines ideal manhood.
- » It is vital that we understand that the real lives and identities of boys and men often – if not always, in some ways – conflict with the dominant “real man” ideal. Behind the bravado and the tough guy posturing, there is human complexity: for some men and boys, the abuse they suffered as children; others their problems in relationships; still others their fears and vulnerabilities. In other words, behind the guise is the real boy and man, the results of a sensitive, nuanced experience of the world that rarely airs in public.
- » Boys pick up on this act, learn what’s inside the box and what’s outside, from a culture that feeds – and feeds off of – masculine stereotypes. Beyond individual boys and their unique struggles, there are larger social and historical forces at work that affect the way individuals live their lives.
- » The media help construct violent masculinity as a cultural norm. Even a cursory survey of media imagery and discourse reveals quite strikingly the repeated and unquestioned assumption that violence is not so much a deviation as it is an accepted part of masculinity.
- » If we want to understand violence in America, we need to understand the growing connection made in our society – on both an individual and a systemic level – between being a man and being violent. And we need to understand how this has produced disastrous results for American society as a whole.
- » The fact is that some of the most serious problems in contemporary American society, especially those connected with violence, can be looked at as essentially problems within contemporary American masculinity. If we look at almost any category of violence we see that the perpetrators are overwhelmingly male.

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» Boys and men are inflicting an incredible level of pain and suffering, both on themselves and on others. And much of the violence is cyclical: many boys who are abused as children grow up and become perpetrators. But if we want to intervene in this deadly cycle we have to examine how our society encourages male violence in the first place.

(For more information, see Scientific American's June 1999 Special Issue on Men, www.sciam.com/1999/0699mens/0699quicksunmary.html).

» Trying to improve the lives of boys and men is anything but a case of "male-bashing." Looking critically at what boys and men are doing – including harming themselves and others – is not in any way "anti-male." In fact, it's the opposite. It's simply being honest about what's going on in boys' and men's lives. Women have been at the forefront of trying to get men to start talking about these subjects, but it's not only girls and women who stand to benefit if men's lives are transformed; statistically speaking, the major victims of male violence are other males.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER STUDY

1. What are some benefits to boys and men of putting on the "tough guise"? When is it an effective and adaptive response, and when is it self-destructive and dangerous to others?
2. Why do some people consider it "male-bashing" to point out that males commit the vast majority of violence? Discuss the term "male-bashing." It is a violent term that is, nonetheless, often used to describe women and men who are speaking out against violence. Why? What effect does some men's defensiveness have on our willingness to be honest about the disproportionate amount of violence perpetrated by males?
3. Are there biological reasons why males commit the vast majority of violence? If so, why do rates of violence vary widely between different countries? Why is the U.S. by far the most violent society in the industrialized world? And how do we explain, if the primary cause of violence is biological or genetic, why the vast majority of males do not perpetrate violence?
4. Many cultural commentators have noted that media representations of men of color (*e.g. news accounts, roles in film, pornography, sports*) have disproportionately shown them to be aggressive and violent. What effect do these portrayals have on the gender identity formation of boys and men of color? How do these portrayals influence the way the white majority sees men of color?

EXERCISES

1. The Box Exercise: Draw a box on a chalkboard. Ask students to name characteristics of a "real man." Write them inside the box. When the box is full, ask for themes (*e.g. strength, toughness are equated with masculinity*). Then ask them to name characteristics of men who don't measure up, and write these outside the box. When you've gotten a sufficient number of words (*e.g. wimp, wuss, fag*), ask for themes. Then talk about how boys/men are boxed in by these definitions, and punished if they don't fit in.

[Note: For an explanation of the box exercise see Helping Teens Stop Violence: A Practical Guide for Counselors, Educators, and Parents, by Allen Creighton with Paul Kivel, of the Oakland Men's Project. See especially pg. 87. For more information about the Oakland Men's Project write to them at 1203 Preservation Way, Ste. 200, Oakland, CA 94612, or call at 510.835.2433.]

2. Ask students to find another example, like the *Wizard of Oz*, that features a man creating an image that is not the actual man underneath (*e.g. a character in a film or a piece of literature; movie stars themselves; sports personas, young men in school, college, etc.*). Have them write about whether they feel it is obvious that the

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persona is just an act. As they explore and defend their point of view, ask them to consider how the persona differs from what they see as the more authentic person performing it. And ask them to explain what they see as the significance of this difference – between persona or performance and reality.

3. Another option here is to show a film whose theme involves a male character whose masculine posturing creates conflict – both within himself and with others. Ask students to write about these internal and external conflicts. Have students pay specific attention as they write to the nature of the “masculine performance” involved. Some more specific writing topics might be: *a)* Analyze how this character-driven theme reinforces the overall meaning or theme of the film; *b)* Decide whether or not the film resolves this tension by reinforcing traditional, or hyper-masculine identity, or by subverting it and opening up new possibilities for male identity; or *c)* Write about the consequences of this conflict – for the life of the male character himself, and for others around him – and discuss how this relates to the overall theme or meaning of the film.

(Possible films: *Once Were Warriors*; *Born on the Fourth of July*; *Full Metal Jacket*; *In and Out*.)

4. As a class, view the film *The Celluloid Closet*, a documentary that specifically surveys masculine performance throughout the history of Hollywood film, and uncovers a striking homophobic subtext beneath masculine posturing. Ask students to write about this connection between traditional styles of masculinity and homophobia, and to find other examples in contemporary films or television shows.

5. Ask students to write about a personal experience – involving themselves or someone they’ve known – in which there was pressure to conform to a rigid gender stereotype. Key here is to encourage them to look critically at this experience, and to widen their discussion by connecting this personal experience to some of the larger issues presented in the film.

SUGGESTED READING

Archer, J. (Ed.). (1994). *Male Violence*. London: Routledge.

Butterfield, F. (1995). *All God's Children: The Bosket Family and the American tradition of violence*. New York: Knopf.

Canada, G. (1998). *Reaching up for Manhood: Transforming the Lives of Boys in America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Garbarino, J. (1999). *Lost Boys: Why our sons turn violent and how we can save them*. New York: Free Press.

Kivel, P. (1992). *Men's work: How to stop the violence that tears our lives apart*. Center City, MN: Hazelden.

Messerschmidt, J. (1993). *Masculinities and crime: Critique and reconceptualization of theory*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Miedzian, M. (1991). *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the link between masculinity and violence*. New York: Doubleday.

Schiffman, J. R. & O'Toole, L. L. (Eds.). (1997). *Gender violence: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. New York: New York University Press

HIDDEN: A GENDER

SUMMARY

The way we talk about violence shapes the way we understand it. Assuming, rather than naming explicitly, the fact that violence is primarily in the domain of boys and men both hides this basic fact and perpetuates the myth that all men and boys are inherently violent. They are not. Yet the fact is that boys and men are responsible for a disproportionate amount of violence. Calling attention to this fact, as a fact, forces us to look not at the violent nature of boys and men, not at biological determinants, but at the violent “nature” of the ideas, images and values some boys and men associate with being a man. Simply put, it forces us to look at masculinity. When we hear discussions of how media is making “kids” violent, we therefore need to pause. Girls absorb media; why then so much more violence from boys?

Similarly, we need to look at how media frame the issue of male violence generally – how media tend to use language that deflects attention from the glaring fact that males are responsible for the vast majority of violence. Again and again we find examples in media of language that de-genders violence – be it passive voice constructions that hide the recurring gender patterns that characterize violence, or the persistent use of androgynous phrases such as “youth violence” and “kids killing kids,” phrases that not only eschew journalistic precision, but obscure the source of the problem we face by failing to name boys and men as the usual perpetrators. When we gender the way we talk about violence – whether violence on the street, in the movies, or within or resulting from our institutions – we are forced to examine masculinity as part of the problem, and when we do so, we move closer to doing something meaningful about it.

