

Spring 4-27-2022

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Recommended Citation

Fernando, Dulshi; Aguilera, Valeria; Vierra, Kristin; and Gutierrez, Diana, "The Relationship Between Masculinity & Friendships: A Thematic Analysis On The Qualities of Male Friendships" (2022).

Undergraduate Research Symposium Posters. 94.

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The Relationship Between Masculinity & Friendships: A Thematic Analysis On The Qualities of Male Friendships

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Background

- Certain masculinity norms such as toughness, emotional stoicism, and homophobia appear to be barriers to forming intimate friendships between boys and men (Connolly et al., 2000; Nielson et al., 2020; Peets & Hodges, 2018; Way, 2011; Way, 2013).
- Boys and men who do not successfully build close connections may experience low self-esteem and impaired psychological health (Helgeson & Lopez, 2010; Mendelson & Aboud, 1999; Santos et al., 2013).
- Boys and men who effectively build intimate relationships benefit from peer support and companionship (Helgeson & Lopez, 2010; Mendelson & Aboud, 1999) as well as a decrease in anxiety and depression levels (Åslund et al., 2014; Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Gupta et al., 2013).
- Scholars have yet to conduct a meta-synthesis exploring the relation between masculinity and friendship.

Research Question

What qualities characterize boys' and men's friendships?

Methodology

Data Collection

- The research team used search engines such as APA PSYchINFO, Google Scholar, Worldcat, and Web of Science to find peer-reviewed and grey literature by searching keywords associated with masculinity and friendship.
- The research team read the abstracts to narrow down the literature selection, focusing on papers that were either fully qualitative or mixed-methods and centered on male-to-male friendships.

Thematic Analysis

- The research team applied thematic analysis on the selected articles to code the data.
- The research team utilized a hybrid framework to data analysis, with both a descriptive and interpretive approach.
- The researchers compiled a comprehensive list of themes found in each study.

Finalizing Themes

- The research team looked for similarities or trends in the articles to finalize the list of themes.
- The team reviewed the articles while applying the major themes to confirm that the codes aligned with the research.
- To preserve inter-rater reliability, the researchers gathered frequently during the coding process (Cohen's $K = .84$).

Themes

Regulation of Masculinity

Many of the participants felt pressure to align with masculinity norms in the presence of their male peers. This includes restricted emotional expression, discrediting peers' emotions through insults or teasing, and acting manly and tough

Ex. "[If there's something that's depressing, which I know it's there, I'm not going to try and talk about it ... I'll try to hide it away."

Homophobia

Boys and men reported encountered homophobic insults when expressing emotions or engaging in other counter-stereotypical gender expression.

Ex. "I think a lot of [boys] think that the more open they are, they're going to be called gay or girly. And I think a lot of people are scared of that."

Friendship with Men vs. Women

Men felt that their social relationships with men were purely instrumental, primarily based around shared social instrumental, primarily based around shared social or physical activities, and included little discussion of personal issues. On the other hand, their social relationships with women were more intimate and confiding.

Ex. "We [men] do not talk like I'd talk with my wife about these issues. I don't think males talk about stuff like this unless other ones do, but not me. If a male talked to me about this, I'd probably hassle them."

Resistance to Masculinity

Many studies indicated some form of resistance towards masculinity. Some of the themes that emerged included resistance within the friendship including mutual intimacy, emotional expression, and establishing an emotionally supportive friendships.

Ex. "[My best friend] understands me ... I could tell him stuff and the he will like understand it. If I am like quietish and everything, he would like talk to me and ask me why."

Bromance

This theme pertained to men who reported having a deep and loving platonic connection with other men that allowed them to safely express authentic emotion and share secrets

Ex. "It's that guy or two that you need, who is always there for you. You can talk to him about anything. It doesn't matter what you tell him, he is always there to listen."



Barriers to Friendship

- Regulation of Masculinity
- Homophobia
- Friendship with Men vs. Women



Resistance to Masculinity Norms

- Resistance of Masculinity
- Bromance

Discussion

- The findings suggest that masculinity norms like toughness, emotional stoicism, and homophobia make it difficult for boys and men to form intimate friendships.
- The pressure to adhere to masculinity norms is still an everyday actuality for male friendships
 - However, it is also apparent that some boys and men are finding ways to resist masculinity norms and develop close, authentic friendships.
- Despite the abundance of studies examining these themes, research has not explored why some boys and men can resist masculinity norms while others can not.
- Accordingly, future research should examine factors that motivate or hinder boys and men to resist masculinity norms.
- At a deeper level, the current findings point to a possible cultural shift in which masculinity norms in friendship are becoming more flexible.

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