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# Study on Masculinity and Violence Is Misleading, Expert Says

Written by Chuck Green | Published on September 4, 2015



## Do men who feel less masculine become more violent? Maybe, says expert, but that's not the real issue.



The headlines loomed over a study released last week, proclaiming men who feel less masculine may be more violent.

Man to man: Tamler Sommers believes it's "very misleading."

"I don't read (the study) that way at all," said Sommers, Ph.D., an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Houston. "It doesn't compare less masculine men with more masculine men."

Instead, he noted, the comparisons are between those who are insecure about their masculinity and those comfortable with it.

"The people in the less violent group don't feel manly either. They just don't

*This is a mildly suggestive*



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care that they're not meeting certain standard criteria for manliness," Sommers said. "So to say that less manly men are more violent — as the headline does — doesn't accurately sum up the release."

Sommers also noted this was only one study in "a fairly obscure journal."

"This is a mildly suggestive result," he said. "If it's replicated and there's some sort of account that explains the findings, then it might be worth thinking about. But I'd have to look at the methods, how they determined whether the participants were insecure about their masculinity."

Meantime, as far as what the findings mean to society?

"I'd say, at this point, absolutely nothing. Zero," said Sommers.

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## What the Study Concluded

The study in question [was published](#) in the Injury Prevention online journal on Aug. 24.

In it, researchers examined the responses to an online survey of 600 men in the United States between the ages of 18 and 50.

The survey asked the men questions about perceptions of the male gender as well as their own self-image and their level of violent and risky behaviors.



Researchers concluded men who considered themselves less masculine and thought others viewed them that way were more likely to say they had committed violence using a weapon or assaults that injured others.

This was in comparison to men who didn't feel highly masculine but weren't

concerned about it.

The study was overseen by Dennis Reidy, Ph.D., a behavioral scientist at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's division of violence prevention.

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Tamler Sommers, University of Houston

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## What Does the Research Mean, if Anything?

Sommers said even if the research is correct, it shouldn't be surprising.

"How surprising is it that people who feel insecure about their masculinity would be more prone to violence?" he said. "It's a movie trope, right? The insecure guy, the guy who everyone makes fun of for not being a man. At the end of the movie, he goes on a violent rampage and starts shooting people."

"So in some ways, it's like one of those studies that binge drinking college students are more likely to engage in sexual behavior," he added. "Well, yeah. Obviously."

At the same time, Sommers said the cliché of a mocked, insecure male finally provoked into a frenzy is based in reality.

"I'm sure (the theme) picks up on the fact that when you feel insecure about any part of your character that's not meeting the standards it should be meeting, you feel like a failure," he said. "So you're going to take steps to compensate -- and maybe overcompensate."

What, if anything, should society do about the issue?

"What's society?" said Sommers. "I don't think society's a coordinated organism or thing. But in terms of what this individual should do about it? I'd say there's nothing you really can do."

Instead, perhaps any potential solutions should be undertaken by an individual's parents during childhood.


**“** *You want to build in the people around you a strong sense of self-confidence and respect. You don't want to encourage unrealistic expectations.* **”**

Tamler Sommers, University of Houston

"In general, you should try to raise children who are comfortable with who they are," he said. "And it's not just masculinity. If someone feels insecure about any important part of their character, that's going to be unhealthy and will probably cause someone to act in a unhealthy way."


"You want to build in the people around you a strong sense of self-confidence and respect. You don't want to encourage unrealistic expectations," said Sommers. "Short of that, again, in terms of whether society or, for that matter, the government, should do anything. Not based on anything this study reveals. Not in my view. You can tell I'm a little skeptical."

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