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**WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN:
MEASURING THE EXTENT BETWEEN
SELF-REPORTED TOXIC MASCULINE
BELIEFS AND SOCIAL ANXIETY LEVELS
IN COLLEGE MEN AGED 18 TO 25.**

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1. Abstract

Introduction: This thesis explores the relationship between toxic masculine antecedents and social interaction anxiety among college men aged 18 to 25.

Objective: The objective of this study was to examine the impact of self-reported toxic masculine antecedents on social interaction anxiety in college men aged 18 to 25.

Method: The study utilizes a quantitative research design and collects data from a sample of college men aged 18 to 25 through self-report measures. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the associations between various toxic masculine antecedents and social interaction anxiety.

Results: The findings reveal significant relationships between certain toxic masculine antecedents and social interaction anxiety. Restrictive emotionality emerges as a significant predictor, indicating that higher scores on emotional restriction are associated with higher levels of social interaction anxiety. Similarly, avoidance of femininity is found to have a significant association with social interaction anxiety. Higher scores on avoidance of feminine traits are associated with lower levels of social interaction anxiety. However, the study does not find significant associations between social interaction anxiety and the importance of sex, toughness, dominance, and negativity towards homosexuality.

Practical Implications: Understanding the relationship between toxic masculine antecedents and social interaction anxiety can have practical implications for addressing mental health challenges

among college-aged men. This knowledge can guide the development of interventions or strategies to mitigate the negative impact of toxic masculinity on social interaction anxiety.

Conclusion: In conclusion, this study provides insights into the relationship between toxic masculine antecedents and social interaction anxiety among college-aged men. It highlights the significance of restrictive emotionality and avoidance of femininity as predictors of social interaction anxiety. The findings contribute to our understanding of the impact of toxic masculinity on mental health and suggest potential areas for further research in this field.

Keywords: Traditional masculinity, Toxic masculinity, Masculinity, Anxiety, Social anxiety, College men.

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2. Introduction

As the world continues to shift towards a more inclusive and progressive society, the question of what it means to be a man remains a relevant and ever growing topic. Masculinity has been the subject of much debate and scrutiny in recent years, as society grapples with changing negative norms and expectations surrounding gender roles. While progress has been made in breaking down traditional gender stereotypes, masculinity continues to permeate many aspects of modern life. In recent years the term traditional masculinity has been rebranded and repopulated as "toxic masculinity". This term has resurfaced in part due to the increasing presence of content creators like Andrew Tate who propagate and promote traditional/toxic masculine beliefs and behaviors through social media and other digital platforms. In addition, the proliferation of online media platforms has led to the resurgence of famous actors, athletes, and even past presidents expressing their opinions on numerous topics that are seen as traditional/toxic for modern-day society.

Toxic masculinity, a term first introduced in the 1980s by Shepherd Bliss in the mythopoetic men's movement, has evolved from a description of his father's militarized and authoritarian masculinity to a broader understanding of harmful male behavior. According to Pleck (1995), there may be several masculinity ideologies, but there is a set of shared standards and expectations associated with the traditional male role in the Western world, known as traditional masculinity ideology. This ideology is believed to maintain gender-based power structures. Connell (1995) referred to this as "hegemonic masculinity" to highlight its function in sustaining patriarchy. Years before, Pleck (1981) proposed the Gender Role Identity Paradigm, that is, the idea that gender norms differ based on the social and cultural environment. Pleck's

current perspective on the psychology of men and masculinity remains largely dominant to this day.

The gender role strain paradigm, pioneered by Levant (2011) and Pleck (1995), fixates around the concept of masculinity ideology. It refers to a collection of societal beliefs regarding the thoughts, emotions, and actions expected of men and boys. More specifically, college-aged men. In research conducted on teenagers and college students, the adherence to traditional masculinity ideology, as measured by the Male Role Norms Inventory—Revised (MRNI—R; Levant et al., 1992; Levant & Fischer, 1998;), utilized to evaluate a fundamental proposition of the gender role and comparable tools, has been shown to differ according to several social contextual factors. Specifically, a greater adherence to traditional masculinity ideology was discovered to be linked to sex (male gender), age (being younger), and marital status (being single)(Smalley, 2007). In the university setting, young men could be faced with pressures and influences that can shape their beliefs and behaviors surrounding masculinity to a certain extent. Gender Role Conflict Theory (GRCT; O'Neil et al. 1986) examines the psychological and social factors that affect men's ideas of masculinity in a patriarchal society. GRCT suggests that conforming to masculine norms can result in negative outcomes such as addictive behaviors, sexual harassment, and violence, and can negatively impact individuals' psychological well-being. These sources are likely to occur in college men, given the transition to college is a challenging developmental stage where men may feel the need to conform to masculine norms (i.e: to fit in) and may experience difficulties in doing so. Thus, this can cause them to violate these norms, leading to increased conflict, as they compare their ideal self-concept to their current self-concept.

The American Psychological Association (APA) developed guidelines in 2018, building on a project initiated in 2005, which asserted that "traditional masculinity is psychologically harmful" and emphasized the detrimental effects of socializing boys to suppress their emotions, both internally and externally (Pappas, 2019). According to the guidelines, traditional masculinity encompasses various standards, including the rejection of femininity, achievement, avoidance of appearing weak, and a tendency towards adventure, risk, and violence (APA, 2018). The APA highlights the negative impact of male privilege, which often imposes limitations on men's adaptive functioning by endorsing sexist ideologies aimed at maintaining male power. Firstly, avoidance of femininity (AF), which consists of the rejection of femininity, leading to a fear of femininity among men and a subsequent disconnection from emotional expression. This fear of femininity can result in gender-role conflict, which limits men's ability to reach their full potential, and may lead to anxiety and stress when male norms are violated. Next, restrictive emotionality (RE) will be explored within the traditional masculine ideology, given it is the act of limiting emotional expression, which may lead to inadequate coping strategies and aggressive reactions. However, recent research suggests that men are also embracing their emotional selves while still maintaining emotional restraint as a significant aspect of male self-identity.

Moreover, research suggests (Govorun et al., 2006) that individuals who place a high value on masculinity for their self-esteem are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards sexual minorities (NH), which may stem from anxiety about being perceived as gay. This anxiety can also lead men to avoid seeking therapy from male therapists due to concerns about emotional intimacy being associated with homosexual. Moreover, masculinity has been linked to a higher number of sexual partners in some studies (Arnocky et al., 2018), while other research suggests

that men who exhibit more feminine traits report higher levels of promiscuity (Ostovich & Sabini, 2004). Likewise, the importance of sex (IS) to men has received little research attention, but multiple studies have confirmed the reliability of the scale and its subscales, including the IS. Not only so, toughness (TO) emphasizes the importance of projecting strength and suppressing emotions, as displaying vulnerability may contradict the image of confidence adherents strive to convey. In addition, men who conform to this norm are likely to restrain themselves from displaying their emotions. Lastly, dominance (DO) is determined by factors such as height and muscularity, and has been sexually selected in human males as it aids in competition and attainment of status and resources. Detecting cues of physical dominance and threat in other men quickly and reliably would have been advantageous for ancestors in avoiding conflicts they were likely to lose and in identifying powerful allies.

This study is particularly relevant in light of the current cultural discourse on masculinity, with the term "toxic masculinity" becoming increasingly popular in social media. There is a growing need for research that delves deeper into the causes and consequences of certain behaviors and attitudes among men. Over the course of many years, concepts such as toxic masculinity and wounded masculinity have become deeply entrenched in therapeutic discourse, shaping discussions and approaches within the field. These notions have been explored and discussed extensively by various sources, including the American Psychological Association (APA). Guidelines for men's behaviors to change have been published through years on end, and yet remains a vital and pertinent part of modern day discourse. Additionally, the everlasting patriarchy being the social system in which men hold primary power and dominance over women in various aspects of society, including politics, economics, and culture. It is

characterized by male privilege, gender inequality, and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and norms that typically favor men for centuries.

