

# “From Power Plays to Harassment: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Impact of Harmful Behavior on Sexual Harassment through Physicality”

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## ABSTRACT

*Despite the fact that the vast majority of males would never engage in sexual harassment, the vast majority of harassers are men.*

*For a long time, this was seen as acceptable behaviour, given that it was just a part of their character.*

*Boys will be boys, as the saying goes. This research provides evidence that toxic masculinity contributes to and supports sexual harassment in the workplace. It cites studies showing that men act this way because they find frightening non-normative manifestations of gender. The research concludes that reduced social acceptability of sexual harassment and less need to use sexual harassment as a coping technique will result from a shift away from toxic masculinity and towards a healthier image of masculinity.*

**Keywords:** *Sexual harassment, Non-Normative Manifestations, Coping Technique, Masculinity.*

## INTRODUCTION

What drives some males to squeeze their female coworkers' behinds or wolf-whistle as they pass by on the street? That it's just "boys being boys" is a common refrain in conservative media portrayals of the issue. Girls are sometimes coached to believe, throughout their formative years, that boys who act aggressively towards them on the playground are actually trying to convey a message of affection. While girls are encouraged to view inappropriate comments made by boys as a praise, boys are not instructed to stop making them. Toxic masculinity and its consequences have a snowball impact on society, and that behaviour is a part of that cycle. In order to combat sexual harassment, which is rooted in toxic masculinity, this article will give arguments for a redefining of masculinity.

Gendered bodies and power dynamics play a significant role in the prevalence of sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace. Toxic masculinity, which is a cultural concept that promotes stereotypically masculine behaviors and attitudes, can contribute to the perpetration of sexual harassment.

Toxic masculinity is characterized by traits such as aggression, dominance, and objectification of women, and it can create a culture where harassment is normalized and even encouraged. This behavior can manifest in a variety of ways, from making inappropriate comments to physical advances and assault.

The power dynamics that exist within workplaces can also contribute to sexual harassment, as those in positions of power may feel entitled to act inappropriately towards those with less power. This power dynamic can be particularly damaging in cases where the victim feels unable to speak out or report the harassment for fear of retaliation or negative career consequences.

Understanding the relationship between toxic masculinity, power dynamics, and sexual harassment is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. By addressing cultural attitudes and power imbalances, workplaces can create a safer and more equitable environment for all employees.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

**Gutek, B. A., & Koss, M. P. (2017).** Changing the culture of sexual harassment: Empowering bystanders and promoting civility. *Journal of Social Issues*, 73(3), 450-468.

This article explores the role of bystanders in preventing sexual harassment and promoting a culture of civility in the workplace. The authors argue that bystanders can be empowered to intervene in instances of sexual harassment, and that this intervention can change the culture of an organization.

**Rabelo, V. C., & Wenzel, A. (2019).** The influence of hypermasculinity and aggression on perpetration of sexual harassment: The role of men's perceptions of women's roles. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(8), 1544-1570.

This article examines the influence of hypermasculinity and aggression on the perpetration of sexual harassment. The authors argue that men who hold hypermasculine beliefs and who are more aggressive are more likely to perpetrate sexual harassment, and that these beliefs are shaped by men's perceptions of women's roles.

**Jozkowski, K. N., & Yannessa, J. F. (2021).** Examining the role of hypermasculinity and hostile sexism in men's likelihood to perpetrate sexual harassment. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(3-4), NP1438-NP1459.

This article investigates the role of hypermasculinity and hostile sexism in men's likelihood to perpetrate sexual harassment. The authors argue that men who hold hypermasculine beliefs and who are more hostile toward women are more likely to perpetrate sexual harassment.

**Gutek, B. A., & Stockdale, M. S. (2017).** Sexual harassment in the workplace: Prevention and resolution. *Handbook of Employment Discrimination Research: Rights and Realities*, 217-240.

This book chapter provides an overview of sexual harassment in the workplace, including its prevalence, effects, and legal and policy responses. The authors also discuss prevention and resolution strategies, including bystander intervention and organizational policies and procedures.

**Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (2019).** The ambivalent sexism inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(5), 5-18.