KEY POINTS

- » Violence needs to be seen as a gender issue, especially as an issue caught up in how we as a society think about masculinity and manhood.
- » In the national conversation about violence, it’s rarely referred to as a gender issue, although one gender, men, perpetrates approximately 90% of the violence.
- » One of the ways dominance functions is that the dominant group avoids being examined. We focus always on the subordinated group – blacks or Latinos when we talk about race; gays when we talk about sexual orientation; women when we talk about gender. Unconscious or not, this focus helps the dominant group remain invisible and protects the status quo.
- » This dynamic plays out in a number of ways when it comes to discussions of violence. One is the rampant use of the passive voice when we talk about crimes against women, which shifts our focus off of male perpetrators and onto female victims and survivors.

(see **Julia Penelope** in Suggested Reading.)

- » Another example, also embedded in language, can be seen in the sort of linguistic neutering of violence found in newspaper headlines and stories all around the country – which again and again speak of “youth violence,” and of “kids killing kids,” not boys killing boys and boys killing girls.
- » Few would argue with the common-sense idea that dealing with a problem requires, first of all, that you name it. If we don’t frame violence as the overwhelmingly male, masculine phenomenon that it is, then subsequent discussions about the causes of violence are destined to ignore one of the key elements.
- » A key indication that de-gendered discussions of violence serve to universalize or naturalize violence as a male thing: when girls commit violence, that’s always the subject. When girls turn violent, the gendered nature of the crime is always part of the discussion. The same needs to be true with male violence. The bottom line is that violence has been gendered masculine.

HIDDEN: A GENDER

- » A key goal in violence prevention is to make masculinity visible. To make explicit the overwhelmingly masculine character of most violence. And to reject the idea that “it goes without saying” that males are more violent as anti-intellectual, biologically deterministic, and implicitly anti-male.
- » Making masculinity visible is the first step to understanding how it operates in the culture and how definitions of manhood have been linked, often unconsciously, to dominance and control. Making masculinity a key part of the equation is therefore step one in dealing effectively with the problem of violence in our society.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER STUDY

1. Many people think the very concept of “gender issues” is synonymous with “women’s issues.” Talk about why this is so. And discuss how this misconception makes it difficult for many men, and women, to understand the gendered nature of men’s lives.
2. Why is it important to identify the gender of the perpetrators of violence? How would gendering the discussion help contribute to reducing violence?
3. What is the difference between saying “male violence” and “men’s violence”?
4. What is the difference between using the common term “violence against women” rather than the less commonly used “men’s violence against women”? And why is this difference significant?
5. Why did *Thelma and Louise* become so controversial, when movies featuring men’s violence against women are released regularly with little protest?
6. Is it “nit-picking” or needlessly “politically correct” to suggest that we should not use male-inflected language to suggest universal ideas and experiences? Are we overreacting or reading into things too much, for example, when we question descriptions such as “man has always searched for answers,” or “man’s religions have unifying themes” as inherently exclusionary and sexist? How might the way we approach and think about such formulations be different if we said “men and women” instead?
7. What is meant by the term “politically correct”?
8. When is it time to stop questioning something? To stop thinking critically about an issue or an idea (*such as the importance of how language is used*)? And who decides?

EXERCISES

1. Ask students to find and cut out a newspaper or magazine op/ed column or article about violence. Have them bold the words used to describe perpetrators. Rewrite the piece using gendered language. (*i.e.* “A 15-year-old boy killed” rather than “A 15-year-old youth killed”)
2. Ask students to write about an experience they’ve had in which language influenced what happened. Ask them to think about how the experience might have been different if the language involved was different.
3. Ask students to write in response to the following: Do words have power? How much? How? Why or why not? Give examples.

SUGGESTED READING

Katz, J. & Jhally, S. (1999, May 2). “Missing the mark”. The Boston Globe, pp. E1.

Penelope, J. (1990). *Speaking freely: Unlearning the lies of the fathers’ tongues*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Spender, D. (1985). *Man made language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

UPPING THE ANTE

SUMMARY

What comes to be accepted as “masculine” in a society is largely a cultural construction, not simply an expression of a shared male nature. Key here is distinguishing biology from learning, seeing masculinity – or, more accurately “masculinities” – not in biological terms, but as a learned set of standards or styles embedded deeply in the values and ideology of culture. As culture evolves, so does our notion of what constitutes “manliness.” What is considered supremely “masculine” in one context – say, **George Washington** in a wig and knee breeches or **Mel Gibson** in a kilt – might be the very definition of “unmanly” in another.

The fact that masculinity is not fixed, that male identity is fluid and subject to change, is of course cause for hope that violent ideals of masculinity are not inevitable; if “masculinity” by nature is forever shifting, and if we’re plagued in our own cultural moment with media images that continually connect masculinity with control and violence, then the possibility exists for better images and healthier visions of what it means to be a man. But even a cursory look at some of the more dominant images consumed by young men in particular suggests that the way media have portrayed manliness seems to have devolved as much as it has evolved.

The marked increase over time in the size of representations of men’s bodies, and the concomitant increase in gun size and killing power, provides a kind of cultural Rorschach test. They are indications of how the stakes have been raised, how the real man fantasy peddled to and consumed by so many boys has grown increasingly physical, violent and mean. Significantly, even as we observe this phenomenon of increased male body size, particularly in the kinds of representations that predominate in action films, professional wrestling and video games, we can trace simultaneously the shrinking of the ideal body size of women. Such increasingly impossible and potentially destructive images need to be taken seriously, especially in the context of heightening concerns not only about male violence – but about steroid abuse by boys and men, and anorexia among girls and women.

KEY POINTS

- » One way to understand the meaning and value of something in American society is to look at how it is represented in the media – and to understand that the media both reflect and produce these meanings and values.
- » Images of men and masculinity have changed dramatically and in revealing ways over the past 50 years, particularly in terms of the size of men’s bodies. And these changes tell us a story about what’s going on in the culture.
- » The representation of the ideal masculine body has grown considerably over time. The ideal has always been a fantasy, but now the fantasy is bigger. The increasing size of *Superman*, *Batman*, pro wrestlers, *GI Joe* and the characters of *Star Wars* is especially interesting and revealing given that representations of the ideal, fantasy female body have been shrinking in inverse proportion. (*For more discussion of how women’s bodies are represented in media, see Jean Kilbourne’s films Slim Hopes & Killing Us Softly 3.*)
- » It is telling that in an era when women have been challenging male power in business, the professions, education, and other areas of economic and social life, the images of women’s bodies that have flooded the culture depict women as less threatening. They’re literally taking up less symbolic space. At the same time, images of men have gotten bigger, stronger, more muscular and more violent. It stands to reason that one of the ways that men have responded to women’s challenges is by overcompensating and placing greater value on size, strength, and muscularity.

