

# MASCULINITY AND QUEERNESS

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I am a Bisexual, Cisgender white man, to make clear my positionality while writing this article.

Let us review some key terms that will be helpful in understanding this topic:

**Masculinity:** a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with men and boys.

**Limited Masculinity:** refers to traditional cultural masculine norms that can be harmful to men, women, and society overall.

**Queer:** “a multi-faceted word that is used in different ways and means different things to different people. 1) Attraction to people of many genders. 2) Don’t conform to cultural norms around gender and/or sexuality. 3) A general term referring to all non-heterosexual people.” ([Vanderbilt University](#))

In this article, we’ll discuss the role **Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia** play in excluding, harming, and preventing queer masculine individuals from expressing their masculinity and living healthy, joyful lives.

Queer Men/Masc individuals tend to experience masculinity and gender identity differently from non-queer, or cishetersexual men. Queer Men/Masc individuals may be **Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Asexual/Aromantic**, among other sexual orientations, Queer Men/Masc Folk may also Be **Trans, Nonbinary, Genderqueer, or Agender**, among other gender identities. Queer men may also just simply be **Queer**. This [crowdsourced dictionary on LGBTQ+ terminology](#) gives even more examples of what queerness may or may not look like, according to members of the community themselves.

Because Toxic masculine norms tend to consider romantic attraction to or sexual desire for other men to be feminine and therefore morally wrong, or non-conforming gender identities less or non-masculine, and therefore worthy of exclusion. To maintain toxic masculine norms that are incompatible with both healthy masculinities embodied by non-queer men, and queer masculinities, Toxic masculinity encourages **Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia** among men to “keep other men in line.”

**Homophobia** is characterized by:

- A fear or suspicion of other men’s lack of toxic masculinity
- A fear of femininity and disempowerment through being considered feminine (Including the sexual/romantic desire for other men)
- A fear of one’s own lack of toxic masculinit

Homophobia can look like derogatory jokes about having sex with other men, being a “pussy” or using homophobic slurs. Homophobia can also look like being violent towards men who are gay or perceived as gay, including assault and sexual violence.

**Biphobia** is characterized as fear, aversion, or hatred of Bisexual or **Bi+** individuals. While it can look like and appear a lot like homophobia, manifesting in violence or derogatory jokes, for Bi men/masc individuals it can also look uniquely like:

- **Bierasure**, or ignoring and/or Denying the possibility of Bi men existing in medical studies, popular literature, or in communities (both heterosexual and queer communities)
- **Hypersexualizing**, or assuming Bi+ men are uniquely more sexual or willing to have sex
- **Medicalizing**, or assuming Bi+ men's sexuality means they are more likely to spread STIs like HIV, or means they are mentally ill

**Transphobia** is characterized as a fear, aversion, or hatred of Trans individuals, which may ( or may not, depending on context) include Genderqueer, nonbinary, and other Queer gender identities. Transphobia towards Transmen and Transmasculine individuals can look like:

- Exclusion from male or masculine spaces
- Refusal to use someone's pronouns or acknowledge their gender identity
- Violence and Sexual harassment
- **Medicalization**, or the reduction of trans individuals to their hormones, body parts, or chromosomes, or assuming their gender identity means they are mentally ill
- Denying Gender Affirming medical care

Toxic Masculinity encourages these attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards other queer men and masc individuals because the way we express ourselves falls outside what toxic masculinity considers "real men" to be. Our conception of masculinity and exclusion of alternative ways of being masculine contributes towards the harm Queer men and Masc individuals face; 40% of Gay men, nearly half of Bisexual men experience sexual violence in their lives, compared to around 20% of heterosexual men ([CDC, 2010, p.11](#)). Trans individuals are 2.5 times more likely than cisgender individuals to suffer violence, whereas Bisexual individuals are eight times more likely to suffer domestic violence than straight individuals and twice as likely as gay/lesbian individuals, who themselves are more likely to suffer violence than straight individuals ([Truman & Morgan, 2022](#)).

Healthy and inclusive masculinity practices can help foster environments where Queer men and masc individuals are recognized and supported in their communities (Anderson, 2009). Inclusive masculinity practices include:

- Expressing emotions, building trust, and then being vulnerable with each other. Checking in with other men, being willing to share your own emotional states, and also being willing to have honest conversations about important or difficult topics is a great first step to encouraging genuine listening and learning about what your peers value. The Aurora Center has great resources for having hard conversations I use with my own partner and friends often
- Developing personal and organizational habits around non-judgment and inclusion are also important, for it will help your peers be more expressive about what they experience and value. Encouraging hobbies and interests even if they don't fit with "real man" activities, being open and curious about other men's experiences, and calling in your peers who shame other peers, challenging and inquiring about their reasons for doing so, are great ways to make your peers feel more comfortable in being themselves rather than pressured to be a specific kind of man.

- Discouraging language associated with homophobia, racism, transphobia, and misogyny is also a great way to make sure marginalized men feel included and are able to share their experiences, calling in or challenging other men who use this language is difficult, but a variety of strategies can be used:
  - Inquiring into why they think something harmful is funny can be a way to call them in and push them to shift their language
  - Asserting your own discomfort can challenge the language and often voice what other peers are already thinking
  - Refusing to validate the language of other men by laughing or agreeing with them can be a way to prevent them from feeling encouraged
  - Checking in with other men to see if they are comfortable with other men's actions and language can also give you assurance and knowledge that you are not the only uncomfortable one

All of these things feed into refusing to assume everyone experiences masculinity the same. Some final things you can do:

- Let marginalized members speak to their own experiences
- Don't assume the gender identity or orientation of your peers, let them express it to you or politely ask (but do not push)
- Understanding that multiple forms of masculinity have value
- Center your own lived experiences when discussing how you understand gender