Surveying Masculinity: Men's Perceptions of Sexual Violence in the Workplace

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About

      This project aims to re-analyze survey data about men, masculinity, and sexual violence. The project uses different visualizations in order to explain theories of masculinity and the quantitative survey results. The project hopes to see whether or not the survey can accurately represent men's perceptions of sexual violence in the workplace, and if so, determine what these perceptions are.

Introduction

      FiveThirtyEight and WYNC Studios—in partnership with SurveyMonkey—surveyed 1,615 self-identifying adult men in the United States between May 10-22, 2018. This survey contained 30 questions centered on the topic of masculinity. Respondents were asked about their dating relationships, workplace culture, and the #MeToo movement. The results of this survey were reported in Ella Koeze and Anna Maria Barry-Jester's 2018 article "What Do Men Think It Means To Be A Man?"

      Koeze and Barry-Jester's article, however, was superficial and failed to deeply analyze the richness of the survey responses. Their report focused on exacting statistics and neglected to consider the significance of the findings in a historic or cultural context. This lack of critical analysis makes Koeze and Barry-Jester's results misleading, as their article does not consider any contributing or confounding variables.

      This project reexamines the survey's raw data and explores men's perceptions of sexual violence in the workplace. It considers how the #MeToo movement may affect these perceptions by tracing how different structures and theories of masculinity contribute to a Western representation of manhood.

#MeToo

Starting in 2006, the #MeToo movement aims to help survivors of sexual violence find pathways to healing. The hashtag, popularized on Twitter by Alyssa Milano in 2017, has since evolved into a global platform for social justice advocacy. The movement has two primary goals:

1. Address the lack of resources available to survivors of sexual harassment and violence
2. Build a community of advocates, driven by survivors, who will interrupt sexual violence in their communities

While the movement has been successful in promoting awareness, it has been indifferent to how it polarizes and shapes men. Male experiences of sexual violence have been largely lost or ignored by the #MeToo movement, affecting the ways in which men perceive other men. Men are also less likely to experience sexual assault than women, suggesting that the workplace is less dangerous for men than women. And although men have more mobility in work environments, they have less access to resources because of social attitudes and stereotypes about men and masculinity.

Moving forward, women should continue to lead discussions surrounding sexual violence, but also consider what role, besides perpetrator, men play in #MeToo.

Masculine Identity

An understanding of masculinity's evolution over time is necessary in order to unpack the significance of FiveThirtyEight's survey data. This background will help provide theoretical context while analyzing the data.
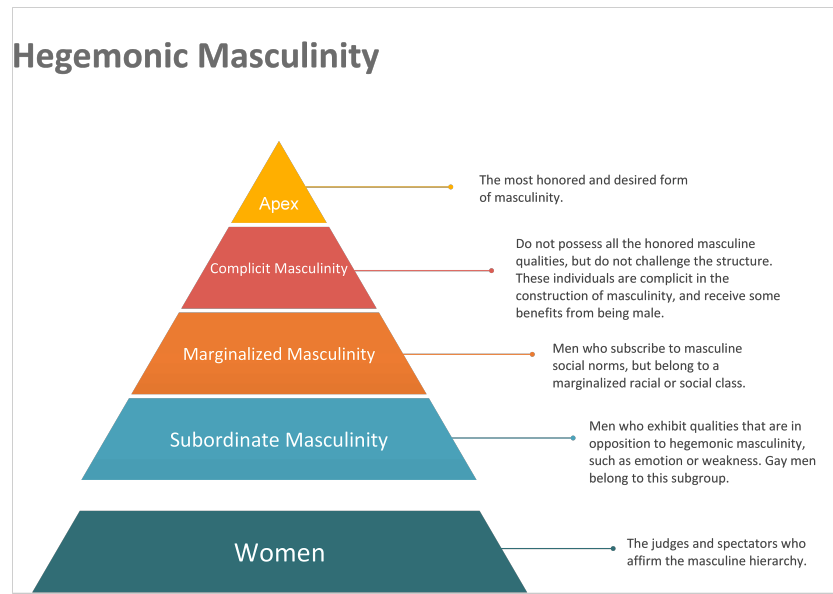
Hegemonic Masculinity

The foundation of masculinity theory starts with R.W. Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity, an omega point for understanding the construction of Western gender identities. Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as the force or ideology among men that is most honored or valued at one moment in time; this idealized form "requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women [and gay men]" (Connell 2005). Hegemonic masculinity, however, is not a fixed character; rather, it is the construction that occupies the position of power at a given, contestable moment. This idea suggests that men are in constant competition with one another in order to position themselves at the hegemonic apex. As a result, this structure gives way to argue for a plurality of masculinities.