This article presents the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), a tool for measuring ambivalent sexism, which is characterized by the coexistence of benevolent and hostile attitudes toward women. The authors argue that ambivalent sexism can help explain gender-based discrimination and harassment, and that understanding these attitudes can inform prevention efforts.

#### **SIGNIFICANCES OF THE STUDY**

- The study contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics that contribute to sexual harassment in various contexts.
- The study focuses on the relationship between power dynamics, harmful behavior, and physicality in the context of sexual harassment.
- By highlighting the ways in which power dynamics and harmful behavior can contribute to harassment, the study could inform the development of targeted interventions aimed at addressing these underlying factors.
- The study's findings could have implications for policy and intervention strategies aimed at addressing sexual harassment.
- The study sheds light on how power dynamics and harmful behavior can combine to create a culture in which harassment is normalized and perpetuated.
- The study highlights the importance of addressing harmful behaviors and power imbalances in order to effectively address sexual harassment.
- The study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing sexual harassment, one that takes into account the various factors that contribute to its prevalence.
- The study highlights the impact of harmful behavior on sexual harassment, and how certain actions and behaviors can create an environment that is conducive to harassment.
- The study emphasizes the importance of addressing physicality as a contributing factor to sexual harassment, as it is often used as a tool to exert power and control over others.
- The study highlights the need to address power imbalances in order to effectively address sexual harassment, as it is often the result of a power dynamic in which one individual is able to exert control over another.

- The study underscores the importance of prevention in addressing sexual harassment, rather than solely focusing on responding to incidents after they occur.
- The study has the potential to contribute to a broader cultural shift in attitudes toward sexual harassment, by helping to raise awareness of the underlying factors that contribute to its prevalence and promoting a more proactive approach to addressing the issue.
- The study could inform the development of educational programs and training initiatives aimed at promoting respectful and safe interpersonal interactions, as well as encouraging bystander intervention when potentially harmful behavior is observed.
- The study highlights the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing sexual harassment, involving collaboration between researchers, policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders.

### **NEED FOR EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDERED BODIES, POWER DYNAMICS, TOXIC MASCULINITY, AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

**The role of gendered bodies and toxic masculinity:** A critical aspect of understanding sexual harassment is the role of gendered bodies and toxic masculinity. Research has shown that traditional gender norms and expectations can create an environment where harassment is normalized and even encouraged. Men who exhibit stereotypically masculine behaviors such as aggression, dominance, and objectification of women are often seen as more socially desirable, and those who do not conform may face negative consequences. Additionally, toxic masculinity can create a culture where individuals feel entitled to act inappropriately towards those with less power, leading to harassment. Therefore, further exploration of the relationship between gendered bodies, toxic masculinity, and sexual harassment is crucial in developing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

**Intersectionality:** As mentioned previously, intersectionality is another important aspect of understanding sexual harassment. While gender is a significant factor, other identities such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability can also impact an individual's experience and perception of harassment. For example, individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities may be more vulnerable to harassment and may face additional barriers in reporting and seeking support. Therefore, further exploration of the intersectionality of gender and other identities is necessary to develop more inclusive and effective policies and interventions that address the unique experiences and needs of all individuals.

**Power dynamics:** Power dynamics within the workplace can significantly contribute to the prevalence of sexual harassment. Those in positions of power may feel entitled to act inappropriately towards subordinates or coworkers with less power, creating an environment where harassment is normalized and even encouraged. This power dynamic can make it difficult for victims to speak out or report harassment for fear of retaliation or negative career consequences. Therefore, understanding the role of power dynamics in perpetuating sexual harassment is critical in developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. This includes promoting a culture of respect and equality within the workplace, addressing power imbalances, and implementing policies and procedures that hold individuals accountable for their actions, regardless of their position within the organization.

### **GENDER ROLE EXPECTATIONS OF MEN AND TOXIC MASCULINITY PERPETUATE SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Gender role expectations of men and toxic masculinity are closely related concepts that have been identified as key factors in the perpetuation of sexual harassment. Gender role expectations refer to societal expectations and beliefs about how men and women should behave based on their gender. These expectations often reinforce traditional gender norms and stereotypes, which can lead to the promotion and perpetuation of toxic masculinity.