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- » The same pattern can be seen in the way gun imagery has changed over the last 50 years; from **Humphrey Bogart** and **Sean Connery**, to **Clint Eastwood**, **Sylvester Stallone** and **Arnold Schwarzenegger**, the guns – along with the masculine codes they represent – have become more and more imposing, violent and menacing.
- » **Bottom line:** There is nothing natural about images. They're made, and how they're made says something about those in the culture who make them and consume them. And the fact is that in our culture men have been the primary authors of our popular culture. When we look at changes in pop-culture's images, we're also looking at the changing psyches of their creators and consumers.
- » Still, the images of violent masculinity that pervade media represent more than the public screening of the private and pathological fantasies of the individual males who dream them up. They are also windows into massive historical, structural shifts.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER STUDY

1. What are some of the potential effects on boys and men of trying to live up to our culture's ideal of physical size and strength? Emotional effects? Health effects? What is the relationship between cultural ideals of male strength and steroid abuse?
2. Why are guns sometimes referred to as "great equalizers"? How do individual and cultural notions of manhood contribute to boys' and men's gun ownership and usage?
3. What are some areas of life (*aside from muscles*) where size matters? Why?
4. What, or whose, interests are served – or have been served – by the increasing size and heightening violence associated with the male body? What, or whose, interests have not been served?
5. Do you feel that the media simply reflect changes in society, or do they in some way inspire change? If the former, why was the stereotypical size of the "masculine" male so much smaller in the past? If the latter, explain how and why you feel individuals are susceptible to media influence?
6. What do you make of the increasing presence of overtly sexualized male bodies in advertising, posed in provocative, at times submissive, ways? Could this increased visibility of the male body as sexualized object – rather than as a powerful agent – be a response to shifting attitudes in the culture about masculinity?

EXERCISES

1. Have students find and bring in (*or use the images provided here*) a full-bodied magazine picture (*or video*) of a male TV, movie, or sports star from the 1940s, '50s or '60s. At the same time – or for a later class – have them find and bring in an analogous star from the 1980s or '90s. (*For example, you might pick a football star from the early 1960s, as well as a current NFL star.*) In class, have them discuss the differences and similarities of their bodies, and offer some reasons for the difference: Better nutrition? Better weight training equipment and techniques? Social changes? Be prepared to discuss the possibilities.
2. Do the same as above with advertisements featuring females. Have students pay attention here, and above, not only to the size of the bodies featured, but to how they are posed.
3. Have students bring in an example from advertising (*a print ad, a synopsis of a TV commercial, etc.*) in which masculinity, or manhood, is referred to explicitly – whether used literally or ironically. Have them explain what they feel the people who made the ad are trying to do; specifically, how are the advertisers attempting to use masculinity, and gender, to sell their product? What assumptions do the advertisers seem to be making about those who will be influenced by the ad?

UPPING THE ANTE

4. After sharing ideas on one or two of the discussion topics above, ask students to write a paper analyzing masculinity in a TV or print ad, or other media image. Ask them to focus specifically on *a)* the way masculinity is portrayed, especially as related to the body; *b)* what that portrayal signals about what kind of man is pictured; and *c)* what effect(s) this is designed to have on those looking at the image.
5. Have students write an essay about “strength.” Ask them to look the word up in the dictionary, and to come up with as many takes on the word as possible. The key to the assignment is to have them offer as complete a definition of “strength” as possible, using examples from the dictionary, their own experience, literature, films they’ve seen, etc. To provide more specific focus, you might ask them to consider and examine the breadth and nuance of their definition against the common association of strength with physical size and ability.

SUGGESTED READING

- “As GI Joe bulks up, concern for the 98-pound weakling.” (1999, May 30). *New York Times*, section 4, page 2.
- Bordo, S. (1999). *The male body: A new look at men in public and in private*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Hall, S. (1999, August 22). “The troubled life of boys: The bully in the mirror.” *New York Times*, section 6, page 31.
- Kilbourne, J. (1999). *Deadly persuasion: Why women and girls must fight the addictive power of advertising*. New York: Free Press.
- Klein, A. (1993). *Little big men: Bodybuilding subculture and gender construction*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Lehman, P. (1993). *Running scared: Masculinity and the representation of the male body*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
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BACKLASH

SUMMARY

We gain insight into masculinity and its contemporary relationship to violence when we consider history. What comes to be considered “masculine” is always in process, always to some extent connected to time, place and history – individual and local as much as institutional. The current crisis in masculinity might therefore be constructively understood as a response, at least in part, to massive cultural changes.

The women’s movement, the civil rights movement, and gay and lesbian rights movements presented a direct threat to traditional notions of manhood, rendering dominant straight, white masculinity visible and therefore vulnerable. The immense popularity of masculine icons such as **John Wayne, Ronald Reagan** and **Sylvester Stallone** might be seen, then, as an expression of longing for backlash versions of violent, traditional, dominant versions of masculinity that could, in fantasy at least, return America – especially dislocated American males – to less confusing, less threatening times, times untouched by the progressive political and social gains of the ‘60s and ‘70s.

KEY POINTS

- » The changes we’ve seen in images of masculinity are in part a response to a perceived threat to traditional conceptions of the dominant idea of masculinity – that is of white, middle-class heterosexual masculinity.
- » The social movements that arose in the 1960s presented a threat to established power that still reverberates. The Civil Rights Movement, the Women’s Liberation Movement, the gay and lesbian movements, and the anti-war and student movement that opposed U.S. intervention in Vietnam disrupted entrenched power interests and the traditions on which they were based. In particular, these movements threatened the dominant white heterosexual masculinity that had held largely unquestioned social, political, economic and cultural power in the United States.
- » Some men have not reacted well to these changes and there has been a backlash. Again, our media heroes tell a story. **Sam Kinison, Andrew Dice Clay, Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh** and the current crop of so-called men’s television shows all rose to prominence and widespread popularity by tapping into and trading in anger towards strong, independent women. All of these acts found an audience by explicitly trashing either feminism, or any notion of a woman as something more than a tool for men’s pleasure.
- » Similarly, we can see examples all around us of a backlash against the hard-fought gains of gays and lesbians. As with the women’s movement, while many heterosexual people, men and women, have responded very positively to these changes, many have not. The rise in anti-gay violence is one of the clearest indications that a lot of young men are very insecure and anxious about their sexual and gender identities as the culture increasingly opens up.
- » A number of scholars have argued that on top of all the internal social movements that were transforming American life in the 1960s, there was also an external aspect represented by the loss of the Vietnam War. And one way that some people responded to that was to say that we lost in Vietnam because we had lost our masculine pride – had **Sly Stallone** held sway in the ‘60s and ‘70s, and with him all the old-school masculinity he embodied in *Rambo* and *Rocky*, then maybe we’d still be the great (*read: macho*) country we were before Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement came along and emasculated America.
- » The ultimate political manifestation of this backlash against the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s came in the election to the presidency in 1980 of the arch conservative **Ronald Reagan**. After a campaign in which Reagan and his handlers expertly employed masculine iconography against every

BACKLASH

progressive gain of the '60s and '70s, his election marked the culmination of the belief that the reason America had lost its way was that it had become too weak, too soft. His cowboy image and his right-wing beliefs represented a vision of America rooted deep in the past, when blacks were not demanding equality, when women accepted their second-class status, when gays were still in the closet. Basically, a past when men were still men and knew what that meant.

» To really understand what **Ronald Reagan** represented culturally and politically, we have to understand the career of another very prominent and powerful movie actor, **John Wayne**, an incredibly important force in the shaping of post-war American masculinity. After the emasculating performance of **Jimmy Carter**, Reagan – reverberating in the wake of Wayne – was the man for the job.

» It's key to remember, of course, that when we talk about "John Wayne," we're talking about an actor playing the role of *John Wayne*. We're talking about a performance, one that is linked to the sort of facade-keeping and simulation at the heart of every "real man" performance.