In this thesis, the concept of toxic masculinity will be examined in the context of social interaction anxiety. In Western cultures, men are often socialized from a young age to conform to traditional masculine norms, which emphasize invulnerability, fearlessness, stoicism, emotional restraint, and toughness (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Adhering strictly to these norms can have negative implications for mental health literacy, help-seeking behaviors, and mental health outcomes (Seidler et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2017). When it comes to anxiety, symptoms such as worry, fear, and nervousness are often seen as contradictory to the ideals of stoicism, self-reliance, and toughness associated with traditional masculinity (Gallegos et al., 2019). This socialization process poses unique challenges for young men in developing and managing anxiety disorders, as they tend to endorse traditional masculine norms more strongly than older generations (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Herreen et al., 2021; Rice et al., 2011). Particularly among young men, there is a tendency to manage anxiety independently without seeking formal mental health services (Clark et al., 2018). Despite its growing prevalence, there is a noticeable lack of quantitative research aimed at understanding how toxic masculinity may affect social anxiety specifically in young men. In this study, social interaction anxiety will be measured using the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) developed by Mattick & Clarke (1998).

To date, there has been no empirical research examining the potential association between social anxiety and toxic masculinity. This thesis seeks to explore the possible relationship between the toxic masculinity antecedents and social interaction anxiety by means of the research question; "To what extent do self-reported toxic masculine antecedents affect social

interaction anxiety in college men aged 18 to 25?". The findings of this study may have important implications for the development of targeted interventions aimed at reducing toxic masculinity beliefs in university settings. Ultimately, promoting healthier and more positive gender norms among university men is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable society. In the next few chapters, the variables of this study, the research and methods, as well as the conclusion and implications will be analyzed. The analysis will include all antecedents of toxic masculinity researched for this thesis presented in the theoretical framework as well as a closer look into social anxiety. Subsequent, the methods performed and the process of the quantitative research conducted. Lastly, the results of the research, the conclusions, and discussion for possible next steps.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework serves to better understand the role of toxic masculinity in social anxiety. This follows with the scale themes in the Male Role Norms Inventory—Revised (MR-NI-R; Levant & Fischer, 1998; Levant et al.,1992), which evaluates conventional beliefs and attitudes regarding masculinity, as well as the significance placed on conforming to societal norms for male conduct. Out of the original seven, six of the subscales were adapted for this study, to now be analyzed more thoroughly as independent variables. Additionally, this framework will take a deeper look into the dependent variable of social interaction anxiety following the SIAS scale developed by Mattick & Clarke, 1998.

3.1 Social Interaction Anxiety (SIA)

Anxiety disorders are the most commonly diagnosed mental illness in men worldwide (Kessler et al., 2010). In a given year, 11% of the global male population will be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, and more than 113 million males have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime (Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network, 2019). The onset of anxiety symptoms usually occurs in childhood or early adolescence, and young males aged 10–24 years constitute 12% of the global anxiety prevalence (5.48 million; Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network, 2019). Untreated anxiety can lead to other mental health problems, including depression, substance use, and increased suicide risk (Nock et al., 2010). However, research on young men's anxiety is limited, and their experiences are poorly understood. Men's anxiety scholarship primarily focuses on sex differences research, comparing all young males to all young females to differentiate biological determinants (Craske, 2003). Moreover, the thresholds of 'normal' anxiety are context-specific and ever-changing with tumultuous social, political, economic, and environmental global landscapes. Traditionally, cultural representations of anxiety have been gendered, associating uncertainty, irrationality, and mood volatility with feminized traits and, by extension, unmanly emasculating embodiments (May, 1996). This gendered perspective can neglect men's experiences of anxiety due to their juxtaposition with traditional masculine norms. Masculine gender socialization offers important contexts and nuances for understanding men's gendered experiences and expressions of anxiety, as well as potential avenues for self-management or tailored treatment (Fisher et al., 2022).

Social interaction anxiety is a term used to describe the discomfort or distress experienced when communicating with others, whether they are strangers, friends, or members of the opposite sex. The main anxieties related to this term include feeling inarticulate, boring, foolish, uncertain of how to respond or what to say during social interactions, and being

overlooked. Self-report scales play a crucial role in evaluating the clinical condition and outcomes of anxiety disorders, including social interaction anxiety. Despite the development and refinement of a considerable number of self-report scales over the past two decades, there has been relatively little emphasis on creating valid and comprehensive measures to assess specific fears of social interaction anxieties that are more common, as acknowledged by the American Psychiatric Association (1980, 1987). Social Interaction Anxiety (SIA) refers to an individual's fear of negative evaluation and distress in social situations (Rapee & Heimberg, 1997; Mattick & Clarke, 1998).

The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) is a self-report scale designed to measure fear in social interaction situations. The scale has been tested to facilitate testing various forms of social fear, which seem to fit in one distinct category. Terms like shyness, dating anxiety, heterosexual social anxiety, communication anxiety, and interpersonal anxiety all seem to share a common attribute of describing challenges in socializing or engaging with others (Mattick & Clarke, 1998). Leary (1983) proposed a conceptual differentiation between social fears based on the structure of the situations that elicit anxiety. He argued that in contingent interactions, an individual's responses are continuously tailored to the responses of others, as in social interactions. Whereas in non-contingent encounters, behavior is primarily guided by one's plans and minimally affected by the responses of others present, as in scrutiny fears.

3.2 Restrictive Emotionality (RE)

A central aspect of traditional masculinity ideology is that men are taught to limit their emotional expression, also referred to as RE. This amounts to avoidance of expressing, feeling, sharing, or displaying strong emotions (O'Neil et al., 1995). According to theory, RE, which

once more, is a key component of the toxic masculinity ideology, may lead to insufficiently developed coping strategies for emotions, and according to theory, may cause men to "convert their vulnerable emotions into aggression and react aggressively when hurt" (Levant et al., 2006).

On the other hand, research also suggests that men are possibly rejecting previous "non-emotional" identities and are embracing their emotional selves (Roberts, 2013; Holmes, 2015). Although male emotions are currently being promoted, emotional restraint continues to be a significant and indistinguishable aspect of male self-identity. (O'Neil, 2015). The purpose of this aspect (RE) is believed to be unhealthy because it is men concealing vulnerability to maintain dominance in a patriarchal social structure. According to research, prolonged adherence to the norm of RE may lead to alexithymia, which is characterized by the inability to articulate one's emotions in words (Levant et al. 2015). Levant (1992) proposed that boys who were encouraged to adhere to traditional masculinity ideology to a greater extent were more likely to exhibit mild-to-moderate forms of alexithymia. Subsequently, several studies (Fischer & Good, 1997; Levant et al., 2003; Berger et al., 2005; Levant et al., 2006) have established a connection between the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology and alexithymia in men.

Furthermore, multiple studies on RE have linked a cause of RE to be Avoidance of Femininity (AF), which will also be further discussed in this framework. Good et al. (1989) proposed that men may avoid exhibiting their complete range of emotions, especially in front of other men, due to the fear of being seen as unmanly. Additionally, the difficulty with male emotional expression lies in the fact that it is often viewed as a feminine trait (Brody & Hall, 2008). Literature supports this concept by suggesting that women tend to demonstrate more emotional expression than men (Yeung et al., 2015; Deng et al., 2016). Given so, the idea of RE

limits men's emotional expression, leading to a lack of coping strategies and the conversion of vulnerable emotions into aggression. However, recent research suggests that men are embracing their emotional selves. Nonetheless, emotional restraint remains a significant aspect of male self-identity. The purpose of RE is to conceal vulnerability and maintain dominance in a patriarchal society, which could lead to alexithymia; the inability to articulate emotions in words. According to Spindel and Seidler (2019), men may adopt problem-focused coping strategies as a means to reclaim a sense of control and conceal their feelings of failure and self-blame. These strategies involve actively confronting problems, searching for solutions, and seeking information in an effort to regain a sense of mastery over their circumstances. By focusing on addressing the specific challenges they face, these men mitigate the negative impact anxiety has in their lives.