Psychologist Robert Brannon (1976) gives evidence to Connell's claims by insisting that masculinity has historically been comprised of 4 main themes:
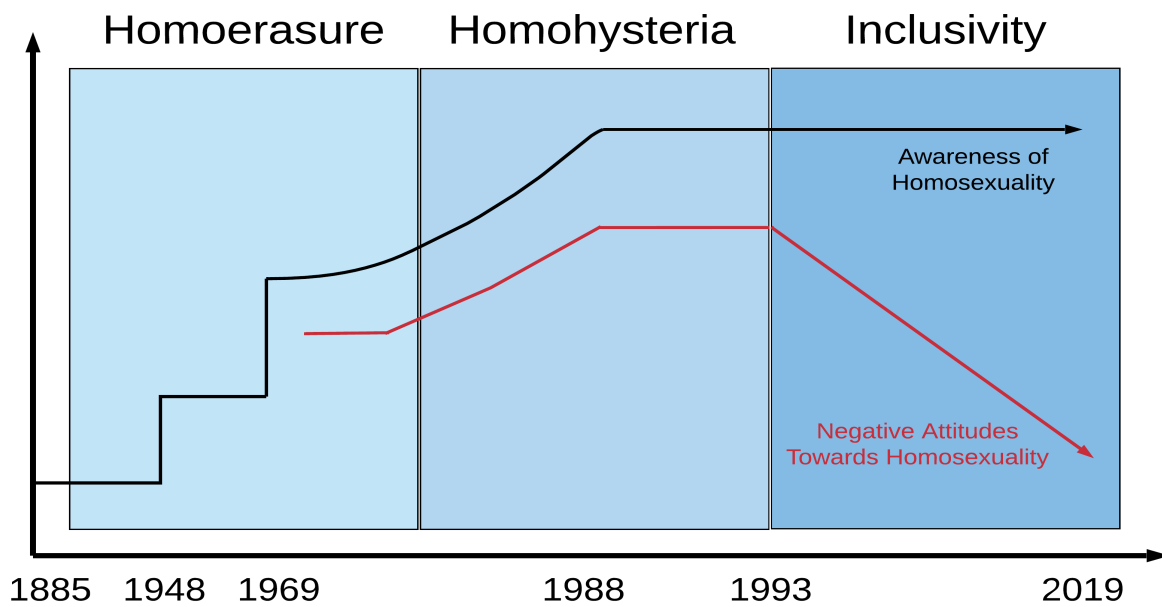
- **No Sissy Stuff:** The stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability.
- **The Big Wheel:** Success, status, and the need to be looked up to.
- **The Sturdy Oak:** A manly air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance.
- **Give 'Em Hell!:** The aura of aggression, violence, and daring.

These themes create a contrasting reality: men hold institutional power in patriarchal societies, but most men do not feel powerful. This is because masculinity is constructed like a pyramid, and not all men can belong to the apex. Instead, masculine capital is accrued through adhering to Brannon's model, which affirms power through female subjugation. The following chart represents the varying structures of hegemonic masculinity:

Hegemonic Masculinity

- **Apex** — The most honored and desired form of masculinity.
- **Complicit Masculinity** — Do not possess all the honored masculine qualities, but do not challenge the structure. These individuals are complicit in the construction of masculinity, and receive some benefits from being male.
- **Marginalized Masculinity** — Men who subscribe to masculine social norms, but belong to a marginalized racial or social class.
- **Subordinate Masculinity** — Men who exhibit qualities that are in opposition to hegemonic masculinity, such as emotion or weakness. Gay men belong to this subgroup.
- **Women** — The judges and spectators who affirm the masculine hierarchy.