» The relationship between **John Wayne** and **Ronald Reagan** shows us two important things. First, that the ideal of manhood that was being offered as an alternative to the changes of the 1960s and '70s came from the past, when racism, sexism and homophobia were the norm. Second, that the image that people like Ronald Reagan were trying to reproduce was already an act that attempted to repress a more real, complex masculinity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER STUDY

1. Numerous writers and theorists have argued that cultural changes catalyzed by the various multicultural women's movements over the past generation have created historically unprecedented opportunities for women. How have some of these changes affected men's lives, both positively and negatively? Is sexual equality a zero sum game, where one sex can gain only at the expense of the other?
2. Seventy-five percent of women who are murdered by their husbands, boyfriends, or exes are killed after they leave or seek to leave the relationship. What is the connection between this phenomenon on the individual level and the sociological insight that groups tend not to concede power without a struggle of some sort?
3. The vast majority of gay-bashing incidents are perpetrated by young men. Discuss the reasons for gay-bashing, focusing on the gender and sexual identities of the perpetrators.
4. Much of the contemporary discussion about gender and politics focuses on women. But men, too, are influenced dramatically by gender ideology. Discuss some of the ways that men's sense of themselves as men affects the way they vote, align themselves politically, or think about social and political issues. How do differences of race and socioeconomic class complicate this?

EXERCISES

1. Have students find and bring in a newspaper article that they feel illustrates a case of backlash, an example of someone acting violently when presented with a perceived threat. Ask them to be prepared to discuss the article in relation to gender, based on the ideas about "backlash" discussed in the film.
2. Have students bring in a newspaper article about politics which they feel in some way relates to masculinity – be it the masculinity of a candidate as he tries to project a certain image; the masculinity of a politician expressing views on a particular issue; or perhaps a political story written in a way that makes certain assumptions based on gender. Discuss the ways that the political realm – issues, politicians, candidates for office, etc. – often intersects with personal issues that regularly play out with regard to gender.

BACKLASH

3. In keeping with this attempt to draw connections between the public and private realms, particularly as these connections play out politically, ask students to name political issues that they feel are more “masculine” concerns; then do the same with issues they feel are more “feminine,” stereotypically or not. Talk about what they come up with, making connections to the “gender gap” that is now so prominent a part of political discussions. Also, discuss the ways in which politicians might play to the fears and anxieties of men; what kinds of politicians are more likely to do this? Is one ideology, or party, more likely to do so? Is one more “masculine” than another?
4. Watch a film in class that deals prominently with a clear instance of personal backlash by a male trying to assert – or reassert – his authority and power, and ask students to write in response to it. Ask them specifically to examine the nature of the threat that provoked the violent response, paying close attention to how gender is presented. Was there a threat to the character’s masculinity? Did the fear of the feminine play a role? Was there any homophobia involved? And how did this incident relate to – or reinforce – the overall theme of the film?
5. Do the same as above with a short story, with special attention to the last point about relating the specific incident, and issues of character, to more general themes in the work.
6. Have students write in response to something going on in current events – something they might find in a newspaper or see on the news – which they feel represents a case of institutional or cultural backlash. For example, a cultural movement involving students who want the biblical creation story taught in their science classes (*which would be a response, of course, to fears that culture has become too secularized.*) For this assignment, ask them to choose something, specifically, which they feel is significant in terms of gender, an issue or incident in which ideas about masculinity are involved.

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THE TOUGH GUISE

SUMMARY

The essence of masculinity is performance. And the essence of the performance has grown increasingly violent. Over the last decade, largely as a result of the popularity of rap and hip-hop music, an urban black street style has made its way into the cultural mainstream, what **Richard Majors** has called “Cool Pose.” Glamorized in places like *MTV*, and consumed out of context by white suburban boys who have come to emulate this distorted glamorization of the hyper-violent black male body and tough-guy style, this phenomenon has joined disparate groups like white middle class boys and poor African-American city kids across racial and class lines in a common embrace of violent masculinity.

KEY POINTS

- » Theorists and researchers in pro-feminist sociology and men’s studies in recent years have developed the concept of masculinities, as opposed to masculinity, to more adequately describe the complexities of male social position, identity, and experience. All males might belong to the same sex-class, but their experiences as men differ substantially according to their racial or socioeconomic background, or their sexual orientation.
- » The idea that men need to adopt a hyper-masculine posture in order to gain credibility and respect is common in many groups of men of color, who for so long and in such great numbers have been stripped of such credibility – stripped of their manhood, essentially – by the dominant white culture.
- » Again, this phenomenon of posing shows us that a defining element of masculinity is the performance of it. But rap and hip-hop music and style are not by any means the only forces that offer this story. The culture in general tells boys that you become real men through power and control, that respect is linked to physical strength and the threat of violence and the ability, frankly, to scare people.
- » We have to ask ourselves: what is the effect on society and its institutions when boys are trained to become men according to such claustrophobic, outmoded standards?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER STUDY

1. What does it mean to be “masculine”? What does it mean to be “feminine”?
2. Where do ideas about masculinity and femininity come from?
3. In what cases, or environments, do you feel a “hyper-masculine” pose – one based on control, power and the threat of violence – might be necessary? Are there such situations?
4. What might be some of the consequences of adopting such a pose? Consequences for the one posturing and those around him?
5. How do media influence – or determine – what such poses consist of? Examples?
6. What are the implications when a style of tough-guy masculinity formed in one environment gets taken up in another?
7. How does the media’s portrayal of African-American men distort the actual experience of African-American males?
8. What sort of power can the limited, sometimes racist, portrayal of men of color exercise over white boys? And why do you feel white boys from the suburbs seem to be so taken in by these images?
9. How much of what it means to be male – to seem male – do you feel is learned? How much do you feel is natural? And where are the primary places boys learn how to be in the world?

THE TOUGH GUISE

EXERCISES

1. Draw a line down the middle of the board. On one side, write down qualities that students feel are “masculine.” On the other, write down qualities that they consider “feminine.” Talk about why it might be that we make these associations, and about what some of the consequences might be.
2. Returning to the lists made above, talk about the values we as a culture assign to these characteristics. For example, do the characteristics listed as “masculine” tend to be associated with strength or power, the “feminine” characteristics with weakness? Discuss the meaning of these associations, what they reveal about our cultural values, and ask students to think critically about the reality of such associations. Are there values – say, strength – that after further analysis seem not to represent strength at all?
3. Again using these lists, think about these terms with regard to stereotypes and perceptions about race. Look at both sides of the board and talk about these characteristics in relation to media (*film, television news*) stereotypes of the urban black or Latino male – and consider perceptions of white, middle class suburban males in comparison.
4. Ask students to write an essay based on the exercises above, and the discussions they inspire.
5. Ask students to write an essay exploring their own perceptions of race. Have their perceptions changed over time? How and why?
6. Have students write an essay examining how much of what they understand about race has been learned through direct experience, and how much has been learned second-hand – through media, or others. Have there been differences between these two kinds of learning? If so, how are they significant?
7. Ask students to find a newspaper or magazine article which they believe reinforces stereotypes of African-American males. Have them write about the nature of the stereotype, with specific focus on the sort of masculinity it portrays.

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THE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

SUMMARY

Taking a hard look at masculinity is absolutely crucial to understanding the again overwhelmingly male phenomenon of school shootings – which among other things have identified bullying as a serious and largely overlooked problem in our middle schools and high schools. While it's dangerous and misguided to explain away what happened at Columbine as the logical outcome of anything, it would be equally irresponsible to ignore the distinctly male character of this, and the other, incidents.

Another important feature of these school shootings, especially the way they've been covered and talked about, is the running subtext that what's most shocking is that these incidents have involved so-called "normal kids," the unspoken racist implication being that this is what (black) kids in cities do. If we're to answer the "why" question, it is imperative that we take our focus off of the pathological male as the perpetrator of violence and put it on the "normal," average-looking guys. We also need to confront the fact that most violence is perpetrated by boys and men and figure out how, given this unavoidable fact, we might change our definitions of manhood to begin dealing seriously with the heart of the problem.