Empirical evidence indicates that the overall adherence to masculine norms, including factors such as emotional control, results in negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety (Wong et al., 2017). Extensive research conducted by Mahalik et al. (2005) further supports these findings, suggesting that men who conform to masculine norms emphasizing self-reliance and emotional control may encounter difficulties in their interpersonal relationships. Consequently, these challenges can contribute to the development of mental health issues, including anxiety, among such individuals. It is noteworthy that societal expectations of masculinity, which discourage seeking professional psychological help, may act as a significant barrier, impeding access to the necessary support and interventions required for effectively addressing mental health concerns.

H1: If men are more emotionally restrictive, they will be more socially anxious.

3.3 Avoidance of Femininity (AF)

Another antecedent that is closely linked to toxic masculinity is AF, which plays a significant role in shaping societal expectations and reinforcing harmful gender norms. David and Brannon (1976) established four norms characterizing traditional masculinity ideology, with one of them being the avoidance of feminine traits, labeled as "no sissy stuff." Gender-role conflict has been proposed to stem from a fear of femininity among men (O'Neil, 1981, 1982; Farrell, 1974; David & Brannon, 1976). This fear of femininity involves a strong negative reaction to stereotypically feminine values, attitudes, and behaviors, learned in early childhood through socialization from parents, peers, and societal norms. Men's fear of their feminine side have been discussed in theoretical literature for decades (Boehm, 1930; Hays, 1964; Horney, 1967; Jung, 1953, 1954; Lederer, 1968; Menninger, 1970), with many analyses having a psychodynamic (exploring the underlying psychological causes of emotional distress) basis. Likewise, reviews of mythology also provide evidence that fears and threats associated with femininity have existed over centuries (Lederer, 1968; Johnson, 1977). Levinson et al. (1978) found that men either neglected or repressed their feminine side or regarded it as dangerous.

The active discouragement of feminine traits is a significant aspect of male gender role identity, as noted by O'Neil (2015), and is a manifestation of the "fear of femininity" concept in masculinity theory (Kierski & Blazina, 2009; O'Neil, 2015). Such fear of femininity acts as a censor for deviations from gender norms, leading men to disconnect from their emotional and physical experiences (Kierski & Blazina, 2009). Consequently, emotional expression, which is often associated with femininity, is perceived as a threat to masculinity and is avoided. Research into the adverse impact of socialized gender roles continues to be an active area of investigation. This negative impact is commonly referred to as gender or sex role conflict, as well as sex role

strain (Garnets & Pleck, 1979; O'Neil, 1981, 1982; Pleck, 1981). Gender-role conflict is a psychological condition where adhering to traditional gender norms results in negative consequences or harm to oneself or others. The ultimate consequence of this conflict is the limitation of one's ability to realize their full potential or the potential of others (O'Neil, 1986).

Men are expected to conform to strict and traditional gender norms more than women (Herek, 2000, 2002; Moss-Racusin, 2015), leading to a constant need for men to prove their masculinity (Levant et al., 2007, 2012). In like manner, one key component of traditional masculinity ideology is the rejection of femininity (Kimmel & Llewellyn, 2012; Levant et al., 2013). As evidence of this, recent research indicates that men may avoid behaviors and characteristics deemed stereotypically feminine in order to confirm their masculinity (Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019). When men violate stereotypical male norms, they often experience stress and anxiety and may attempt to reassert their masculinity to alleviate these negative feelings, both to themselves and to others (Vandello et al., 2008). In short, the concept of toxic masculinity involves the avoidance of feminine traits, which stems from a fear of femininity among men. This fear acts as a censor for deviations from gender norms, limiting men's ability to express themselves and realize their full potential, resulting in gender-role conflict and negative consequences. According to May (1996), cultural representations of anxiety have traditionally been gendered, associating uncertainty, irrationality, and feelings with feminized traits and, consequently, depicting them as emasculating. This gendered perspective may overlook men's experiences of anxiety due to their juxtaposition with traditional masculine norms.

Research suggests that heterosexual men who strongly conform to societal norms associated with sexism may face difficulties in their relationships with women. This adherence to

sexist norms can lead to negative consequences such as compromised mental well-being and heightened levels of anxiety (Wong, Klann, Bijelic, & Aguayo, 2016). These challenges arise from gender stereotypes and power imbalances, which can hinder effective communication, mutual understanding, and healthy dynamics within heterosexual relationships. As a result, these men may experience higher levels of distress and emotional strain, impacting their overall psychological functioning and contributing to increased anxiety.

H2: If men are more avoidant of feminine traits, they will be more socially anxious.

3.4 Negativity Towards Homosexuals (NH)

Men often strive to distance themselves from femininity in order to protect their perceived masculinity and to avoid being attributed to the cultural link of femininity with homosexuality. This distancing is often the need to not be associated to homosexual men (Glick et al., 2007; Salvati et al., 2019; Talley & Bettencourt, 2008; Wilkinson, 2004). Since heterosexuality is often viewed as a central aspect of traditional masculinity (Beasley, 2008), affirming one's heterosexual orientation and displaying negative attitudes towards gay men can be a strategy to confirm one's masculinity (Berent et al., 2015). Various studies have supported this explanation, demonstrating that sexual prejudice (i.e., negative attitudes towards sexual minorities; Govorun et al., 2006; Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009) is linked to how much importance one places on masculinity for their self-esteem and self-representation. Not only so, but men may avoid showing affection towards other men because they associate emotional closeness with homosexuality, as suggested by O'Neil et al. (1986). Given that homosexuality is still stigmatized, heterosexual men may experience anxiety at the possibility of being mistaken

for a gay man and externalize this anxiety as hostility towards gay men (Fasoli et al., 2016; Herek & McLemore, 2013; Hunt et al., 2016).

Surely, masculinity is often associated with heterosexuality, and distancing oneself from gay men and exhibiting negative attitudes towards them can serve as a means of reaffirming one's masculinity (Beasley, 2008). This is because traditional masculinity ideology views heterosexuality as a fundamental aspect of masculinity (Berent et al., 2015). Furthermore, research has shown that individuals who place a high value on masculinity for their self-esteem and consider masculine norms important for self-representation are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards sexual minorities (Govorun et al., 2006; Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009). In essence, the article suggests that heterosexual men distance themselves from femininity and homosexuality to reaffirm their masculinity. This distancing is often seen in the form of negative attitudes towards gay men, as homosexuality is still stigmatized, and expressing emotional closeness towards other men may be associated with homosexuality. Despite the limited existing research on the relationship between negativity towards homosexuals and social anxiety, further investigation in this area holds significant value. It can be hypothesized that individuals with a high level of negativity towards homosexuals, particularly in the context of interacting with a group that includes gay men, may experience feelings of unease and anxiety during such interactions. Exploring this hypothesis can provide insights into the potential impact of negative attitudes towards homosexuals on social anxiety in men.

The precarious nature of manhood renders anything that highlights its instability or challenges one's status as a man particularly anxiety-inducing. This perspective on the fragility of manhood is evident in various disciplines such as anthropology, American social history, political science, and psychology (Vandello et al., 2008) . It encompasses situations that question

a man's sexuality as well. In her book "The Wimp Factor," Ducat (2004) proposed that masculine anxiety heavily influences politics, emphasizing the necessity for politicians to distance themselves from anything perceived as feminine in order to succeed. Vandello and Bosson et al., (2008) further suggest that feedback that threatens traditional gender roles evokes heightened feelings of anxiety and related emotions (such as threat or shame) among men. Moreover, homophobia can serve as a coping mechanism for men in their efforts to establish a sense of control when experiencing anxiety due to feelings of attraction toward other men (Mahalik et al., 2003).

H3: If men have more negativity towards homosexuals, they will be more socially anxious.

3.5 Importance of Sex (IS)

The importance of sex is a significant antecedent that has been associated with various aspects of traditional masculinity beliefs in men. Several studies have found a positive association between masculinity and the number of sexual partners a man has (Arnocky et al., 2018; Gallup, White, & Gallup, 2007; Shoup & Gallup, 2008). However, contrasting research suggests that men who display more feminine traits tend to report higher levels of promiscuity compared to their more masculine counterparts (Ostovich & Sabini, 2004; Zietsch et al., 2008). The number of sexual partners in men is influenced by social values associated with masculinity (Pleck, 1993).