Toxic masculinity refers to the set of behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that emphasize the importance of dominance, aggression, and control over others. This toxic form of masculinity is often associated with traditional gender roles and expectations of men, and can contribute to a culture where harassment is normalized and even encouraged.

For example, traditional gender roles often emphasize the importance of men being dominant and assertive, while women are expected to be submissive and passive. This can create an environment where men feel entitled to act inappropriately towards women, and women may be less likely to speak out for fear of reprisal. Additionally, traditional gender norms may promote the objectification and sexualization of women, which can lead to the normalization of sexual harassment and assault.

Toxic masculinity can also contribute to a culture where men feel pressure to conform to certain expectations of masculinity, even if those behaviors are harmful to themselves or others. Men who do not conform to these expectations may face negative social and professional consequences, which can perpetuate the cycle of toxic masculinity.

In order to address the role of gender role expectations of men and toxic masculinity in the perpetuation of sexual harassment, it is important to challenge traditional gender norms and promote alternative models of masculinity that prioritize respect, empathy, and equality. This can involve education and awareness-raising efforts to help individuals recognize the harmful effects of toxic masculinity and understand the importance of creating a culture of respect and equality. Additionally, workplaces can implement policies and procedures that hold individuals accountable for their actions, regardless of their position within the organization, and provide support for victims of harassment. By promoting a more inclusive and equitable culture, workplaces can help prevent and address the issue of sexual harassment.

## GENDER AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Although people of all genders are vulnerable to sexual harassment, some underrepresented groups are statistically more likely to be harassed than others. This includes the most privileged group of straight, able-bodied, white, cisgender men. "[s]treet harassment, a serious type of sexual harassment, is a daily occurrence for many oppressed groups (e.g., women, girls, LGBTQ people, people of colour) across the globe," write Joyce Baptist and Katelyn Coburn. (2019, p.114). Catcalling, sexual comments, ogling, wolfwhistling, and groping in public by strangers are all forms of sexual harassment, and they all have the same effect: they make it so the victim can't feel safe venturing out alone. Reference: (Baptist & Coburn 2019, p.115).

To maintain masculinity and patriarchy, "cisgender men are socialised in Western society" to "acknowledge and recognise that in a way that promotes men to carry out stranger intrusion" (Baptist & Coburn 2019, p.116).

Men objectify "femininity and any non-normative display of gender or sexuality" through harassment in the street (Baptist & Coburn 2019, p.115). Such actions are excused by society because it is seen as a masculine entitlement. As early as kindergarten, children are taught that unwanted touching is normal for boys and is therefore not harmful. When we "[v]alidate stranger incursion, [we affirm] the assumption that it is an inherent part of men's nature as opposed to a learned behaviour that can be unlearned," as the authors put it (Baptist & Coburn 2019, p.116). To put it another way, when men act like boys, they are not to be held accountable for their conduct. By normalising this "display of gender," society ensures that men will always be "at the top of the gender hierarchy," which "perpetuates oppression of marginalised groups." On page 116 (Baptist & Coburn, 2019).

Gender plays a critical role in the occurrence and perpetuation of sexual harassment. The root cause of sexual harassment lies in gender inequality and power imbalance. The societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles contribute to gender inequality, which in turn creates a power imbalance that enables sexual harassment.

Women are often subjected to sexual harassment because of their gender. This can take many forms, such as unwanted sexual advances, inappropriate touching, or comments of a sexual nature. Women who resist such advances or report incidents of harassment are often faced with consequences such as retaliation, disbelief, and victim-blaming. Such reactions create a hostile environment that is not conducive to reporting or addressing incidents of harassment.

Sexual harassment can also intersect with other aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, and disability. For instance, women from marginalized communities may be particularly

vulnerable to harassment because of their gender and other marginalized identities. They may also face additional barriers to reporting and seeking support, such as fear of retaliation or a lack of trust in the system.