KEY POINTS

- » According to press reports, the Columbine perpetrators were outsiders who didn't fit in, and who saw themselves as being victimized and bullied by an abusive jock culture that celebrated toughness and muscularity. In guns these kids found the great equalizer, an immediate ability to actualize their revenge fantasy in a violent, physical way, and finally gain a grotesque form of respect.
- » Most of the media coverage has missed the fact that the school shootings are not about "violence," generally speaking, but about violent masculinity. As usual, the focus has been on "youth violence," or "kids killing kids," or as a CBS special on Columbine put it, "*Young Guns*." But this isn't kids killing kids. Overwhelmingly, again, it's boys killing boys and boys killing girls. And we need to name it as such.
- » Attributing violence to psychotic and pathological male figures – represented in media by such figures as **Freddy Kruger**, **Jason**, and **Hannibal Lecter** – allows us to avoid confronting the fact that the vast majority of violence is perpetrated by average, normal-looking boys and men. Attributing violence to supernatural "evil" also allows us to deflect attention away from the social, economic, and political institutions that for many years have been producing violent males at pandemic rates.
- » Lethal violence involving young people has long been a fact of life in communities of color. But the media tends to report it matter-of-factly. But when white kids (boys) kill in tree-lined suburbs, the issue becomes front-page news and prompts a national debate about "youth violence."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER STUDY

1. Why are the vast majority of school shootings perpetrated by boys?
2. Why do you think there have been few, if any, such incidents involving girls who took up arms against their classmates?
3. If a girl, or group of girls, were the perpetrators in a school shooting, do you feel media coverage would emphasize the fact that they were girls?
4. Why do the media tend not to focus on the gender issue when boys, or men, are the perpetrators?
5. What were the stated motives of the shooters in the majority of U.S. school shootings in 1998-1999? What are some of the similarities? Differences?

THE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

6. The teenaged perpetrator of the Pearl, Mississippi shooting, **Luke Woodham**, stated that *"I killed because people like me are mistreated every day. Murder is not weak and slow-witted. Murder is gutsy and daring."* Discuss this statement and what it might reveal about his state of mind. Also, what does it mean that the majority of school shooting perpetrators claimed to have been bullied in school?
7. What sort of pressures do boys, in particular, face during their middle and high school experience? How do these differ from the pressures girls face? How are they similar? Can these pressures lead to violence? Why does it seem to happen in some cases, and not in others?
8. If you were in charge, what would you do to reduce male violence in schools?
9. What are some other social issues involving youth that were largely ignored when confined to communities of color, but which became major national issues when young white people were involved?

EXERCISES

1. Have students research coverage of a school shooting (*using old newspapers, the internet, anything that provides a good example of mainstream media coverage*). Ask them to read the coverage with an eye toward gender, specifically whether or not the language used in the story calls attention to the fact that the perpetrators were boys. If so, how is the issue explored and dealt with? If not, what sort of language – what words – are used to de-gender the reportage, and what effect does this have on the meaning of the story. Have them report their findings to the rest of the class.
2. Have students work in groups to come up with a plan to reduce school violence, to prevent school shootings in particular. Beforehand, make a list of the typical anti-violence measures most schools are now taking: increased security, police in the hallways, etc. Then ask them to come up with a new approach informed, specifically, by their engagement with issues of masculinity.
3. Bring in copies – or sample articles, ads and pictures – from a typical gun magazine. Have students work in groups to discuss and analyze a particular sample, with attention to gender. Given that the primary consumers of such magazines are men and boys, ask them to focus specifically on what their sample might teach males, boys especially, about what it means to be a man.
4. After completing **No. 1** above, ask students to re-write their group's article about school shootings by focusing on gender. This will mean gendering any language that's universalized, and extending any analysis provided in the article based on this new, explicit focus on masculinity.
5. Have students write up a proposal for preventing male violence in schools.
6. Ask students to write a personal essay – based on their own experience, or the experience of others they know or have known – about how gender plays into the pressures that a middle or high school student faces. Ask them to consider the consequences of these pressures, and also how these pressures might be reduced.
7. Ask students to write a short story about a school shooting, one that captures the state of mind of the perpetrator. Consider this a draft. When they're finished, ask them to revise the story by building in a character – a friend, a counselor, a teacher, a principal – who intervenes before the violence is enacted. What made the difference?

THE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

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CONSTRUCTING VIOLENT MASCULINITY

SUMMARY

Perhaps the most obvious question to ask – yet one that’s rarely posed – is: “*Why is approximately 90% of violence committed by boys and men*”? One of the keys to arriving at some kind of answer is to reject oversimplifying explanations that posit one-to-one, cause-and-effect relationships between things like video games or movies and specific, imitative violent acts. The fact is that the root of the problem lies not just in these few places, but everywhere, deeply embedded in what passes for normal culture – part of the normal training, conditioning and socializing of boys and men.

A broader view of media violence suggests that significantly reducing violence involves much more than simply stopping young boys from playing violent video games, or watching violent movies. The reality is that messages that link being a man with being violent, controlling and intimidating are everywhere in the culture – from gun magazines, sports and wrestling, to romantic comedies and talk radio – as well as in the more obvious places like video games and television. If we want to deal seriously with reducing violence, we have to turn away from thinking about violence as “kids imitating violence,” and focus instead on the incredible diversity of ways that we as a society are actively constructing violent masculinity as a cultural norm; not as something unusual or unexpected, but as one of the ways that boys become men.

KEY POINTS

What’s needed is a critical understanding of how masculinity is represented, valued and modeled across the cultural spectrum. This means taking seriously and looking critically at:

- » the incredibly pervasive and influential sports culture – particularly violent sports like football and pro wrestling;
- » commercial images that glamorize steroid-induced physical size and strength;
- » how guns are intimately associated – in media, and in the very history and mythology of America – with manhood, masculine credibility, and compensatory power;
- » the increasingly interactive nature of violent video games, which every day offer boys newer and more sophisticated ways to simulate and experience violence in ever more personal and realistic ways.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER READING

1. Do media images “cause” violence? When is the cause direct, as in imitative acts of violence? How might the influence of media be felt in more subtle ways?
2. If males’ propensity for violence is biologically preordained, what accounts for the wide discrepancies in rates of violence between different societies? Between different regions in the same societies? Between different historical periods in the same societies?
3. If the glamorization of violence by media and other parts of our culture sometimes inspires actual violence, why is it that girls and women who are surrounded by the same media environment are so much less likely than boys and men to commit violence?
4. Given that media glamorize violence (*something those in the industry admit as a problem themselves*), and assuming that this glamorization can lead males, in particular, to commit violent acts, why is it that so many more males exposed to the same imagery do not commit acts of violence? Does this suggest there’s something more than biology going on here?

CONSTRUCTING VIOLENT MASCULINITY

EXERCISES

1. Have students work in groups to compile a list of every violent act they have seen depicted in media over the past week. (*Movies, video games, television, news, sports, etc.*) Discuss the lists as a class, and draw out any patterns that are revealed regarding gender.
2. Have students work in groups to compile a list of ways that kids are exposed to violence – both overt and subtle forms of violence – outside of media. Discuss the lists as a class. If **No. 1** above precedes this assignment, explore the connections between the two lists.
3. In groups, ask students to come up with a list of conventions typically followed by genre films known for their violence (*i.e. horror or slasher films*). When they're done, talk about these conventions in the context of gender. Would they work if the gender roles as they have listed them were reversed? Do Hollywood films typically reverse gender roles and play against type? If not, why not?
4. Have students work in groups to formulate a plan to reduce the influence of media violence on kids. The catch: censoring – or changing – the media is not an option.
5. Ask students to write up a proposal to reduce the influence of violent media, on boys in particular, not allowing the option of censoring existing imagery, or changing the media.
6. Ask students to write an essay exploring the ways that certain media known for their violence (*Hollywood film, the video game industry, etc.*) might be led to take responsibility for their potentially destructive influence and change how they do business.
7. Ask students to write an essay comparing and contrasting a depiction of violence by network news (*e.g. coverage of a war by CNN*) and depictions of violence in Hollywood film (*e.g. a film such as Rambo that depicts violence in war*). Think in terms of visual and linguistic issues. How are the two depictions similar? How are they different? What accounts for that difference?