According to Pleck (1993), men who hold traditional attitudes toward masculinity tend to have a higher number of sexual partners within the past year. Additionally, these men are more

likely to have less intimate relationships during their last sexual encounter, believe in adversarial relationships between men and women, exhibit lower consistency in condom use, hold attitudes associated with low condom use, perceive less responsibility for male involvement in preventing pregnancy, and associate pregnancy with validation of masculinity. These associations persist even after controlling for broader gender role attitudes. Consequently, adherence to traditional masculinity ideology is linked to indicators of reduced quality in heterosexual relationships among adolescent males, as well as increased risks of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The phenomenon known as performance anxiety arises from IS as a performance, where individuals view it as an activity under scrutiny and evaluation by the other. This performance-oriented mindset often leads many men to experience self-consciousness, self-criticism, worry, tension, and anxiety during sexual encounters. Additionally, factors such as personal beliefs, cultural influences, relationship dynamics, and individual differences can all contribute to how men perceive and experience anxiety in relation to the importance of sex. Additionally, the presence of underlying psychological or emotional factors may also influence the relationship between sex importance and anxiety.

H4: If men over-value the importance of sex, they will be more socially anxious.

3.6 Toughness (TO)

The concept of toxic masculinity has frequently been linked to the display of behaviors associated with toughness. According to its definition, toughness is especially pertinent to the suppression of emotions as it stresses the significance of projecting mental, emotional, and physical strength (Bruch, 2002). Expressing one's emotions can potentially expose personal

weaknesses and flaws, which contradicts the image of confidence and self-sufficiency that adherents of toughness strive to convey. Therefore, men who conform to this norm would likely restrain themselves from displaying their emotions (Bruch, 2002). Research suggests that men's inclination towards toughness and the performance of strength can stem from a variety of factors, including cultural norms, socialization processes, and the desire to maintain a sense of power and control. Studies by authors such as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Mahalik et al. (2003) shed light on the influence of gender role expectations on men's adherence to traditional masculine norms, which often include the display of toughness.

The dynamics of male toughness within social interactions and the associated anxiety are complex and multifaceted. Further research, such as that conducted by Wong et al. (2017) and Good et al. (2010), examines the impact of conformity to masculine norms, help-seeking behaviors, and mental health outcomes, providing insights into the intricate relationship between masculinity, toughness, and social interaction anxiety. Furthermore, the pressure to appear strong and dominant in social contexts can contribute to social interaction anxiety among men. This anxiety arises from the fear of being perceived as weak, vulnerable, or lacking in masculine qualities. Men may feel compelled to uphold a tough exterior, suppressing any signs of emotional expression or perceived weaknesses, in order to gain respect and assert their dominance within the social group. Although there is limited scientific literature available on this topic, it is still considered relevant to this study due to its use in the MRNI-R scale.

H5: If men act tougher, they will be more socially anxious.

3.7 Dominance (DO)

Dominance, as the final antecedent, plays a role in assessing the extent to which individuals exert control or influence over others. This concept offers valuable insights into the dynamics of power and authority within social interactions and group settings. Physical dominance, also known as formidability in the psychological literature, is mainly determined by factors such as height and muscularity (Blaker & Van Vugt, 2014). There is substantial evidence that physical dominance has been sexually selected in human males, as it aids in competition (Puts, 2010). For instance, in many traditional societies, men who are strong and win more fights attain more status and resources (Chagnon, 1977; Von Rueden, Gurven, & Kaplan, 2008). Furthermore, women are more attracted to strong, muscular men with resources and status (Buss, 1989; Durkee et al., 2019; Frederick & Haselton, 2007; Sell, Lukazsweski, & Townsley, 2017), and men with more masculine facial features, bodies, and voices have greater mating success (Apicella, Feinberg, & Marlowe, 2007; Hill et al., 2013; Kordsmeyer, Hunt, Puts, Ostner, & Penke, 2018; Lassek & Gaulin, 2009; Puts, 2005; Rhodes, Simmons, & Peters, 2005). Likewise, detecting cues of physical dominance and threat in other men quickly and reliably would have been advantageous for ancestors in avoiding conflicts they were likely to lose and in identifying powerful allies.

For decades, men have exercised dominance across various domains such as politics, media, and the workforce, often becoming intertwined with notions of power and influence. The association between men and dominance has been influenced by traditional masculine values, where exhibiting dominance is seen as a means to showcase strength and assertiveness in order

to acquire power. However, when considering the impact of dominance on social interactions, particularly in relation to social anxiety, it is essential to recognize that excessive dominance can potentially alienate others in social settings, giving rise to perceptions of being bossy and less approachable. Striking a balance between assertiveness and empathy becomes crucial in navigating social dynamics and avoiding possible social interaction anxiety.

The admission of anxiety itself can pose a challenge to the status and dominance of men (Vandello & Bosson et al., 2008). In such cases, feedback that directly threatens their sense of manhood may compel men to downplay or conceal their feelings of anxiety for the purpose of self-presentation. Considering the precarious nature of manhood, which demands action and success in all traditionally masculine pursuits, it is not surprising that many men experience anxiety due to the perceived unattainable standard of dominance (Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; O'Neil et al., 1986; Pleck, 1981). Unfortunately, this anxiety often manifests as physical aggression. Similar to previous research (e.g., Malamuth, Linz, & Heavey, 1995), it is believed that many instances of male aggression can be best understood as responses to anxiety stemming from the pressure to conform to masculine norms and the ongoing need to prove oneself.

H6: If men act more dominant, they will be more socially anxious.

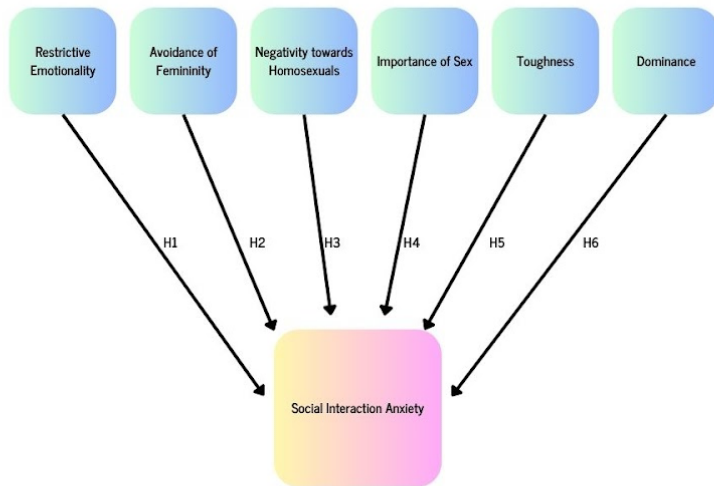


Figure 1 - Conceptual model

These various independent variables are representing the possible relationship with social interaction anxiety in this conceptual model.

4. Methods

4.1 Research Design

The research design for this study was chosen to be a quantitative survey analysis. The survey method was selected due to its popularity for collecting quantitative data, allowing for a simple way to collect data from a large sample of participants in a relatively short amount of time (Gurbuz, 2017). The survey method also provided a structured way of collecting data, which helped ensure that all participants were asked the same questions in the same way. This could increase the reliability and validity of the data. Lastly, by conducting a survey a large amount of the target audience could be reached due to its accessibility. In the survey, participants

were required to answer items in regards to both the MRNI-R scale on toxic masculine antecedents and the SIAS scale. Participants were required to assess their perceptions of the items using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, indicating their level of agreement or disagreement to the item.

4.2 Measurements

Firstly, the survey measured the independent variables; the endorsement of specific traits that existing research has labeled as toxic masculine behavior in college men (Appendix A). Secondly, such endorsement was measured in relation to the dependent variable; participant's level of social anxiety (Appendix B). Seven different scales were used in the survey in order to measure both the independent and dependent variables. At the start of the survey, participants were asked their age, their sex, and if they consent to continue. At this point, participants were faced with their first scale. All scales had the same opening question; "Please select your opinion about the following statements honestly on the scales". This would ensure continuity for all scales. Participants were not informed through the survey on what each scale was measuring, in order to avoid confirmation bias.