Inclusive Masculinity

Since the construction of hegemonic masculine theory in the 1970-80s, the Western climate has become more inclusive to feminine or "soft" forms of masculinity, and has moved away from what Eric Anderson has termed homohysteria, or "men's fear of being homosexualized" (Anderson 2011). This shift adopts the idea of "inclusive masculinity"—or masculinity that is less homosexually panicked—and functions as a flexible icon set to replace Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. Anderson's research discovered that "a decrease in homophobia simultaneously permits an expansion of heteromasculine boundaries" (Anderson 2011). The fall of homohysteria permits men to enjoy the privileges of the feminine world, including access to emotions and intimacy. The acceptance of feminine attributes flattens the hegemonic hierarchy and reconstructs social power laterally. Although inclusive masculinity has provided a broader avenue through which men may live their lives, it still affirms that there is a position of power to be achieved at the cost of women.

Homoerasure   Homohysteria   Inclusivity

Awareness of Homosexuality

Negative Attitudes Towards Homosexuality

1885 1948 1969   1988   1993   2019

(Diagram redrawn from Anderson and McCormack's original)

The above diagram explains the progression of masculinity over the last 100+ years. As negative attitudes towards homosexuality decrease, the range of social mobility between men increases. This inverse relationship echoes Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory, as it confirms male power is impacted by female-coded behavior.

Each of these theoretical frameworks guide understandings of masculinity, and will serve as backdrops for the contemporary analysis below.

Demographics

An exploratory analysis of survey demographics is usually insufficient. Standard measurements, such as mean, median, and mode, are informative, but at times misleading. Therefore, it is crucial that measured demographics be analyzed in relation to applicable context. The survey's GitHub repository page states that "[t]he modeled error estimate for this survey is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. The percentages have been weighted for age, race,

education, and geography using the Census Bureau's American Community Survey to reflect the demographic composition of the United States age 18 and over." The project claims to be demographically representative, but that is not necessarily the case.

Age

Age is the only demographic facet that Koeze and Barry-Jester analyze in their article. This is strange given that their survey collected a rich assortment of data ranging from race/ethnicity to number of children. Because age is the only addressed identifier, it will be the first area placed under inspection.

91.76% (1,482/1,615) of the men who took this survey are 35-years-old or older. The overwhelming majority of respondents were born and raised during a time period in which more traditional forms of masculinity were assumed. This suggests that most survey respondents will understand masculinity as rigid and hierarchical. Consequently, individuals with more modern (and inclusive) understandings of masculinity will be underrepresented in the survey.

Percent of Respondents by Age
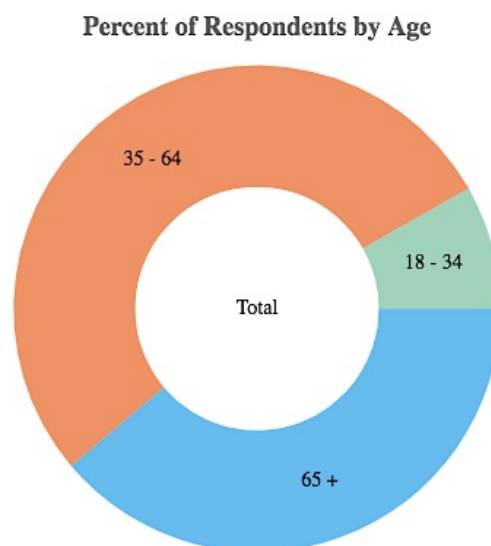
Age and Social Pressure

  FiveThirtyEight's survey asked men if they believed society puts pressure on them in a way that is unhealthy or bad. Koeze and Barry-Jester's article compared the responses to this question to the survey-taker's age. Their original chart is found below:
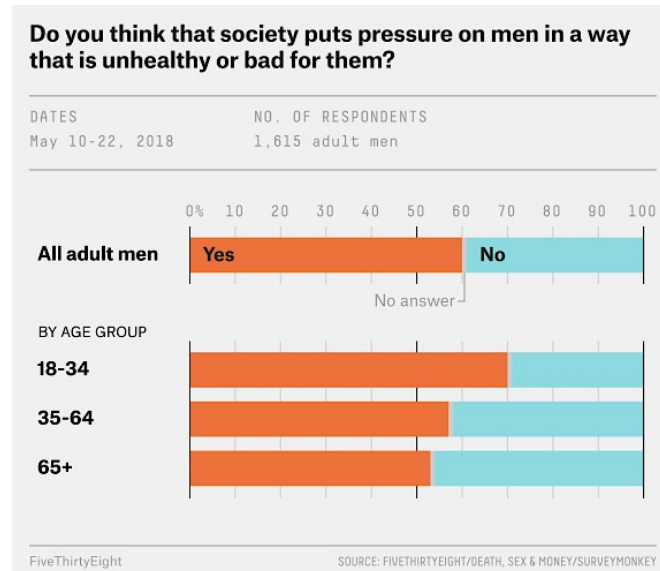

