

# ***Toxic Masculinity: Analyzing Man Standards and Sexual Inequality through Euphoria***

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**Abstract:** Toxic masculinity has been a hot topic since people's self-awareness rose, still, in large of film and television works, a lot of conversation and characterization indicated toxic masculinity implicitly. A hit American TV series, Euphoria, shows toxic masculinity and its potential impact on people around, which reveals a new perspective about the causes of toxic masculinity and how harmful it is. By coding the violent scenario and analyzing the conversations in the episodes, data shows that the main characters with toxic masculinity suffered from peer pressure, American culture and social certain expectation, and the major victims in related violent clips are the female and the queer group. The results turn out that peer pressure, American culture and people's expectation of males can be vital factors in toxic masculinity formation, and the poisonous personality will directly influence female and queer groups around them.

**Keywords:** Euphoria, Toxic masculinity, man standards, queer oppression

## **1. Introduction**

My theme is to research the negative effects of peer pressure and social standards on toxic masculinity while toxic masculinity can harm the authority of female and queer group through analyzing the TV series Euphoria. This TV series tells the story of several high school students in a high school in the United States.

In the research of American culture, there's little research contributed to the toxic masculinity which reinforces the concept of gender stereotypes, and toxic masculinity enable people to suppress their emotions, increase violence, belittle women and do harm to other groups. In the past few decades, we used machismo to describe the masculinity that men passively and actively pursue to some extent. In recent years, toxic masculinity has suddenly become one of the hot words in gender discussion. Meanwhile, there have been many influential people who have stood up to protest against the concept of masculinity. For example, Harry styles, a former member of One direction, wore high heels, skirts and even painted nail polish at large-scale awards ceremony and other behaviors classified as "femininity" by traditional standards. This made me notice that the public's perception of the edge of gender traits is changing. At the same time, Euphoria showed me a more typical and even extreme example of toxic masculinity. So, I wondered what is toxic masculinity, and here is the result. According to the sources, American culture defines the specific characteristics of ideal male structure suitable for patriarchy, and defines "ideal" masculinity as heterosexuality, tenacity and lack of

emotional sensitivity [1]. The main purpose of gender role socialization is to maintain patriarchal norms by requiring men to achieve dominance and sexual behavior [2]. This means that under the pressure of male-dominated society, men are given the pressure to possess these male characteristics, and even to meet the expectations of society, parents and friends, they pretend to possess these characteristics and make behaviors that are inconsistent with their own hearts. When action conflicts with internal differences, it often leads to extreme violence or depression among men. By analyzing the characters' family environment and social influences in the play, this paper aims to convey that the concept of gender role is not a biological phenomenon, but an idea of psychological and social construction.

Paper aims to raise the awareness of toxic masculinity and through my research, more researchers will lead to further research and preventive measures for toxic masculinity. In order to achieve this goal, this paper has carried out three steps. First of all, this paper explains and defines "toxic masculinity", that is, the stereotype of male groups and the strict definition of masculinity. After that, it will analyze the factors that affect Nate's masculinity from two directions: individual and society. Finally, the third part of the article will discuss the harm of toxic masculinity to feminism and queer groups, as well as the preventive measures and solutions to toxic masculinity. Studying this question helps call on more people to understand toxic masculinity and turn slogans into actions to solve this social problem from a realistic perspective.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Before it is possible to understand my observations, it is necessary to consider the work that has already been completed in the field of the causes influencing factors of toxic masculinity. Although the research only shows an incomplete picture, when viewed together there is much to learn. There're two factors that impact hegemonic masculinity in adulthood, peer pressure and social standards.

### 2.1. Peer Pressure

In the article "Daddy issues: Friends rather than fathers influence adult men's hegemonic masculinity", Van Doorn and de Gracia based on the observation of 180 participants and combined with three theoretical models and data analysis, it is concluded that toxic masculinity is more likely to be affected by male peers [3]. This research puts forward that the next research direction is the affection between male peers, and the influence of college bribery on male socialization and masculinity. Meanwhile, the article also suggested that peers would reprimand and punish those who violate gender norms (such as exclusion groups) to urge people to stick to gender stereotypes. In this article, the research results show that with the decrease of peer support and the increase of group exclusion, it will have a negative impact on compliance with male norms and increase male hegemony and toxic masculinity. This article points out that peer will promote men's compliance with male norms, which helps me further understand how peer pressure shapes toxic masculinity.