The first scale was the RE, and included 12 items which would range from "If I am in pain, it's better for me to keep it to myself rather than to let people know" to "Fathers should teach their sons to mask fear". The probes, just like the ones in the following five scales, is one of the subscales in the Male Role Norms Inventory—Revised (MR-NI-R; Levant & Fischer, 1998; Levant et al.,1992). When answering the items, participants were faced with a Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) and had to rate how applicable the statement was to them. This also applies to the other scales and

items. The second scale was measuring the NH. The scale included eight items which would range from "I think gay men should not kiss in public" to "I think showing affection towards male friends is gay." The items "Displaying affection towards male friends is indicative of homosexuality" and "Men should categorize behaviors typically associated with femininity among other men as 'being gay'" were incorporated into the NH scale. This decision was made based on the recognition that these terms have gained popularity in media and may resonate more effectively with the intended audience, enhancing their understanding and relatability.

The third scale was measuring AF. The scale included five items which would range from "I would avoid holding my girlfriend/wife's purse" to "I think boys should play with action figures not dolls". The fourth scale was measuring IS. The scale included five items which would range from "I would never turn down sex" to "I would use any and all means to "convince" a woman to have sex with me". The fifth scale was measuring TO. The scale included five items which would range from "When life gets tough, I get tough" to "I think a young man should try to be physically tough, even if he's not big". The sixth, and final scale measuring the independent variables, was measuring DO. The scale included five items which would range from "I should be the leader in any group" to "I would provide the discipline in the family".

The seventh scale, the dependent variable, measured social interaction anxiety in the participants. The scale was derived from the SIAS scale developed by Mattick & Clarke, 1998. When responding to these items, participants were also presented with a Likert scale to indicate how applicable the statements are to themselves. The SIAS scale included 18 items which would range from "I have difficulty maintaining eye contact with others" and "I have difficulty talking with new people" to "I have difficulty talking to people I find attractive". All items were taken from the SIAS scale which have been re-tested multiple times for validity and reliability.

4.3 Procedure

Before the data collection procedure, ethical approval (230630) was obtained on the 17th of April. After receiving approval from the ethical committee, a survey was conducted over a period of three weeks. Furthermore, the survey was created in Qualtrics and was shared via the social media platforms Instagram and LinkedIn as well as printed in QR codes and distributed around the University of Twente campus. Through snowball sampling, people were asked to share with other men who fit the demographic to participate as well. The survey procedure began with asking participants for their consent and informing them about how their data would remain anonymous. After this, the first scale of the MRNI-R was introduced to test the independent variables of toxic masculinity. Following this scale, the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale to test the dependent variable of interaction. Both scales had likert scales for participants to use as a response to each prompt. At the end of the survey, the aim of the study was at the very last slide before finalizing the survey, in order for participants not to have confirmation bias while answering the items. After this, participants were asked once more if they consent for their data to be used.

4.4 Scale construction

In order to analyze the data gathered, a PCA factor analysis was conducted for each factor and each item within the factors. This was done in the program Rstudio. PCA is a statistical technique that reduces data dimensionality and uncovers underlying patterns by transforming correlated variables into uncorrelated components. It helps identify latent factors that explain relationships among observed variables. Cronbach's alpha was tested for each factor.

Cronbach's alpha provides a reliability coefficient ranging from zero to one, with higher values indicating greater internal consistency among the items.. A commonly suggested guideline is that a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 or higher is considered satisfactory, although the specific context and field of study should also be taken into account when interpreting the results. For further overview, refer to Table 1.

The data was cleaned before beginning the PCA. The packages loaded in R were haven, rjson, jsonlite, dplyr, tidyr, janitor, tidyverse, psych, CTT, and Lambda4. These packages facilitate importing and exporting data from various statistical software formats, manipulating datasets through filtering, transforming, summarizing, and joining, reshaping and tidying up messy data, as well as conducting factor analysis and other related tasks. Firstly, the original data contained the time each user took to complete the survey in seconds, for clearer analysis it was converted to minutes. Furthermore, columns one to 17 were excluded from the analysis as they contained irrelevant or non-informative data. Surveys between 4 and 30 minutes would be acceptable to investigate. However, surveys lower than 4 minutes would have been completed too quickly and surveys longer than 30 would have taken too long. Lastly, rows with missing data were removed.

For factor 1 (RE), the overall internal consistency of the scale, as measured by cronbach's alpha, was .7, which suggests a moderate level of reliability. When certain items are deleted from the scale, the cronbach's alpha coefficient may increase, indicating higher internal consistency and reliability. The results suggest that those particular items may be less strongly correlated with the underlying factor, and removing them improves the overall internal consistency of the scale. For this factor, the only item that should have been deleted was item 7: "I would not borrow money from friends or family members". If item 7 was deleted, the alpha for factor 1

would have been .7. Overall, factor 1 was reliable and did not have enough alphaIfDeleted items to alter the significance of the items.

For factor 2 (NH), the overall internal consistency of the scale, as measured by cronbach's alpha, was .8, which indicates a high level of reliability for the scale. For this factor, only one item should have been deleted; item 4: "I would never compliment another man that I am not close to". If item 4 was deleted, the alpha for factor two would have been .8. Overall, factor two was reliable and did not have enough alphaIfDeleted items to alter the significance of the items.

The cronbach's alpha coefficient for factor 3 (AF) was .5, indicating moderate internal consistency, yet not above .6, meaning the scale is unreliable. When examining the alphaIfDeleted values, which indicate the cronbach's alpha if a particular item is removed, Item 3 ("I would not wear make-up to conceal flaws (ie: pimples)") should have been removed. If item 3 was deleted, the alpha for factor three would have been .6. Thus, a reliable scale. Overall, these results suggest that factor 3 demonstrates moderate internal consistency, with varying levels of correlation between the items and the underlying factor.

Factor 4 (IS) has a cronbach's alpha coefficient of .6, indicating a moderate level of internal consistency and reliability. The alphaIfDeleted value for factor 4 was .7, suggesting that removing Item three would have increased the alpha. Item 3 was: "I prioritize my own pleasure." Next, the cronbach's alpha coefficient was .6 for factor 5 (TO), indicating a moderate level of internal consistency and reliability. The alphaIfDeleted values did not range above the overall alpha, suggesting that removing certain items would be unneeded in factor 5.

Furthermore, factor 6's (DO) cronbach's alpha coefficient was .7, indicating a good level of internal consistency and reliability. The alphaIfDeleted value .8 was seen in item 5, suggesting

that removing item 5 would have a slight impact on the overall internal consistency of factor 6. The removed item was: "If someone else starts it, I should be allowed to use violence to defend myself". Moreover, the cronbach's alpha coefficient for factor seven (SIAS) was .8, indicating a good level of internal consistency and reliability. The removed items to increase the alphaIfDeleted should have been Item 8 ("I am at ease meeting people at parties, etc.") and 10 ("I find it easy to think of things to talk about").

In summary, the factor analyses show the internal consistency and item-level characteristics of each factor. The cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated the reliability of all factors, while the item-level statistics provide insights into the average scores, item rest correlations, and the impact of removing specific items on the overall consistency of each factor.

Table 1 - Alpha values

Factor	# of items	Alpha	Alpha if deleted
Factor 1	12	.7	.7
Factor 2	8	.8	.8
Factor 3	5	.5	.6
Factor 4	5	.6	.7
Factor 5	5	.6	
Factor 6	5	.7	.8

Factor 7 18 .8 .8

4.5 Participants

Participants anonymously filled out the survey and all had to fit in the same category of age and sex. All participants were presented with the same statements. The demographic for this survey were men from the ages of 18 to 25. 170 participants took part in this research survey. However, a total of 160 of all responses were used for this research. The 10 participants who were removed either did not fit the age range or sex required for the survey. Additionally, some participants took too long to complete the survey (longer than 30 minutes) or too little (below four minutes), thus were also removed from the analysis. Out of the total 10, three were removed for taking too much time, five for taking too little time, and two for selecting a different sex than male. The mean age of participants was 21 years old. The youngest age of participants was 18 and the oldest age was 25. The standard deviation was 1.84.

5. Results

In the results section, key descriptive statistics were calculated for the dataset, providing insights into the central tendency and variability of the data.

