

## Traits of masculinity: What does it mean to ‘be a man’?

There are commonalities of human behavior that extend beyond any geographic or cultural boundary. Every known society has a sexual division of labor – many facets of which are ubiquitous the world over. Some activities are universally considered to be primarily, or exclusively, the responsibility of men, such as hunting large mammals, metalworking, and warfare. Other activities, such as caregiving, cooking, and preparing vegetable foods, are nearly always considered primarily the responsibility of women.

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[W]hy are these particular conceptions of masculinity so common across cultures and throughout history, and what are the implications for our current, democratic, post-industrial era?

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[E]xhortations such as “be a man” are common across societies throughout the world. Such remarks represent the recognition that being a man came with a set of duties and responsibilities. If men failed to stay cool under pressure in the midst of hunting or warfare, and thus failed to provide for, or protect, their families and allies, this would have been devastating to their societies.

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Obviously, these traits are not, and need not be, restricted to men. But when it comes to teaching the next generation of young males what socially responsible masculinity looks like, it might be worth keeping these historical contributions in mind. Not as a standard that one should necessarily feel unduly pressured by, but as a set of productive goals and aspirations that can aid in personal development and social enrichment.

*Editor’s note: William Buckner is a student of Evolutionary Anthropology at UC Davis*

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