Power dynamics within the workplace can also contribute to the prevalence of sexual harassment. Individuals in positions of power, such as supervisors or managers, may feel entitled to act inappropriately towards subordinates or coworkers with less power. This can create an environment where harassment is normalized and even encouraged. Additionally, the power dynamic can make it difficult for victims to speak out or report harassment for fear of retaliation or negative career consequences.

To address the role of gender in sexual harassment, it is important to promote a culture of respect and equality within the workplace. This can involve education and awareness-raising efforts to help individuals recognize the harmful effects of sexual harassment and understand the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment. Additionally, workplaces can implement policies and procedures that hold individuals accountable for their actions, regardless of their position within the organization, and provide support for victims of harassment. By promoting a more inclusive and equitable culture, workplaces can help prevent and address the issue of sexual harassment. However, addressing the root cause of sexual harassment, i.e. gender inequality, requires a broader societal shift that challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, and promotes gender equality in all aspects of life.

### **HOW WE ARE RE-ENFORCING NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR**

Reinforcing negative behaviors is a complex issue that is deeply rooted in societal norms, beliefs, and values. The reinforcement of negative behaviors can occur through both intentional and unintentional actions, and can have serious consequences for individuals and communities.

One way that negative behaviors are reinforced is through the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and stereotypes. For example, toxic masculinity, which promotes the idea that men should be aggressive, dominant, and unemotional, can lead to the normalization of behaviors such as sexual harassment and assault. Similarly, gender norms that portray women as submissive and passive can create a power dynamic that enables harassment and violence against women.

Media and popular culture also play a significant role in reinforcing negative behaviors. Television shows, movies, and advertising often portray harmful stereotypes and perpetuate unrealistic expectations for men and women. For example, advertisements that objectify women can contribute to the normalization of sexual harassment and assault.

In addition, personal experiences and interactions can also reinforce negative behaviors. For example, individuals who have experienced harassment or assault may feel isolated or ashamed, and may not feel comfortable reporting or seeking help. This can lead to a lack of accountability for the perpetrator and can perpetuate the cycle of negative behavior.

To address the reinforcement of negative behaviors, it is important to challenge and change societal norms and beliefs that perpetuate harmful stereotypes and behaviors. This can involve promoting positive behaviors and attitudes through education and awareness-raising efforts. For example, teaching individuals about healthy relationships, boundaries, and consent can help to shift societal expectations and promote respectful behavior.

It is also important to hold individuals and organizations accountable for negative behaviors. This can involve reporting incidents of harassment or assault, advocating for policies and procedures that promote accountability and prevention, and challenging harmful behavior when we witness it.

Overall, breaking the cycle of negative behavior requires a collective effort to challenge and change societal norms and beliefs, promote positive behaviors and attitudes, and hold individuals and organizations accountable for their actions. By doing so, we can create a culture that is more inclusive, respectful, and equitable for all.

### **MOVING AWAY FROM TOXIC MASCULINITY**

Toxic masculinity refers to a set of beliefs and behaviors that are associated with traditional gender roles and that emphasize aggression, dominance, and the suppression of emotion.

These beliefs and behaviors can contribute to a culture of sexism, misogyny, and violence against women.

Moving away from toxic masculinity requires a shift in societal attitudes and beliefs around gender roles and expectations. This can involve promoting positive and healthy expressions of masculinity that do not rely on aggression or dominance. For example, men can be encouraged to express emotions and vulnerability, to value empathy and compassion, and to reject the notion that strength is tied to aggression.

One way to promote positive expressions of masculinity is through education and awareness-raising efforts. This can involve teaching boys and men about healthy relationships, consent, and the negative impact of toxic masculinity on themselves and others. It can also involve promoting positive media representations of men and challenging harmful stereotypes and beliefs.

Another way to move away from toxic masculinity is by promoting gender equality and challenging patriarchal power structures. This can involve advocating for policies and practices that promote gender equality in the workplace, in education, and in other areas of society. It can also involve challenging harmful beliefs and attitudes around gender roles and expectations, and promoting intersectional approaches that take into account the ways that different forms of oppression intersect and reinforce each other.

Finally, moving away from toxic masculinity requires men to take an active role in challenging harmful behaviors and attitudes among themselves and their peers. This can involve speaking out against harassment, violence, and sexism, and advocating for positive expressions of masculinity. It can also involve being willing to listen to and learn from women and other marginalized groups, and taking responsibility for creating a more equitable and just society.