Also, the author of "challenging toxic masculinity in schools and society" points out that in American cultural studies, society pays little attention to the examination of masculinity, "It allows dominance or toxic masculinity, masculinity based on simplified norms and understandings of traditionally masculine characteristics such as violence, physical strength, suppression of emotion and devaluation of women" [4]. In the American campus, masculinity has also been reshaped under the influence of campus culture and peers. On campus, the male mainstream groups are far away from the so-called "feminization weakness", and think that the standards of masculinity are superior and need the support and implementation of all male mainstream groups [5]. The article not only helped me verify that the influence of peers can restore masculinity in American schools, but also pointed out that toxic masculinity degrades femininity. In the adolescent environment, peers and campus

occupy more time for teenagers. This research result plays an important role in the prevention of toxic masculinity, and reaffirms the positive role of campus culture management in improving toxic masculinity.

## 2.2. Social Standard

On the society level, some scholars believe that the label of toxic masculinity is suitable for marginalized men. That is, toxic masculinity provides a framework to regard the essence of marginalized men as aggressive and criminal [6].

In addition, class inequality in American society will also shape toxic masculinity. MacDonald wrote in the article *The "Alt" Right, Toxic Masculinity, And Violence* pointed out that the narrow and restrictive understanding of masculinity is mainly manifested in domination, attack, strength, sexual conquest, and rejection of any characteristics or behaviors related to femininity [7]. The political ideas of white men are mixed with traditional male ideas, namely domination, aggression, power, sexual conquest and rejection of any characteristics or behaviors related to femininity. The American political system exposes the male image of the management class to the public, which limits and potentially affects the public's understanding and recognition of masculinity.

Society tends to look at inequality from the perspective of a relatively weak party, which creates a blind spot in power. Therefore, on the issue of gender inequality, scholars seldom pay attention to the examination of masculinity. These theories explain the shaping of toxic masculinity in society from the perspective of social paradigm and political communication, and provide feasible help for the improvement measures of toxic masculinity.

## 3. Methods

This research uses deductive approach in thematic analysis to analyze the causes of Nate's toxic masculinity in this TV series, including the influence of peer influence and social pressure. Set the theme according to the existing theories in the literature, and verify these theories by coding the texts in TV dramas. At the same time, I also use content analysis to study the influence of violence caused by toxic masculinity on feminists and Queer groups by coding and analyzing the violent scenes of Nate in TV dramas. For example, in Episode 04, when Nate and Jules (the Queer character in the play) met for the first time, Nate chose to threaten and verbally violence Jules at the party because of losing face in front of everyone, and satirized her Queer identity. In this scene, Jules, as the chosen victim, is watched and subjected to violence in front of friends, which also reflects that the Queer group is not taken seriously in Nate's seriousness.

I chose Deductive Approach because I was trying to find out people's opinions or values in a set of stereotyped data, such as the TV series *Euphoria*, and used thematic analysis to answer the relationship between toxic masculinity and parent-child relationship, peer pressure and social standards, and what its harm is. To be more practical, my essay started with my hypothesis, that is, *Euphoria* shows the harm of peer pressure and social standards results in toxic masculinity, which can cause a negative influence to queer group and female. As a result, in the research process, I used deductive method to divided the violence scenarios into body violent and words violent, encoded these scenes' subject, object and detailed occasions description.

After finishing the coding process, I chose to use content analysis to further research the charter lines. On the one hand, my artifact is a TV play. While I analyze the text, I also want to analyze the visual content, such as violent scenes. On the other hand, content analysis allows me to quantify the emergence of themes and concepts in lines and situations, so as to reveal the differences in ways of showing toxic masculinity in different situations. Therefore, I watched every episode thoroughly and

picked some classic character lines as examples and evidence in my research on the causes of toxic masculinity.

#### 4. Analysis

In the research process of gender inequality, researchers often look at inequality from the weak side, which has caused an obvious blind spot in terms of rights. However, in the process of examining masculinity, I found that unrestrained and poisonous masculinity provides a complex mixture of opportunities and constraints, empowerment and government for women and queer groups, and they must control this mixture every day. Toxic masculinity sets standards for male groups based on simplified norms, and at the same time, it also sets the same standards for female groups, emphasizing gender boundaries and opposites. For queer people in the traditional sense, toxic masculinity will also affect their self-cognition which refers to the insight and understanding of oneself.