Their chart shows that the majority of men, regardless of age group, believe that society puts pressure on them in a way that is unhealthy or bad. However, it does not prove that sexual violence or the #MeToo movement are the cause of this belief. Much of their analysis points towards the #MeToo as a site of social influence. Yet, as this argument will show, #MeToo has little effect on masculine attitudes. It does, though, show that younger men are more likely to feel negatively pressured by society. This may suggest that younger men find it more difficult to adhere to prescriptive forms of masculinity.

Age and Working Status

Only 54.5% (880/1,615) of the respondents are currently a part of the workforce. These individuals' opinions hold greater weight in conversations surrounding sexual violence in the workplace, as they actively participate in a work environment. Those that are retired hold a less important position in this analysis, as it is unknown how long these individuals have been absent from the workplace. And those who are currently unemployed are the most dubious; it is uncertain what their relationship to the workforce might be.

The responses of the men who are unemployed or retired cannot be thoughtfully analyzed or fully understood. By admitting that they are not actively part of the workforce, these men were not permitted to answer questions on the following topics: the #MeToo movement, sexual harassment in the workplace, or men's advantages/disadvantages at work.

The number of informative survey results is therefore 880.

Proportion of Respondents by Age and Working Status
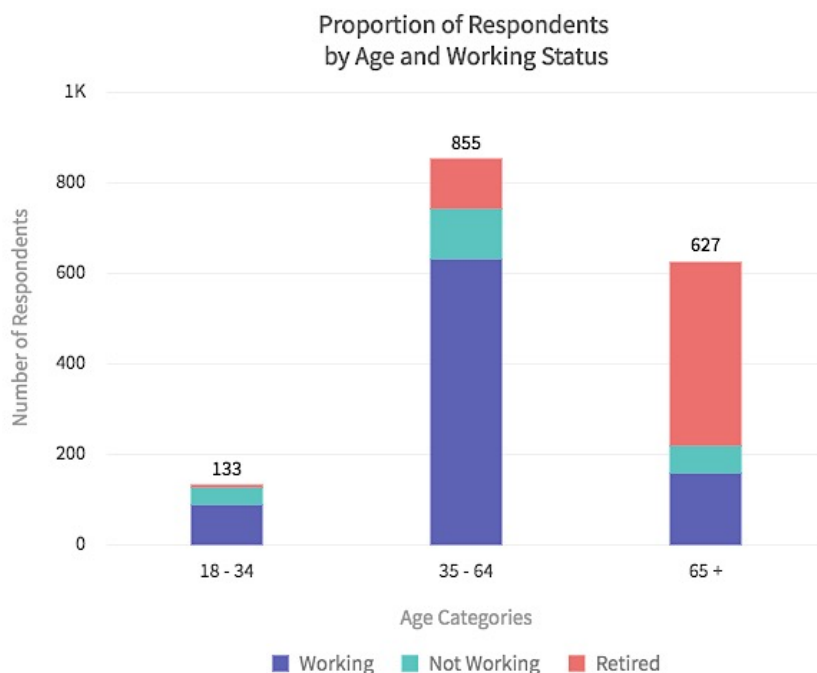
Geography

      Men from all 50 states are included in the survey results, and the number of respondents from each state are indeed weighted in relation to census population data. Even when considering only the 880 working men, the data remains geographically representative. This is beneficial, as it shows that men from different cultures and regions are included in the survey results.