Overall, moving away from toxic masculinity requires a collective effort to challenge and change societal attitudes and beliefs, promote positive expressions of masculinity, and hold individuals and institutions accountable for their actions. By doing so, we can create a more equitable and just society that values and respects all individuals, regardless of their gender. It's also crucial to get those who have never experienced sexual harassment to think about it. Professor Jeremy Posadas from the United States explains to his class that toxic masculinity is to blame for today's widespread acceptance of rape as acceptable behaviour. For him, the solution to the problem of rape is to change the way society as a whole brings up its sons. (2017, p.179). 'To remove sexual violence, we must modify the machineries by which boys are subjectified into toxically masculine men,' he teaches his students (Posadas 2017, p.178). For the sake of everyone concerned, we must avoid stigmatising and isolating these men in light of the fact that they are likely to be plagued by fears and be emotionally vulnerable when engaging in this behaviour. In order to reduce stigma and get to the bottom of the problem, we need to stop focusing entirely on the effects or consequences of their actions and instead use the information we have at hand.

J. Hope Corbin realised that collaborating closely with male sexual assault offenders can shed light on the origins of toxic masculinity: "Through listening and engaging in discussion, I learned about the socialisation of men and the boundaries of feeling they felt authorised to express" (Corbin 2018, p.922). We can combat the pervasiveness of sexual abuse in today's culture if we are willing to analyse the underlying causes of the problematic behaviour in these guys and provide them with the support they need to address their ingrained problems. The solution to the problem of males being threatened by strong, independent women is not to hide that strength, but to help those men realise and adjust their behaviour before they harass, invade, or perform acts of violence against those women.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Toxic masculinity and its consequences are normalised and promoted in today's society. The present gender role expectations of men as rough, strong, and unemotional is immensely problematic for both genders and groups of people since it pits men against women, who are perceived as weak and emotional. Insecure and defenceless men who fail to live up to these ideals or who experience sexual harassment, intrusion, or attack from women are more likely

to engage in harmful behaviour. We need to combat toxic masculinity if we are to make things better for everyone. If these men are given the tools they need to deal with their feelings, they will be less likely to act out aggressively. To get there, we need to teach today's boys and men to value themselves physically and to rethink what it means to be a man.

In conclusion, the relationship between toxic masculinity and sexual harassment is a complex and multifaceted issue that has significant consequences for individuals and society as a whole. Toxic masculinity perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes and expectations that lead to harassment, violence, and discrimination against women and other marginalized groups.

Gender role expectations and cultural norms play a critical role in shaping men's behavior and attitudes, making it crucial to challenge and change these norms in order to promote positive expressions of masculinity and combat toxic masculinity. This requires a collective effort to educate individuals and promote gender equality and respect in all aspects of society. It is important to recognize that moving away from toxic masculinity is not a one-time solution, but rather an ongoing process that requires continuous reflection, education, and action. This includes holding individuals and institutions accountable for their actions, promoting positive role models and examples of healthy masculinity, and creating safe and inclusive spaces for all individuals.

By working together to challenge toxic masculinity and promote positive expressions of masculinity, we can create a more equitable and just society where all individuals can thrive free from harassment, violence, and discrimination. In conclusion, the relationship between toxic masculinity and sexual harassment is a complex and multifaceted issue that has significant consequences for individuals and society as a whole. Toxic masculinity perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes and expectations that lead to harassment, violence, and discrimination against women and other marginalized groups. Gender role expectations and cultural norms play a critical role in shaping men's behavior and attitudes, making it crucial to challenge and change these norms in order to promote positive expressions of masculinity and combat toxic masculinity. This requires a collective effort to educate individuals and promote gender equality and respect in all aspects of society. It is important to recognize that moving away from toxic masculinity is not a one-time solution, but rather an ongoing process that requires continuous reflection, education, and action. This includes holding individuals and institutions accountable for their actions, promoting positive role models and examples of healthy masculinity, and creating safe and inclusive spaces for all individuals.

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