

to deny responsibility for the choices that you make. I exercised free choice, and at the same time achieved freedom from my society's conservative expectations, by choosing to pursue a college education in America rather than getting married and staying in Nepal. But I have to accept the responsibility for this decision: my family misses me terribly, and I sometimes find it very difficult to balance work and school and to support myself financially. I am fortunate to have both the support of my family and the strength of my religion as I move forward into my future.

## Student Writing

### Jorden Carlsen's Writing Process

In response to an assignment asking him to develop an extended definition of an abstract concept related to the course readings, Jorden Carlsen, a student at City College of San Francisco, chose to explore the concept of *masculinity*.

Actually, I was stuck at first on choosing a topic. But masculinity is an interesting concept to me because its meaning is kind of vague; people aren't sure exactly what it means. So I thought it was open enough that I could come up with my own conclusions about it. What I wanted to do was to get the audience, my classmates and teacher, to agree that masculinity can be a positive ideal, and I didn't want to lose them along the way. I didn't want to make my essay too complex or outlandish.

To get started, I sat down and began writing ideas about masculinity on a piece of paper, just a list. From that, I could decide which direction to take. Then I began to do research. I used Google to find newspaper and magazine articles. I read about ten articles, and then I went back to my list to see which ideas I could support. Then I highlighted the parts of the articles I wanted to use to support these ideas.

I got rid of some of the ideas on my list and added some new ones. While I was doing this, I was able to write some sentences that I thought sounded good. These later became either topic sentences or supports in the body paragraphs of my essay.

Doing the research helped me get going. I could see that I could combine some of the ideas on my list to go together to form paragraphs. From there, I did an outline.

Deciding what ideas to use at the beginning was the hardest part. I began with what had attracted me to the topic, that the concept isn't exactly clear.

In the body, I decided to deal with some negative ideas about masculinity first and then move on to more positive ones and my own personal ideas. As I wrote, I actually convinced myself even more that my thesis was correct, that the concept of *masculinity* can be a positive tool for men. So my conclusion came right out of that. I was sold on the idea.



## Masculinity Makes a Good Man

by Jorden Carlsen

Nowadays it is difficult to pin down exactly what characteristics make someone a "real" man, and when most of us say a "real man," we mean a masculine man. We know that such a man should be physically strong and not run away at the sight of a spider, but what else has come to mean a man is masculine? To some being masculine means that a man is never able to show any sign or weakness, and to others it means that all a man need do is be a good provider. I think there is more to it than that. I think that masculinity should be an ideal for men to live up to. It shouldn't limit a man's emotion or make him afraid to be seen as weak. Instead, the ideal of masculinity should be something that can encourage men to live up to their full potential in life. It should be something that makes men want to be good providers, stay in good physical shape, and be generally reliable. Masculinity can and should be used as a tool to help men make the most of themselves.

For some people the idea of *masculinity* has become self-defeating. For them it has become synonymous with experiencing uncomfortable social pressures, denying their emotions, having unsavory world-views, or having a fear of showing any kind of weakness. Sara B. Kimmel explains one view of this present situation in her article "Measuring Masculine Body Ideal Distress: Development of a Measure." This article is mainly concerned with many men's dissatisfaction with their bodies and the stress this dissatisfaction causes them. Kimmel notes that "boys and men are comparing themselves to increasingly unattainable masculine body images and are thus increasingly likely to evaluate their body image negatively." For these men, wanting to have a body that they see as masculine has made them unhappy with the body they have. As bad as it may sound, I think slight dissatisfaction can be a good thing for people who are out of shape in that it can encourage them to exercise or eat right, but like many things, can go too far and do more harm than good by, for example, leading to steroid use or eating disorders.

Kimmel also mentions an instrument called "The Conformity to Masculinity Norms Inventory," which has been used to assess conformity to masculine norms in the dominant culture in U.S. society. I found something among the topics included in their survey disturbing. Two of the factors that were included in the "Masculinity Norms" were "Power over



Women" and "Disdain for Homosexuals." Why is it [that] people see these things as masculine? I certainly cannot tell you. I believe that a man should respect people, not control or show disdain for them. Doing so can only display a man's insecurities and other shortcomings that take away from the depth of character that makes a real man.

Another drawback to masculinity is that some believe that a real man should not show his emotion, or even worse, not have any. Is this another example of something taken too far? I think it is possible that this belief could have its origins in men's need to do what needs to be done. It has served men best in the past to be able to put their emotions aside and deal with the task at hand, but when there is no task that needs to be done, men don't need to hide their emotions. Yet in his essay titled "Complexion," Richard Rodriguez wrote, "More important than any of this was the fact that a man never verbally revealed his emotions" (516). Through his writing Rodriguez is able to show his range of emotion, which displays his personal strength to face adversity and shows that being emotional can be a part of being a "real" man.