5.1 Descriptives

The descriptives section provides a comprehensive overview of the survey results, showcasing key findings and statistical summaries. From the descriptives in the table below, the mean and standard deviation can be seen for each factor. There were mostly lower scores on the constructs, except for toughness and moderate scores for negativity of homosexuals and

dominance. The highest mean was of Toughness at 3.75, and the highest standard deviation was for Avoidance of femininity at 1.26. The lowest mean was of Negativity towards homosexuals at 2.09, and the lowest standard deviation was of Toughness.

Table 2 - Means and standard deviations

Factor	Mean	SD
Emotional restriction	2.66	1.29
Negativity of homosexuals	2.09	1.23
Avoidance of femininity	3.03	1.26
Importance of sex	2.32	1.17
Toughness	3.75	1.01
Dominance	3.17	1.16
Social anxiety	2.76	1.17

5.2 Main effects

After the surveys were completed, the data was exported into Rstudio for a multiple regression analysis. The multiple regression analysis was chosen in order to further investigate the relationship between the dependent and independent variables and explore the p-values. The p-value is a statistical measure that indicates the probability of obtaining the observed data or more extreme results under the assumption that the null hypothesis is true. If the p-value is less

than the chosen alpha level ($p < .05$), it suggests that there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis for that specific variable.

Table 3 shows the results of the multiple linear regression. This was done with the code "model <- lm(SocialAnxiety ~ EmotionalRestriction + NegativityHomo + AvoidanceFem + ImportanceSex + Toughness + Dominance, data = ThesisData)". The intercept is the expected value of the dependent variable when all independent variables are set to zero. In this case, the estimated intercept is 3.19. The t-value of 10.5 indicates that this intercept is significantly different from zero. The p-value ($<2e-16$) suggests strong evidence against the null hypothesis of no intercept effect. Furthermore, the coefficient for restrictive emotionality is 0.25. It suggests that, on average, a one-unit increase in restrictive emotionality is associated with a 0.25 unit increase in the dependent variable. The t-value of 2.50 indicates that this coefficient is statistically significant at the .05 level (p-value = .01). The coefficient for negativity towards homosexuals is -0.02. However, the t-value of -0.39 suggests that this coefficient is not statistically significant (p-value = .69). Therefore, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that negativity towards homosexuals has a significant effect on the dependent variable.

The coefficient for avoidance of femininity is -0.18. It suggests that, on average, a one-unit increase in avoidance of femininity is associated with a 0.18 unit decrease in the dependent variable. The t-value of -2.08 indicates that this coefficient is statistically significant at the .05 level (p-value = .03). Additionally, the coefficient for importance of sex is .12. It suggests that, on average, a one-unit increase in importance of sex is associated with a .12 unit increase in the dependent variable. The t-value of 1.78 suggests that this coefficient is not statistically significant at the conventional .05 level (p-value = .07). However, it is worth noting that it is close to the threshold for significance.

Furthermore, the coefficient for toughness is -0.102. The t-value of -1.11 suggests that this coefficient is not statistically significant (p-value = .26). Hence, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that toughness has a significant effect on the dependent variable. Lastly, the coefficient for dominance is -0.11. The t-value of -1.45 suggests that this coefficient is not statistically significant (p-value = .14). As a result, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that dominance has a significant effect on the dependent variable.

Table 3 - Main effects

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
(Intercept)	3.19	0.30	10.5	<2e-16 ***
Restrictive emotionality	0.25	0.10	2.50	.01 *
Negativity towards homosexuals	-0.02	0.07	-0.39	.69
Avoidance of femininity	-0.18	0.08	-2.08	.03 *
Importance of sex	0.12	0.06	1.78	.07 .
Toughness	-0.10	0.09	-1.11	.26
Dominance	-0.11	0.08	-1.45	.14

Note: Signif. codes: 0 '****' 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

6. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between various toxic masculine antecedents and social interaction anxiety. This was represented in the current research question: "To what extent do self-reported toxic masculine antecedents affect social interaction anxiety in college-aged men?".

6.1 Answering RQ

Firstly, the results of the multiple regression analysis showed that restrictive emotionality (RE) significantly predicted SIA scores, indicating that higher scores on emotional restriction were associated with higher levels of social interaction anxiety. The positive beta coefficient suggests that higher scores on RE are associated with higher levels of SIA. Therefore, H1 is accepted. Extensive research has been conducted on men and their tendency towards restrictive emotionality, indicating that high scores in this domain are not unexpected. Nevertheless, limited studies have explored the association and potential adverse effects of restrictive emotionality specifically in college-aged men. Therefore, these findings shed some light on this understudied area, offering an opportunity for further research and a deeper understanding of the implications of restrictive emotionality among college-aged men. In a study conducted by Levant et al. (2010), the relationship between the items of the Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI-R) and alexithymia was investigated. Alexithymia refers to a difficulty in identifying and describing one's own emotions. The findings of the study revealed a significant association between the participants' emotional restriction scores on the MRNI-R and alexithymia ($p < .01$).

Following this, a series of studies (Fischer & Good, 1997; Levant et al., 2003; Berger et al., 2005; Levant et al., 2006) have demonstrated a correlation between the adoption of

traditional masculinity ideology and the lack of showing feelings in men. Consistent findings have linked men's restricted expression of emotions to various negative outcomes, including higher levels of alexithymia (Fischer & Good, 1997; Shepard, 1994), increased paranoia and psychoticism (Good, Robertson, Fitzgerald, Stevens, & Bartels, 1996), fear of intimacy (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Fischer & Good, 1997; Good et al., 1995), elevated levels of depression (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Good & Mintz, 1990; Good et al., 1996), a greater inclination towards hostile-submissive personality styles (Mahalik, 2000), and higher levels of anxiety, anger, and personality traits resembling those of individuals with substance abuse issues (Blazina & Watkins, 1996). Moreover, studies have shown that men who conceal their emotions tend to face a range of challenges, including lower self-esteem (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995), difficulties in forming intimate relationships (Fischer & Good, 1997; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991), and heightened levels of depression and anxiety (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Good & Mintz, 1990; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991). Given the extensive body of existing research on the profound influence of restrictive emotionality on men, this conclusion is well-supported.

Similarly, avoidance of feminine traits (AF) was found to have a significant association with SIA scores, suggesting that higher scores on avoidance of feminine traits were associated with lower levels of social interaction anxiety. Therefore, H2 is rejected. Considerable research has been devoted to investigating men and their tendency to avoid femininity, with many studies highlighting paternal upbringing as a potential influencing factor. Therefore, the observation of high scores among men in the avoidance of femininity category is consistent with existing knowledge. However, there is a notable lack of studies examining the association and potential detrimental effects of avoidance of femininity in social anxiety specifically in college-aged men. When men exhibit behaviors that are deemed traditionally masculine, such as avoiding feminine

traits, they may perceive themselves as meeting societal expectations and fitting into the desired masculine mold. This alignment with cultural norms can lead to increased confidence and a feeling of security in social interactions. By embodying characteristics that are praised and valued within their cultural context, these men may believe they are more likely to be respected, admired, and socially accepted.

Men who conform to these norms may have a better understanding of what is expected of them in various contexts, allowing them to navigate social interactions with greater ease. They may have internalized societal messages that emphasize the importance of projecting strength, control, and dominance, which can contribute to a sense of confidence and security in their interactions. McMahon's 2019 study on men's emotional restriction through femininity found that the emotional restriction exhibited by men was determined by the interplay between high scores on masculinity and low scores on femininity. The findings of this study seem consistent with this thesis. As per various theories, the presence of restrictive emotionality can result in the inadequate development of coping mechanisms for emotions and suggest that men may resort to converting their vulnerable emotions into aggression and displaying aggressive reactions when they experience emotional distress and is a major factor in toxic masculinity (O'Neil et al., 1995)(O'Neil, 2015)(Levant et al. 2015)(Levant et al., 2006).