Survey Responses by State
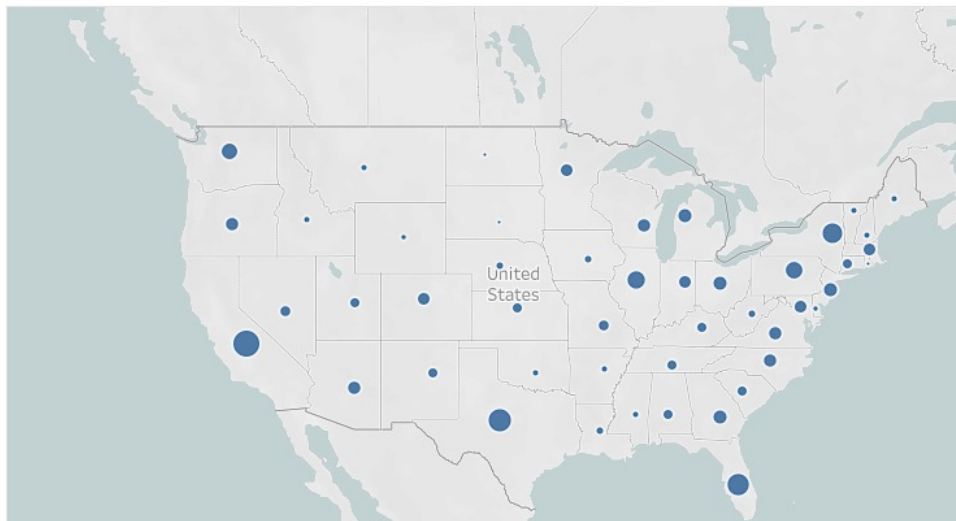
Race

      The racial representation of the 880 working men is disproportionate to the 2017 census estimates. White men are overrepresented in the survey, while men of color are underrepresented in every category. Even when adjusting the results for unemployment rates, the survey fails to capture a representative sample.

Race	Census Data	Survey Data
White	60.7%	80%
Black	13.4%	5%
Asian	5.8%	3%
Hispanic	18.1%	6%
Other	2%	6%
	Total 100%	**Total** 100%

Advantages

The 880 employed respondents were asked if men recieve any of the following *advantages* at work. They were permitted to select multiple options:

1. Men make more money

2. Men generally have more support from their managers

3. Men have more promotion/professional development opportunities

4. Men are explicitly praised more often

5. Men have more choice

6. Men are taken more seriously

7. None of the above

8. Other

Men were more likely to claim that there is no advantage to being male in the workplace.

- 59.6% (525/880) of the currently employed men selected "None of the above."

- 59.3% (70/118) of the Asian, Black, & Hispanic employed men selected "None of the above."

- 53.8% (42/78) of the Gay/Bisexual employed men selected "None of the above."

Several 2-proportion Z-tests confirm that there is no statistical significance between the responses given by queer men or men of color. That is to say, queer men and men of color are just as likely to say there is no advantage to being male in the workplace as their straight, white counterparts.

Disadvantages

The 880 employed respondents were asked if men receive any of the following *disadvantages* at work. They were permitted to select multiple options:

1. Managers want to hire and promote women

2. Greater risk of being accused of sexual harassment

3. Greater risk of being accused of being sexist or racist

4. None of the above

5. Other

Men were more likely to claim that there is a disadvantage to being male in the workplace.

- 56.8% (500/880) of the currently employed men chose at least one of the first three options.

Unrelated Variables

Directly following their chart on disadvantages in the workplace, Koeze and Barry-Jester present their findings about the #MeToo movement. 77% of employed men have at least some knowledge of the movement.

However, men were asked about the #MeToo movement *after* being asked about advantages/disadvantages in the workplace. One is not predicated upon the other. By placing these statistics side-by-side, Koeze and Barry-Jester are able to make the figures appear related. Men may feel disadvantaged in the workplace, but the cause is not necessarily the #MeToo movement. Even so, 1/3 of employed men feel that the movement has affected their behavior in the workplace—but in what ways is unclear.

Conclusion

The survey data is overall under representative of the plurality of masculinities that exist in the West. Men are overrepresented from older generations, and underrepresented in terms of race. As a result, white men with traditional upbringings are the majority of respondents. The survey data is also disconnected in how it positions the #MeToo movement in relation to advantages/disadvantages in the workplace. Men may feel disadvantaged at work, but the survey results cannot explain the cause. They can also not explain in what ways the #MeToo movement has affected work behavior. The final conclusion is that men's perceptions of sexual violence in the workplace are not connected to the #MeToo movement. This may because the movement, in many ways, excludes men. In order to better understand how men perceive sexual violence, the different structures that govern masculinity must be considered. Surveys must represent these unique identities and future conversations surrounding sexual assault must include men.

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Appendix

Data Source Site: https://github.com/fivethirtyeight/data/tree/master/masculinity-survey