Therefore, my data analysis will be divided into two themes, how does peer pressure and social standard influence the toxic masculinity, and the negative impact of toxic masculinity on feminists and queer group.

The research was conducted by visual content, an event which was happened in the Euphoria, involved body language and discourse information. By classifying the characters, themes, reasons and approaches in the incident, it is found that the attitude that peers give men the standard and the "standard requirements" that society gives men will reshape masculinity and produce toxic masculinity, and emphasize gender edge and aggravate gender opposition.

##### 4.1. The Causes of Toxic Masculinity

###### 4.1.1. Peer Pressure

Nate, as one of the protagonists in the TV series, is the main object that shows toxic masculinity. In the first episode, in order to show his control and play with women, Nate flaunts his sexual experience in front of his friends, and reveals women's private photos to his guys to prove his "virility". During the incident, Nate paused for about five seconds, but when one of his friends said "You can't be without these photos, do not be a pussy"[8], Nate immediately took out his mobile phone and showed them to everyone to prove his masculinity. However, later in the series, Nate is revealed to be gay, which means he doesn't like these women and is defying his will to conform to what the partners expects of him. The incident reflects the expectations of men in American school culture. The peers' compliance with male standards and demands for other men around them have consolidated the male standards, and the consolidated male standards have bound the personality development of male mainstream groups, increased male hegemony and toxic masculinity, and formed a vicious positive cycle. In the above-mentioned incidents, the reaction of peers to Nate reflects that the way for peers to condemn or punish men is to associate him with feminization. The poisonous masculinity of which means emphasizes the superiority of masculinity and strengthens the conflict between men and women.

###### 4.1.2. Social Standard Factor

The standardized definition of masculinity in social standards can be found in Nate's father Cal, because Cal has more social experience and higher social status than Nate's student status. In the play, Cal owns 80% of the real estate in the town, and is admired and respected by everyone for his frequent donations and good man image. However, in the description of sexual scenes with a transgender, Cal completely ignored the transgender's wishes after learning the transgender's student status, but treated her in a unilateral and rude way. Cal's sensitivity to class reminds me of another scene in the play.

When Cal was called to school, a female teacher was the first to receive him. After learning that she was Nate the senior leader of the school, Cal's warm expression was immediately removed and replaced by indifference. The comparison between the two events shows that social class inequality will also shape toxic masculinity. Some male political ideas are mixed with traditional male ideas, including domination, power and sexual conquest. However, the open political system of the United States shows the male image of management to the public, which limits and influences the public's understanding and understanding of masculinity to a certain extent.

On the other hand, social standards allow dominant or harmful masculinity, such as violence, physical, emotional repression, and the degradation of women, to flourish unchecked. Thus, this culture continues to give men full power and status, and this power tendency in turn encourages more men to pursue "standard masculinity." Nate gains acceptance and respect from his peers by following social expectations for men, including leadership on campus and team captain. Such power forces him to show his toxic masculinity. At the same time, as the opinion leader of men on campus, his toxic masculinity will be used as a benchmark to demand other men in the campus community, thus forming a vicious positive cycle.

At the same time, I mentioned that toxic manifestations of masculinity include the debasement of femininity, sexual subjugation and gender antagonism, all of which are associated with gender identity. Women and queer people are groups that contain more femininity, which means they are more affected by toxic masculinity. In this drama, there are also examples of women and transgender people suffering toxic masculinity violence. Therefore, in the following analysis, I will analyze the negative impact of toxic masculinity on the rights of women and queer community.

## **4.2. The Harmfulness of Toxic Masculinity**

### **4.2.1. Influence on Female**

Among the events that show masculinity in the drama series, 10/17 victims are feminists. Including 4 times verbal violence and 4 times physical violence. In the table1, I listed all the cases where the victims were women and summarized the ways in which they were subjected to violence. Among them, physical violence includes physical violence during sexual relations, and verbal violence includes verbal humiliation and intimidation.

First of all, more than half of the victims were women means that women are one of the main targets of toxic masculinity, which is the result of the continuation of the hierarchy, in which women's value is lower. In the value system of toxic masculinity, women are regarded as objects; They are mainly regarded as means to an end, whether the end is sexual or born in. Sleeping with a woman is an honor and a victory; Failure to do so is a sign of shame [9]. This ideology strengthens the squeezing of women's cultural space, and male violence, as a means of implementing patriarchy, puts itself in the dominant position of cultural society.