Additionally, the unexpected nature of this specific result underscores the need for additional research to comprehensively understand how the avoidance of feminine traits may contribute to a decrease in social anxiety. These findings are inconsistent with Vandello's (et al., 2008) theories. According to Vandello et al. (2008), when men deviate from traditional male norms, they frequently encounter stress and anxiety, leading them to make efforts to reaffirm their masculinity in order to alleviate these negative emotions, both internally and in the eyes of

others. Furthermore, O'Neil (1986) conducted a study on college men's fear of femininity and found that six patterns of gender-role conflict all derived from the core of fearing femininity. In this study, a different scale was used to assess men's patterns of self reported toxic masculinity. Within the study, the Gender Role Conflict Scale measured distinct patterns of success, power, and competition, as well as restrictive emotionality and a lack of emotional responsiveness, which were evident in men's self-reports and also observed in situational contexts. Which, according to the core of theory, is derived from the fear of femininity. Although the study did not measure fear of femininity as an individual item, it still does not confirm the findings of this study. Numerous studies have been undertaken to investigate the phenomenon of men's avoidance of feminine traits (Boehm, 1930; Hays, 1964; Horney, 1967; Jung, 1953, 1954; Lederer, 1968; Menninger, 1970), yet none have specifically focused on examining the effects of men's avoidance of feminine traits on social interaction anxiety or reported corresponding results.

On the other hand, the analysis indicated that the importance of sex (IS), toughness (TO), dominance (DO), and negativity towards homosexuality (NH) did not significantly predict SIA scores. The p-values for these variables were above the threshold of .05, indicating insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, H3, H4, H5, and H6 are rejected. The lack of significance in the findings may be attributed to various reasons. The characteristics of the sample used in the study may have influenced the results. The findings might differ in different populations or contexts. Social interaction anxiety is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors, including individual differences, environmental factors, and interpersonal dynamics. Furthermore, it is important to note that limited research has specifically focused on these antecedents of toxic masculinity in isolation, let alone their relationship with social anxiety.

Previous research has highlighted the significance of all three factors (IS, TO, DO and NH) in the construct of toxic masculinity, which are found to be prevalent among men adhering to traditional masculine beliefs (Beasley, 2008) (Berent et al., 2015)(Pleck 1993)(Bruch, 2002). Nonetheless, out of 11 dimensions of conformity to masculine norms, dimensions such as winning, violence, dominance, primacy of work, disdain for homosexuals, and pursuit of status did not demonstrate significant impact on men's mental health (Wong et al., 2017). However, the scarcity of research examining the relationship between these factors and social anxiety should not diminish the importance of understanding their impact. These toxic masculine factors remain highly relevant and deserve thorough investigation.

In summary, the results of this study suggest that emotional restriction and avoidance of femininity are significant factors in predicting social interaction anxiety (SIA) scores, but in different ways. Results show that men who are more emotionally restricted also have higher social interaction anxiety. However, men who avoid feminine traits have less social interaction anxiety. Both outcomes have a P-value .05, thus have statistical significance. However, the variables of importance attached to sex, toughness, dominance, and negativity towards homosexuality did not show a significant relationship with SIA scores. These findings contribute to the understanding of the factors influencing social interaction anxiety and emphasize the importance of emotional restriction and avoidance of feminine traits within the context of toxic masculinity. Further research is needed to explore the significance of other variables and their impact on social interaction anxiety. Numerous scales have been devised, consistently identifying these antecedents as prevalent factors in toxic masculinity. Such as the GRCS scale by O'Neil (1986), MRNI-R scale by Levant et al., (1992; Levant & Fischer, 1998) , and the

CMNI scale by Mahalik et al. (2003). However, their relationships with social interaction anxiety, particularly among college-aged men, remains largely unexplored.

Based on the obtained results, the research question pertaining to the impact of self-reported toxic masculine antecedents on social interaction anxiety in college-aged men can be addressed. The findings indicate that out of the six self-reported toxic masculine antecedents examined, two of them exhibit a significant association with social interaction anxiety in college-aged men.

6.2 Practical implications

The main take-home message from this study is that emotional restriction and avoidance of feminine traits are significant factors in predicting social interaction anxiety among college-aged men. Men who exhibit higher levels of emotional restriction tend to experience higher social interaction anxiety, while those who avoid feminine traits tend to have lower social interaction anxiety. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing toxic masculine antecedents and promoting healthier expressions of emotions and gender roles.

Educational programs and initiatives can be developed in universities (and highschools) to promote emotional literacy and encourage healthy expression of emotions among men. Additionally, promoting understanding and acceptance of diverse gender expressions and breaking down stereotypes associated with femininity may contribute to further research on whether that could reduce social anxiety. Moreover, college-aged men who exhibit higher levels of emotional restriction may benefit from counseling and support services that address social anxiety. Therapeutic interventions can focus on developing emotional regulation skills, enhancing assertiveness, and providing a safe space for men to explore and express their

emotions. Further, the results suggest the need for reevaluating traditional gender roles and norms that contribute to toxic masculinity. Challenging societal expectations and promoting more inclusive and flexible definitions of masculinity can create a healthier environment for men to navigate social interactions without anxiety. Universities can play a vital role in fostering a supportive environment for students by providing resources such as counseling services, workshops, and awareness campaigns addressing toxic masculinity and social anxiety. Collaborative efforts between academic departments, student organizations, and mental health services can promote a culture of emotional well-being and inclusivity.

It is worth noting that media plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and influencing individuals' perceptions of masculinity. The portrayal of toxic masculine traits in media, such as promoting emotional restriction and avoidance of femininity as desirable qualities, can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to social interaction anxiety among men. This highlights the need for media organizations to actively engage in the creation and dissemination of content that encourages positive masculinity and supports the well-being of individuals, particularly college-aged men. Therefore, it is crucial for media platforms to take responsibility and promote healthier norms for men.

It is important to note that these practical implications should be implemented in a nuanced and comprehensive manner, taking into consideration individual differences, cultural contexts, and the intersectionality of identities. Collaboration among researchers, educators, mental health professionals, and policy-makers is crucial for developing effective strategies to address social interaction anxiety and promote healthier masculine identities among college-aged men.

6.3 Limitations

The present study is not without limitations, which should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the period of time allocated for conducting the study was relatively short, spanning only a few months. Conducting a comprehensive investigation into the complex relationship between toxic masculine constructs and social interaction anxiety typically requires a longer timeframe, possibly extending over a year or more. The limited time available for data collection and analysis may have constrained the scope of the study and potentially impacted the depth of exploration into certain aspects. Additionally, a larger sample size could have been preferable in this scenario, as it would have provided more data for analysis. A larger sample size generally leads to increased statistical power and improved generalizability of the findings. However, the current sample size was limited by time constraints. In a typical situation, researchers would aim for a larger and more representative group of participants to gather a more comprehensive and reliable dataset within a longer period of time.

Second, it is important to acknowledge that there is a lack of extensive research on some specific toxic masculine constructs within the context of social interaction anxiety. While numerous scales and measures have been developed to assess toxic masculinity, not all constructs have been equally explored or validated. The absence of a large body of literature on certain toxic masculine constructs limits the depth of understanding and the ability to make comprehensive comparisons and interpretations within the context of this study. Additionally, it is worth noting that the researcher conducting this study was a woman. The potential influence of the researcher's gender on the study outcomes and interpretations is a valid concern. As the thesis specifically focuses on men and toxic masculinity in men, there is a possibility that the researcher's gender may introduce a bias or influence in data collection, analysis, and

interpretation. While efforts were made to ensure objectivity and maintain a neutral stance, it is important to acknowledge and critically reflect upon the potential influence of the researcher's perspective.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes valuable insights into the relationship between certain toxic masculine constructs and social interaction anxiety among college-aged men. The findings provide a foundation for further research and highlight the need for comprehensive investigations that address the limitations identified. Future studies with longer durations, broader exploration of toxic masculine constructs, and a diverse range of researchers can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved. It is recommended that researchers in this field consider these limitations and address them in future studies to advance knowledge and understanding of the impact of toxic masculinity on social interaction anxiety among men.