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SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

SUMMARY

The mainstream media culture plays a critical role in constructing violent masculinity as a cultural norm by offering up a steady stream of images of violent men (*and boys*). In addition to man-on-man murder and assault, media also contribute to our society's pandemic of rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, battering, and teen dating violence by presenting men's violence against women and girls in a sexualized fashion. Sexualizing men's violence against women has the effect of blinding many people to the seriousness of the violence. The focus is on the supposed "sexiness" of the portrayal, not on the pain and trauma associated with sexual violence. Social scientists have developed a body of research over the past couple of decades which demonstrates that repeated exposure to sexualized violence in pornography and in Hollywood film and music video can have the effect of desensitizing viewers – especially males – to the humanity of female victims and potential victims. This desensitization begins early in life, and today, due to the proliferation of pornographic images on the Internet, cable television, and increasingly in "mainstream" TV and film culture, millions of young boys and men are being exposed to an unprecedented level of sexualized brutality against women.

It is important to emphasize that the widespread incidence of men's violence against women – both sexualized and other forms of non-sexual abuse – in our society is linked to cultural constructs of violent masculinity and sexism and is not simply due to the accumulation of a high number of individual men acting out violently. Violent behavior is overwhelmingly learned behavior, and in the late 20th and early 21st century, the media is the most powerful teacher and transmitter of cultural values.

KEY POINTS

- » Men's and boys' violence against women and girls is not genetically programmed, but rather is learned behavior. In the contemporary era, media is a key site for that learning.
- » The sexualization of violence against women – making it "sexy" – helps blind us to the real pain and suffering violence causes.
- » An example of the power of media to obscure the seriousness of gender violence can be seen in the humorous film *There's Something About Mary*, where a major portion of the film – and the humor – is devoted to the efforts of four different men to track, stalk, and spy on a sexualized female object of their desire. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 1 in 12 women will be stalked in their lifetime.
- » Men who batter women are typically seeking to exert or maintain power and control in the relationship. The need for power and control in a relationship is a learned need. Men learn it in their families of origin, but also in the media culture, where images of masculinity defined as always in control and on top are ubiquitous.
- » Teen dating violence is an increasingly common problem, and college professionals in recent years have been dealing with an increased incidence of abuse in intimate relationships.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER READING

1. What is the relationship between a man's gender ideology (*his definition of what it means to be a man*) and his likelihood of using violence? Do images of men as powerful because they're in control – of women as well as other men – contribute to men's violence against women? Discuss examples from media where boys/men are shown as being in control of or abusive toward girls/women.
2. Many feminists have argued that sexualizing violence makes the violence seem less threatening, and hence more acceptable. Cite and discuss an example from a Hollywood film (*e.g. There's Something About Mary, or Psycho*) where a sexualized depiction of men's violence against women helps to obscure the violent aspect.

SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

3. Much of the political controversy surrounding pornography focuses on the degrading depiction of women as two-dimensional sexual objects for men's pleasure. Yet men finance, produce, and consume the vast majority of pornography. What does pornography teach us about men?

EXERCISES

1. Find a scene from a Hollywood movie where a man is sexually violated. Compare that scene to a scene where a woman is sexually violated (*include a discussion of camera angles, music, the presence or absence of humor, etc.*). Discuss some of the similarities, and differences.
2. Produce a list of phrases that boys and men hear from other males that teach them the need to exercise power and control over a woman (e.g. "who's wearing the pants in this relationship"?, "Are you gonna let her walk all over you"?, etc.).

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INVULNERABILITY

SUMMARY

There is more to what our culture holds up as “masculine” than just violence. Boys are also being taught, by the popular culture, that a real man is not only strong physically, but emotionally as well, in the highly restrictive sense that real men don’t need other people, that they can make it on their own. This ideal has been represented in popular culture by characters like **John Wayne**, in the modern era by the likes of **Sylvester Stallone’s Rambo**, and with particular historical force by the **Marlboro Man**.

The rugged individualist rapture induced by the image of the Marlboro Man has long been intimately tied up with traditional notions of American manhood – with the dangerous idea that masculinity is synonymous with invulnerability and indifference to others. This destructive masculine ethos has inspired and normalized cruel institutional and political behavior, while also getting a lot of young men killed. In reality, the most hard-line version of the rugged individualist ideal plays out in the lives of men in far less glamorous ways. It’s seen in the staggering numbers of boys and men who turn to drugs and alcohol in misguided attempts to recover feeling. And in the reckless behavior that lies at the heart of such overwhelmingly male phenomena as reckless, fast driving, binge drinking, and the kind of sexual assault, date rape and violence against women that so often explodes out of the volatile mix of males and alcohol.

KEY POINTS

- » The ubiquitous image of the Marlboro Man, and the style and ideology it embodies, have wielded immense power in shaping definitions of the “real man” as a quiet, stoic, rugged individual, who doesn’t do much talking or relating to other people.
- » As with the hugely popular Hollywood western genre (*more than 4,000 films in the sound era*), this rugged individualist ideal has enormous emotional and psychological costs if taken seriously as a model or standard.
- » One of the most serious costs of this tough guy, hard guy posing is that a lot of men and boys feel unable to seek help, look inward, or share themselves emotionally with others.
- » The unhealthy and risk-taking behaviors of young males, the damage they are doing to themselves, others, and society, requires that we take seriously those cultural environments that cultivate and glamorize such behavior. Instead of connecting masculinity with invulnerability, we have to show that vulnerability, compassion and caring are also part of what it means to be a real man.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER READING

1. The rugged individualist ideal – as represented by the Marlboro Man – plays a powerful ideological and political role in our society. How does the ubiquitous message that a “real man” makes it on his own influence contemporary political debates about such issues as homelessness, welfare, labor unions, crime, etc.?
2. Why is there such a disparity between men and women in terms of alcohol abuse rates? Drinking and driving accidents? What are some of the ways that men’s use or abuse of alcohol or other substances are linked to their gendered experience as men?
3. What are some of the emotional and psychological reasons why boys and men are so much more likely than girls and women to act out violently?
4. What are some of the emotional and psychological reasons why boys and men are so much less likely to seek help with emotional problems? What are the consequences of this reluctance?
5. What is the connection between the traditional ideal of the “real man” and invulnerability?

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EXERCISES

1. Ask students to bring in images of the Marlboro Man. Have them analyze the images in groups, and ask them to come up with a list of visual characteristics common to these images.
2. Have students work in groups to compile a list of values – or attitudes – that they feel are underscored by the visual features of the typical Marlboro Man.
3. Have students work in groups to explore connections between the visual characteristics, value associations (*both as described above*) and the image of America in the world. Why does this seem to be such a distinctly American image? And what does this say about how masculinity informs American mythology and the image of America around the world?
4. Ask students to bring in an image from a magazine that depicts male invulnerability. Have them share these images in groups and come up with a list of ways in which this image of invulnerability is conveyed visually and/or by text.
5. Ask students to bring in an advertisement for beer in which men are pictured. Have them work in groups and ask them to look critically at how masculinity is portrayed. Are there similarities between the images? Are there differences? Do women play a role in the image? Can they make connections between the style of masculinity portrayed and the kind of beer being advertised?
6. Based on the lists compiled after completing **No.1-3** above, ask students to write an essay reacting to this quote, a paraphrased observation by **Alexis DeToqueville** when he visited this country in the 19th century: *“America has at its heart a defining contradiction – between its embrace of individuality on the one hand, and equality and community on the other. How this nation deals with this conflict will account either for America’s greatness or its undoing.”* Specifically, ask students to think about this quote in the context of the discussions about masculinity and gender inspired by **No.1-3** above.
7. Ask students to write an essay that looks critically at a beer advertisement in which males are depicted - with close attention to how masculinity is conveyed visually.
8. Ask students to write an essay looking critically at an image that depicts male invulnerability. How is invulnerability conveyed visually?
9. Ask students to write about an experience in which a feeling of invulnerability caused problems.