Having a weakness doesn't make a man less masculine; it makes him human. But for some reason it has become construed that for a man to be masculine, he cannot have any weakness. This has led to many kinds of negative consequences for men the world over. I believe this a direct link to male violence. Many men now think that if anyone in any way, no matter how small, threatens to expose a weakness on their part, this person must be violently attacked in order to demonstrate that they are not weak. This has led to all kinds of despicable behavior from verbal attacks to gang warfare. These men don't see the irony that this behavior is covering up the bigger weakness of their own insecurity. Being vulnerable doesn't make men less masculine; it is how they handle the situation and themselves that makes them who they are.

What I believe to be basic to the view of what a man is supposed to be is his ability to provide. The pinnacle of manhood is his role of the hunter-gatherer. When a man can feed and clothe himself and his family, he is on the forefront of manliness. One of the main ideas in an article titled "Man-of-Action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption," written by Douglas B. Holt, professor of Marketing at the University of Oxford, and Craig J. Thompson, professor of Marketing at the University of Wisconsin, is that one of the main ideals of



masculinity in America is that of a man who is a provider, what they call in the article "Breadwinner Masculinity" (427). These are the men who throughout history have been there for their families, clans, or villages, and have been able to keep everyone alive by bringing home the bacon. It may not always be glorious, but putting dinner on the table is often much more important to a culture's well-being than fighting on the battlefield. This is why men who work hard are seen as masculine. Advances in technology are taking working men farther and farther from hunting game and gathering crops, but that doesn't make them any less masculine. A man who spends eight hours a day doing quality control at the computer factory is putting dinner on the table just as much as an iron worker, and they both deserve the title of *masculine breadwinner*.

Take a moment to picture in your mind a masculine man. Chances have it that the man you saw wasn't extremely overweight or had arms that wouldn't stretch a rubber band put around his biceps. When most of us think of a masculine man, we tend to think of one who has an amount of physical prowess. This is mostly likely because strong men are more likely to be better protectors and better suited for the kind of physical labor that in the past kept our predecessors fed. This ideal can be good to encourage a man to stay healthy and in good shape. I know this from personal experience. When my running shoes have a fine layer of dust and I no longer recognize any of the people who work behind the counter at the gym, I know that I'm not living up to part of my potential. A man doesn't have to be an Olympic bodybuilder to have a masculine body. I see it more as a matter of physical ability. I don't do aerobic exercise because I think I'm fat. What gets my running shoes on is my personal drive to have physical stamina in case of the event I may need it, or want it. The physical side of masculinity is something that all men can tap into as encouragement to keep their body physically able, no matter their body type.

Much of what people perceive about masculinity is strength, but I think most people miss the most important strength of all: strength of character. This comes in many forms, from that of reliability to that of integrity. It's what I think about when I think about how a good man should behave. Real men do not take candy from children. They are the defenders of what is right and the ones who are willing to face risk for others. This is where the depth of masculinity lies. A man who is not a



provider or [possessor] of any physical prowess will suddenly take on an air of masculinity when he stands up for what is right. Rodriguez wrote in his essay, "To be formal is to be steady. A man of responsibility, a good provider. Someone formal is also constant. A person to be relied upon in adversity" (515). This is from the part of the essay where he is describing one of the three F's, the concept of what it is to be a man. Living up to the masculine ideal of character isn't always the easiest form of masculinity, but it is the most fulfilling.

*Masculinity* can be a good ideal for a man to live up to. It also can be taken too far or interpreted in a bad way that takes away from a man's character or leads him to unhealthy behavior, but if viewed correctly, and in the right context, it can be a guide for all men to help them live up to their potential. It can give them drive in life to do things that they may not have otherwise seen or had the motivation to do. *Masculinity* is just a concept, but it is one that has the power to lead a man to be more than he is, and that makes it powerful.

#### Works Cited

- Holt, Douglas B., and Craig J. Thompson. "Man-of-Action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption." Journal of Consumer Research Sept. 2004: 425-439.
- Kimmel, Sara B. "Measuring Masculine Body Ideal Distress: Development of a Measure." International Journal of Men's Health Spring 2004. 18 April 2005 <[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0PAU/is\\_1\\_3/ai\\_n6191073/print](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PAU/is_1_3/ai_n6191073/print)>.
- Rodriguez, Richard. "Complexion." Great Writing. Ed. Harvey S. Weiner and Nora Eisenberg. 3rd ed. San Francisco: McGraw, 2002: 513-516.

#### Alternative Writing Projects

Compare and contrast how a distinctive concept (such as *masculinity* or *femininity*) is understood by two different cultures or social groups. Joseph Berger's essay (page 224 in Chapter 8) is an example of such an essay. You may draw upon your personal experience as part of your evidence to support your definition of a concept, and you might consider interviewing someone from a different culture or social group to compare the person's first-hand experiences with your own.