In addition, in the case where object is female, women all refuse or violate the will of the subject. Also, in most cases, the subject and the object are in a relationship. This is consistent with what Brown, James and Taylor wrote, "Men's experience of rejection and shame is an important factor of men's violence against their female partners" [9]. Men think that their partner's behavior is rejection, so it is a threat to his self and self-awareness, and toxic masculinity urges men to think it is necessary to resist this feeling through psychological or physical violence. In this case, violence against women is the means and source for men to regain their self-awareness.

At the same time, toxic masculinity-dominated gender norms maintain male rights and female subordination. For example, masculinity is dominant and strong, while feminization is subordination and weakness, which aggravates the inequality of women in gender issues.

Table 1: Toxic Masculinity on Female.

Subject	Object	Approach
Mckay	Cassie	Body Violence (Sexual)
Danial	Cassie	Words Violence (Insult)
Cassie's relatives	Cassie	Other
Nate	Cassie	Words Violence (Insult)
Nate	Maddy	Other
Nate	Maddy	Words Violence (Threaten)
Nate	Maddy	Words Violence (Insult)
Nate	Maddy	Words Violence (Sexual)
Nate	Maddy	Other
Nate	Maddy	Body Violence

#### 4.2.2. Influence on Queer Group

In these three incidents, Jules suffered two verbal violence as queer. Nate emphasized her identity as a transgender in three incidents, and her tone implied contempt and insult.

Table 2: Toxic Masculinity on Queer Group.

Theme	Subject	Object	Occasion	Theme
Violence	Nate	Jules	Nate shouted to everyone around and knocked things off the table and verbally insulted Jules, "I know who you are, you want all people come to see you?"	Words Violence
Violence	Nate	Jules	Nate and McKay were driving, and Jules was riding, Nate rolled down his car window and shouted to Jules "What's up baby, how about you come and ride on this dick?". Later, Jules falls and breaks her knee, but Nate leaves feeling satisfied and laughing.	Words Violence
Other	Nate	Jules	Nate expresses his love for Jules, but is rejected. In order to protect his male dignity, Nate collects private photos of Jules and threatens her to keep his sexual orientation secret by reporting her for soliciting minors	Other

In the first scene, Nate saw Jules's transgender identity for the first time, and then in the later verbal violence, he explored, "I know what you are", and made a greater humiliation. Jules had doubts about his value perception for a period of time and refused to believe Nate again. Toxic masculinity makes men sensitive to the standard of gender paradigm. Those who do not meet these unrealistic standards or threaten the standards will make these men respond to challenges by some harmful behaviors, such as verbal humiliation, threats and even physical violence. Queer group is not well understood by the public because of the lack of gender definition, for example, it is often characterized by masculinity in body.



Research shows that those who report "more sexual harassment" are women who describe themselves as having traditional "masculinity" characteristics, rather than those who "describe themselves as meeting the ideal characteristics of women" [10]. Queer groups violate their gender ideals and are threatened by men who are jealous of their masculinity. At the same time, they need a man who is regarded as "weak" to compare themselves. However, the existence of queer group threatens people's view on whether men meet their physical ideal. Toxic masculinity causes men to be afraid of failing to live up to the expectations of male gender roles, thus threatening harassment or even violence against queer group.

## 5. Conclusion

Toxic masculinity is influenced by peer pressure of the same age and American campus culture, as well as the standardized definition of masculinity in society, and has a direct and negative impact mainly on women and queer groups. These studies are based on Euphoria, which describes the established understanding and deep-rooted problems. Although the research will make more researchers and the public aware of the negative effects of toxic masculinity on people's health, we still need more research to keep people away from toxic masculinity.

The society needs to reflect on the harmfulness of toxic masculinity. If we want to "eradicate sexual violence" or "eliminate toxic masculinity", we must change the mechanism that boys succumb to masculine men. If men are threatened by another independent and powerful group, the solution is not to hide the power of another group, but to give them support to understand and change their behavior before the toxic masculinity trends these men commit violence. In order to improve everyone's situation, we need to participate in it and fight against the poisonous masculinity, help men to deal with and express their emotions in a reasonable way from their youth, and prevent people from expressing violence and generating gender bias in adolescence and adulthood, so as to reduce the occurrence of violence. For example, masculinity challenges in schools, organizations such as "Men can stop rape", and notable examples of projects aimed at expanding the concept of masculinity and involving men in anti-gender discrimination [4]. Starting from schools to fight against gender inequality and violence is perhaps the most important role that educators can play.

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