SUGGESTED READING

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Real, T. (1997). *I don’t want to talk about it: Overcoming the secret legacy of male depression*. New York: Scribner.

Tomkins, J. (1992). *West of everything: The inner life of westerns*. Jane Tompkins. New York: Oxford University Press.

VULNERABILITY

SUMMARY

More diversified images of masculinity require more honest portrayals of male vulnerability, a glamorization of authentic male experience and feeling that breaks the association with weakness of male sensitivity and compassion for others. Such models already exist, and need to be held up as models, as inspiring and courageous examples of real “real men.”

KEY POINTS

- » Men like **Mark McGwire**, **Sammy Sosa** and **Christopher Reeve** have modeled styles of manhood based on compassion, sensitivity, openness and respect for others.
- » Films like *The Full Monty*, *Boyz n’ the Hood*, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Good Will Hunting* have achieved remarkable popularity – with men and women – by presenting more authentic versions of the male experience, achieving emotional, thematic and aesthetic power by offering a sustained gaze behind the curtain of traditional masculinity to reveal the often tragic consequences of holding too fast to destructive masculine myths.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER READING

1. What would it mean to have more diversified images of masculinity? What sorts of images work against the stereotypical image of the “real man”? What would their characteristics be?
2. What are some examples of alternative masculinity prominent now in American pop culture? How are these images different from those of traditional masculinity?
3. Can you think of examples from media – or other sources, such as your own experience – in which alternatives to traditional masculinity come into conflict with traditional masculinity? (*Homophobia, gay-bashing and bullying are all key issues here.*)
4. What are some examples, other than those in the film, of boys or men who show vulnerability, or who are not stereotypically “masculine,” and are respected for it?
5. Do you feel the culture is opening up, that it has started to embrace more willingly males that go against the traditional masculine type? If so, why do you think this is happening? If not, why not?
6. Are younger generations of Americans different today from older generations in their view of masculinity and femininity? If so, how and why has this happened? What’s different now? If not, how and why have things essentially stayed the same?

EXERCISES

1. Ask students to bring in advertisements that depict “alternative” masculinities. Have them work in groups and look critically at these portrayals. What’s “alternative” about it? What conventions of stereotypical or traditional masculinity does the image work against? Is the alternative portrayal of the male, or males, explicitly set against an image of tradition, or traditional masculinity? And what’s being sold by the ad? How might this particular depiction of masculinity work to sell this particular product?
2. Ask students to bring in a song – a CD – which they feel presents an alternative view of masculinity. Have them make copies of the lyrics and prepare to discuss the meaning of what’s being said in the song in the context of the gender issues raised by this section, particularly the idea of vulnerability.
3. Ask students to work in groups and compile a list of things they feel men and boys can get away with doing now (*without repercussions from some of their peers*) that probably would not have been as acceptable among

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males in past generations. (e.g. *wearing earrings*.) When they present their list to the rest of class, have them theorize what might account for these changes.

4. Ask students to write an essay examining an advertisement they feel uses a non-traditional style of masculinity to sell its product. Have them focus on the questions posed in **No. 1** above.
5. Ask students to write an interpretation of the lyrics of a song (*as described in No. 2 above*) that challenges traditional ideas about masculinity.
6. Ask students to write a short story from the perspective of a boy or young man their age in the 1950s.
7. Ask students to write a short story from the perspective of a boy their age in the 1950s who is transported through time to the year 2000. This can also be worked in reverse. (*Both this topic and No. 3 above will produce especially interesting takes on masculinity by the female students posing as males. Their responses might provide an especially good, likely humorous, opportunity to explore differing perceptions of masculinity, and differences between the ways young males and females are socialized and come to relate to one another.*)
8. Watch one of the films discussed in this section of *Tough Guise* as a class, and have students write an essay examining how masculinity is treated, with specific attention to how this treatment delivers or reinforces the overall themes of the film.

SUGGESTED READING

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Lehman, P. (1993). *Running scared: Masculinity and the representation of the male body*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

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BETTER MEN

SUMMARY

The heartening news is that over the past few decades our culture has opened up in innumerable ways and become more diverse in terms of gender, sexuality, and race. But all around us we see persistent signals that we need to remain vigilant, that basic justice for too many people remains an elusive reality. Any time the culture opens up there is always the risk that it will prompt a closing and a retrenchment of certain threatened interests.

In the final analysis, what's required is a full-scale transformation in how we imagine, define and model masculinity – a personal and institutional re-visioning of manhood that specifically and forcefully affirms courage as something far more noble than simply possessing physical prowess and power. This means nothing less than holding to a vision of masculinity that is entirely at odds with senseless violence, bullying and posturing, and entirely in keeping with grace, compassion and the guts to stay loyal to what's right.

KEY POINTS

- » The entrenched interests most threatened by seismic shifts in contemporary culture are both political and personal. The radical right-wing militia movement makes clear the continued political desire of some men for a reactionary return to times friendlier to self-styled “real men,” especially when such movements are seen through the lens of gender for what they are: nothing less than an extreme wing of the men's rights movement. On a more personal level, persistently high rates of men's violence against women and gay-bashing – even as other crimes decrease dramatically – indicate that there are a lot of men unwilling to break with traditional male authority over women, and are more than willing to use violence to uphold it.
- » Leaders like **Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr.,** and **Nelson Mandela** represent a different kind of man. All three of these men represented peoples who suffered incredible violence and bloodshed at the hands of brutal oppressors; but instead of responding with violence, they responded, at crucial moments, with peace and reconciliation. And it took a lot more guts to do that than the far easier path of violence.
- » Boys and men need to know that courage does not simply mean being one of the guys, when being one of the guys means going along with harassing girls or bullying other boys. It means having the guts to support girls and women, and work with them in their striving for justice and equal treatment. It means speaking out against teen dating violence, sexual harassment, and the myriad ways that some boys and men abuse and mistreat girls and women.
- » For heterosexual people, male and female, it means having the courage to join gay-straight alliances and in other ways support the aspirations of gay, lesbian and transgendered people to be treated with dignity and respect – and to live free from the threat of violence.
- » None of this will be achieved with just individual boys and men being more reflective about their choices. It's going to have to happen both on a personal and an institutional level. One of the most important things we have to work for is a change in the institutions that create, recycle and feed off of a residually destructive and narrow range of gender stereotypes.
- » The effort required is collective. While girls and women are not in any way responsible for men's violence, they do have an important role to play as well, because the “tough guise” is attractive to men in part because they see many girls and women validating it. Girls and women have to show that they're looking for more in men than bad boy posturing, and in particular that they value men who reject the “tough guise.”