6.4 Conclusions

The present study investigated the relationship between various toxic masculine antecedents and social interaction anxiety among college-aged men. The findings of this study align with previous research and highlight the significant role of certain toxic masculine antecedents in social interaction anxiety. Restrictive emotionality (RE) was found to be a significant predictor, with higher scores on emotional restriction associated with higher levels of social interaction anxiety. This result supports previous studies on men and their tendency towards emotional restriction. Notably, limited research has explored the association and potential adverse effects of emotional restriction specifically in college-aged men, making these findings significant and offering an opportunity for further investigation.

Additionally, avoidance of femininity (AF) was found to have a significant association with social interaction anxiety, with higher scores on avoidance of feminine traits associated with lower levels of social interaction anxiety. This finding is consistent with existing research on men and their tendency to avoid femininity. The observation of high scores among men in the avoidance of femininity category highlights the need for further studies to comprehensively understand how this construct contributes to a decrease in social anxiety, particularly among college-aged men.

However, this study did not find significant associations between social interaction anxiety and the importance of sex (IS), toughness (TO), dominance (DO), and negativity towards homosexuals (NH). These results suggest that these specific toxic masculine antecedents may not be significant predictors of social interaction anxiety among college-aged men within the scope of this study. However, it is important to acknowledge the scarcity of research specifically focused on these antecedents in relation to social anxiety, and further investigation is warranted.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the factors influencing social interaction anxiety in college-aged men. The findings highlight the significance of emotional restriction and avoidance of feminine traits within the context of toxic masculinity. Addressing these toxic masculine antecedents and promoting healthier expressions of emotions and gender roles can contribute to reducing social interaction anxiety. Educational programs, counseling services, and initiatives that challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes can play a vital role in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for college-aged men.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A

Male Role Norm Inventory Revised Levant & Fischer, 1998

Factor 1: Restrictive Emotionality

- 36. If a man is in pain, it's better for him to keep it to himself rather than to let people know.
- 53. Men should not be too quick to tell others that they care about them.
- 41. Men should be detached in emotionally charged situations.
- 47. Fathers should teach their sons to mask fear.
- 33. Being a little "down in the dumps" is not a good reason for a man to act depressed.
- 26. A man should avoid holding his girlfriend/ wife's purse at all times.
- 12. Men should not borrow money from friends or family members.
- 46. I might find it a little silly or embarrassing if a male friend of mine cried over a sad love story. (Avoidance of Femininity)
- 40. A man shouldn't bother with sex unless he can achieve an orgasm. (Importance of sex)
- 12. Men should never tell others if they're worried or afraid.
- 33. Men should not show fear.
- 28. Men should not tell their girlfriends they care about them
- 36. If a man is in pain, it's better for him to keep it to himself rather than to let people know

Factor 2: Negativity Towards Homosexuals

8. All gay bars should be closed down.
25. Gay men should not kiss in public.
52. It is disappointing to learn that a famous athlete is gay.
18. Men should never compliment or flirt with another man.
23. Men should never hold hands or show affection toward another.
 1. Showing affection towards male friends is gay.
 2. Men should address feminine things other men do as "being gay"
32. A man should not continue a friendship with another man if he finds out that the other man is homosexual. (Restrictive Emotionality)

Factor 3: Avoidance of Femininity

11. Boys should play with action figures not dolls.
15. A man should prefer watching action movies to reading romantic novels.
6. Men should not wear make-up to conceal flaws (ie: pimples).
9. Men should not be interested in talk shows such as "Oprah."
10. Men should excel at contact sports.

Factor 4: Importance of Sex

- 43. A man should always be ready for sex.
- 20. A man should not turn down sex.
- 44. A man should prioritize his own pleasure.
- 16. Men should always like to have sex.
- 24. It is ok for a man to use any and all means to “convince” a woman to have sex.

Factor 5: Toughness

- 45. When the going gets tough, men should get tough.
- 48. I think a young man should try to be physically tough, even if he’s not big.
- 39. Men should get up to investigate if there is a strange noise in the house at night.
- 42. It is important for a man to take risks, even if he might get hurt.
- 27. A man must be able to make his own way in the world.

Factor 6: Dominance

- 3. Men should be the leader in any group.
- 51. Men should make the final decision involving money.
- 22. A man should provide the discipline in the family.
- 44. A man should always be the major provider in his family.
- 23. If someone else starts it, a man should be allowed to use violence to defend himself.

Appendix B

Social Interaction Anxiety Scale Mattick & Clarke, 1998

1. I get nervous if I have to speak with someone in authority (teacher, boss, etc.)
2. I have difficulty making eye contact with others
3. I become tense if I have to talk about myself or my feelings
4. I find difficulty mixing comfortably with the people I study with
5. I tense up if I meet an acquaintance on the street
6. When mixing socially I am uncomfortable
7. I feel tense if I am alone with just one other person
8. I am at ease meeting people at parties, etc.
9. I have difficulty talking with new people
10. I find it easy to think of things to talk about
11. I worry about expressing myself in case I appear awkward
12. I find it difficult to disagree with another's point of view
13. I have difficulty talking to attractive people of the opposite sex
14. I find myself worrying that I won't know what to say in social situations
16. I feel I'll say something embarrassing when talking
17. When mixing in a group I find myself worrying I will be ignored
18. I am tense mixing in a new group
19. I am unsure whether to greet someone I know only slightly

Appendix C

Survey consent page 1

Hello!

Thank you for choosing to participate.

This survey is part of a bachelor thesis and set up in cooperation with the University of Twente and the faculty of BMS. All responses will be treated with confidentiality and will be kept fully anonymous. The data will only be used for the purpose of this thesis.

This survey will take around 10 minutes. Please beware, the survey should be done alone and with enough time at hand to complete all questions.

For the purpose of this thesis, only answers from the *male sex, ages 18-25, and in university* will be accepted. If you are not a man from ages 18-25 in university, please, withdraw now from the survey.

For any further inquiries, please contact the researcher via email;
d.f.giuziocarvalhomacedo@student.utwente.nl

Below, you may consent to the anonymized data being used for this research. If you do not consent please leave this survey.

Appendix D

Survey consent page 2

This is the end of the survey!

The aim of this study is to measure factors of Traditional Masculinity in "college-aged" men and explore those relations to Social Anxiety.

For any further inquiries, please contact the researcher via email;

d.f.giuziocarvalhomacedo@student.utwente.nl

To finalize, please confirm once again the anonymous use of your data.

Appendix E

Table 4 – Factor loadings

Factor	Highest*	Item	Lowest*	Item
Factor 1	3.28	1	0.37	12
Factor 2	4.47	1	0.16	8
Factor 3	1.93	1	0.52	5
Factor 4	2.31	1	0.41	5
Factor 5	2.06	1	0.59	5
Factor 6	2.74	1	0.27	5
Factor 7	6.65	1	0.26	18

Note: Eigen Value*

Appendix F

Moment of search	Search terms used	Amount of hits	Useful articles
1-3-2023	"Toxic" AND "Masculinity"	228	1
2-3-2023	"Traditional" AND "Masculinity"	1,943	8
7-3-203	"Toxic" AND "Masculinity" AND "Parenting"	1	0
9-3-2023	"Toxic" AND "Masculinity" AND "Socialization"	7	1
19-3-2023	"Male" AND "Role" AND "Norms" AND "Inventory"	104	2
19-3-2023	"Interaction" AND "Scale"	109,008	5
4-4-2023	"Men" AND "Restrictive" AND "Emotionality"	62	3
5-4-2023	"Men" AND "Emotionality"	399	4
8-4-2023	"Men" AND "Negativity" AND "Gay"	58	0
8-4-2023	"Men" AND "Homonegativity"	46	0

8-4-2023	"Heterosexual" AND "Men" AND "Homonegativity"	90	0
8-4-2023	"Men" AND "Avoidance" AND "Femininity"	32	0
8-4-2023	Men AND "Femininity"	2100	0
8-4-2023	Feminine AND "Men"	2452	5
10-4-2023	Men AND "Sex" AND "Importance"	6804	0
10-4-2023	Men AND "Sex" AND "Hetero"	116	0
10-4-2023	Men AND "Toughness"	230	1
10-4-2023	Men AND "Dominance"	3,10	1
14-5-2023	"Men" AND "Sexual" AND "Partners"	11,565	0
14-5-2023	Men AND "Sex"	140,633	0