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» It's clear that a lot of boys and men today are searching for new, healthier, self-respecting ways of being men in a rapidly changing world. We need to hear their stories, too, and learn from them. In different ways all of us need to struggle for real cultural and structural changes in America if we want our sons, and their sons, to have a chance of being better men.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & FURTHER READING

1. How can some types of violence be seen as a response to contemporary culture's increasingly open views of gender, race and sexuality? What kinds of violence, specifically, seem to represent such a response?
2. What is the difference between individual boys and men thinking critically about their attitudes and behaviors, and institutional change that allows more diversity and flexibility in men's lives, relationships, and work and family responsibilities? Cite examples of each.
3. In what ways do some girls and women contribute to boys' and men's adoption of the "tough guise"? Why do some girls/women find "bad boy" posturing attractive?
4. What role can girls and women play in preventing the glorification of violent masculinity, especially to make a difference when it comes to male violence against women?
5. How can changing our ideas about masculinity help preserve hard-won victories over time for social justice – victories won by women, people of color, gays and lesbians in particular?
6. What is courage? What is the difference between physical courage and moral courage? Cite examples of each.
7. How would this film define a "better man"?

EXERCISES

1. Have students reflect in groups on a speech by **Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela**, or another leader who practiced non-violent civil disobedience. Use a different speech for each group. Ask them to present to the rest of the class a summary of the speech, with attention to both its content and the nature of the rhetoric employed. Is there strength conveyed? If so, how?
2. Ask students to bring in a news article that they feel describes an act of male violence in response to change. Have them share their articles with one another in groups, uncover patterns between the stories, and present their findings to the class.
3. Ask students in groups to come up with a definition of courage based on the ideas in the film and their own experience.
4. Ask students in groups to compile a list of characteristics they feel are stereotypically "feminine." Then ask them to talk about, and later present, ways in which a boy or a man could exhibit these characteristics without sacrificing some of the ideals of traditional masculinity.
5. *Tough Guise* mentions three great male leaders of the 20th century who achieved success by embracing – at key moments – a peaceful and non-violent philosophy, instead of the path of violence: Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela. Identify a male leader from the U.S. in the contemporary era who has distinguished himself in this way. Name a male leader – on the local or national level – who has distinguished himself in the fight for gender equality.
6. Have students write an essay exploring the style of manhood modeled by Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. or Nelson Mandela, using quotes from a speech to illustrate and advance their points of view. The question might be: *What sort of man is this?*

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7. Have students write an essay talking about the ways in which men and feminism might be compatible. Ways in which the real interests of men and women are more similar than different.
8. Have students write an essay in response to a piece of literature, or a film, in which a male character demonstrates an ability to be introspective, a character who in some way achieves individuality and freedom by rebelling against the expectation that he follow a more traditional “masculine” path.
9. Have students write about any connections they see between anti-intellectualism and traditional masculinity, drawing on their own experience – as males or females – to examine how gender might play a role in encouraging or discouraging their understanding of the world.

SUGGESTED READING

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Gerson, K. (1993). *No man's land: Men's changing commitments to work and family*. New York: Basic Books.

Gibson, J.W. (1994). *Warrior dreams: Violence and manhood in post-Vietnam America*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Kimmel, M. (1996). *Manhood in America: A cultural history*. New York: Free Press.

Kimmel, M. (1992). *Against the tide: Pro-feminist men in the United States, 1776-1990*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Rotundo, E.A. (1993). *American manhood: Transformations in masculinity from the Revolution to the modern era*. New York: Basic Books.

STATISTICAL SOURCES

1. Males are most often both the victims and the perpetrators in 90% of homicides.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Homicide Trends in the U.S.: Gender*.
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/gender.htm>

2. Over 85% of the people who commit murder are men, and the majority of women who commit murder usually do so as a defense against men who have been battering them for years. Ninety percent of the women in jail for murder are incarcerated for killing male batterers.

Source: Bass, A. (Feb 24, 1992). "Women far less likely to kill than men; no one sure why." *The Boston Globe*: p. 27.

3. Women commit approximately 15% of all homicides.

Source: Stark, E. (1990). *Rethinking homicide: Violence, race, and the politics of gender*. *International Journal of Health and Services*. 20 (1): 18.

4. More than 90 women were murdered every week in 1991; 9 out of 10 were murdered by men.

Source: *Violence Against Women: A Majority Staff Report*. Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 102nd Congress. October 1992, p. 2.

5. Ninety percent of people who commit violent physical assault are men. Males perpetrate 95% of all serious domestic violence.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics Online*.
<http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/>

6. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 95% of reported assaults on spouses or ex-spouses are committed by men against women.

Source: Douglas, H. (1991). *Assessing violent couples*. *Families in Society*, 72 (9): 525-535.

7. It is estimated that 1 in 4 men will use violence against his partner in his lifetime.

Source: Paymar, M. (2000). *Violent no more: Helping men end domestic abuse*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House Publications.

8. Close to all – 99.8% – of the people in prison convicted of rape are men.

Source: National Crime Statistics.

9. Some 81% of men who beat their wives watched their fathers beat their mothers or were abused themselves.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

10. Studies have found that men are responsible for 80% to 95% of child sexual abuse cases whether the child is male or female.

Source: Thoringer, D.; Krivackska, J.; Laye-McDonough, M.; Jarrison, L.; Vincent, O.; & Hedlund, A. (1988). *Prevention of child sexual abuse: An analysis of issues, educational programs and research findings*. *School Psychology Review*. 17(4): 614-636.

11. The majority of victims of men's violence are other men (76% M, 24% F).

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

12. Out of 10,000 cases of road rage, over 95% of them were committed by men.

Source: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, "Aggressive Driving."
<http://www.aaafoundation.org/Text/agdr3study.pdf>

STATISTICAL SOURCES

13. Approximately three-quarters (76%) of binge drinkers are young males.

Source: 1997 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse.

<http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/NHSDA/1997Main/Table of Contents.htm>

14. Males cause 86% of all drinking and driving incidents.

Source: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/alcupdate/alcprobupd.html>

15. One in 12, or 8.2 million women, will be stalked at some point in their lifetime. Eighty percent of the women stalked by intimates had also been physically assaulted by them.

Source: Justice Department, November 1997

16. Every day, 15 children are killed by guns.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1993.

17. The ratio of drug abuse of males to females is 2 to 1.

Source: <http://www.health.org/dawn>

ARTICLES ON MASCULINITY & VIOLENCE

WRITTEN BY JACKSON KATZ & SUT JHALLY

[Note: All of these articles are available on the web at www.jacksonkatz.com.]

"The National Conversation in the Wake of Littleton is Missing the Mark." The Boston Sunday Globe: May 2, 1999, p. E1.

"Manhood on the Mat." The Boston Sunday Globe: Feb. 13, 2000, p E1.

"Put the Blame Where It Belongs: On Men." The Los Angeles Times: June 25, 2000, p. M5.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JACKSON KATZ

Jackson Katz (www.jacksonkatz.com) is one of America's leading anti-sexist male activists and educators. He is widely recognized for his groundbreaking work in the field of gender violence prevention education with men and boys, particularly in the sports culture and the military. He has lectured on hundreds of college and high school campuses and has conducted hundreds of professional trainings, seminars, and workshops in the U.S., Canada, and Japan.

Katz, a former all-star football player, is the founder and director of **MVP Strategies**, an organization that provides gender violence prevention training and materials to U.S. colleges, high schools, law enforcement and military services, agencies, community organizations, and small and large corporations. In 1993 he co-created the **Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Program** at Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society, the first large-scale attempt to enlist high school, collegiate, and professional athletes in the fight against all forms of men's violence against women. Since 1996 he has been directing the first worldwide gender violence prevention program in the history of the United States Marine Corps.

Katz, who holds a Master's degree in education from Harvard, is also widely quoted in the national print media, and has appeared on numerous national and local radio programs in the U.S. and Canada, as well as television programs such as *Oprah*, *Good Morning America*, *Phil Donahue*, *Montel Williams*, *ABC News, 20/20*, and the *CBS Evening News*.

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