Progress toward gender equality has slowed or stalled in recent years, primarily because gender stereotypes and roles are changing more quickly for women than men. Women are increasingly free to behave more like men, while a similar freedom for men (to behave more like women) has been slower to emerge. Expectations governing men remain rigid: They are discouraged from showing weakness/vulnerability and encouraged to assert masculinity by demonstrating strength/toughness. These expectations undermine men’s emotional flexibility, which not only harms their physical health and well-being, but also systematically impedes gender equality efforts. We summarize both the direct and indirect consequences of men’s relative emotional inflexibility, as well as cultural and psychological barriers to men’s emotional flexibility development. We then provide empirically-based policy recommendations for cultivating emotional flexibility in men, which could in turn foster their physical and mental health, undermine traditional gender stereotypes, and promote broader gender equality in the U.S.
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Promoting Gender Equality by Supporting Men’s Emotional Flexibility

Alyssa Croft a, Ciara Atkinson a, & Alexis M. May b

a Psychology Department, University of Arizona

b Psychology Department, Wesleyan University
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Abstract: 150/150 words

Progress toward gender equality has slowed or stalled in recent years, primarily because gender stereotypes and roles are changing more quickly for women than men. Women are increasingly free to behave more like men, while a similar freedom for men (to behave more like women) has been slower to emerge. Expectations governing men remain rigid: They are discouraged from showing weakness/vulnerability and encouraged to assert masculinity by demonstrating strength/toughness. These expectations undermine men’s emotional flexibility, which not only harms their physical health and well-being, but also systematically impedes gender equality efforts. We summarize both the direct and indirect consequences of men’s relative emotional inflexibility, as well as cultural and psychological barriers to men’s emotional flexibility development. We then provide empirically-based policy recommendations for cultivating emotional flexibility in men, which could in turn foster their physical and mental health, undermine traditional gender stereotypes, and promote broader gender equality in the U.S.

280 character Tweet (includes spaces): 272/280 characters (35 words)

American men are socialized to be tough/unemotional, which has harmful effects on society. Restricting men’s provision/reception of emotional support reinforces gender stereotypes. We offer empirically-based recommendations for fostering emotional flexibility in boys and men.

Highlights: 4-6 bulleted highlights of 2-3 lines each (80 words)

1. In the West, women’s roles and stereotypes have changed faster than men’s.
2. Rigid masculinity stereotypes restrict most men’s capacity for vulnerability.
3. This harms men, as well as women and society as a whole.
4. Systemic and structural changes should support men’s emotional flexibility, which can subsequently shift gender stereotypes and facilitate gender equality.
5. We provide recommendations to help cultivate emotional flexibility in boys and men, and to diversify their access to emotion expression and role participation.
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Promoting Gender Equality by Supporting Men’s Emotional Flexibility

Western gender roles and stereotypes have changed asymmetrically in recent history, such that women’s roles and stereotypes have changed faster than men’s. Women have increased their participation in male-dominated professional roles and constitute roughly half of the paid workforce (Croft et al., 2015; Eagly et al., 2020). Stereotypes about women have also shifted to mirror their changing role distributions – contemporary American women are rated as more competent/intelligent than women of the 1950s (Eagly et al., 2020). Despite these gains, research shows that progress toward achieving gender equality has slowed or even stalled entirely in the U.S. during recent years (between 1970-2018; England et al., 2020). Women are still stereotyped to be substantially more communal than men and this stereotype has strengthened over time (Eagly et al., 2020).

Further, the asymmetry in gender role change has contributed to persistent gender-based inequities across domains. Gender role segregation persists, delineating what is viewed (and indeed performed) as “men’s work” versus “women’s work.” Moreover, women continue to do disproportionately more than men at home (Croft et al., 2014; 2015; Eagly et al., 2020). This means while women are taking on new roles and expectations outside the home, they are doing so in addition to their traditional domestic responsibilities.

Masculinity stereotypes remain as rigid as ever, directly and indirectly restricting most men’s interest in, as well as access to, roles and behaviors that are stereotypically feminine. This includes avoiding showing weakness/vulnerability (e.g., Berdahl et al., 2018) and instead consistently demonstrating strength/toughness (e.g., Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Masculinity expectations have many consequences, but perhaps most perniciously, they undermine men’s emotional flexibility and mental health (see Wong et al., 2017). We employ the broad term
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*emotional flexibility* to encompass various aspects of emotionality, including experiencing and expressing a wide range of emotions, giving and receiving emotional support, cultivating diverse emotion regulation strategies, and having an awareness of and empathy for the emotional experiences of others. Men’s restricted access to emotional flexibility has life threatening consequences for their own physical health and wellbeing, while simultaneously impeding gender equality efforts by reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. Enabling more men to perform nontraditional roles would concurrently create space for more women to perform nontraditional roles (e.g., Croft et al., 2015, 2019, 2020).

While previous work recommends increasing men’s engagement with specific roles and behaviors (see Croft et al., 2015, 2020; Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2016; Meeussen et al., 2020), this paper focuses on a broader psychological construct (*emotional flexibility*), which represents a “way of being” that transcends specific roles, behaviors, and experiences. We begin by presenting our rationale for increasing men’s emotional flexibility, then summarize cultural and psychological barriers to the development of emotional flexibility in men. We conclude with empirically-based recommendations for dismantling these barriers, which will in turn enhance men’s physical and mental health, and promote broader gender equality.

**Why Support Men’s Emotional Flexibility?**

Rigid masculinity stereotypes restrict men’s capacity for vulnerability, and are directly harmful for men, as well as indirectly harmful for women and society at large. Recently, the American Psychological Association (APA) released its first-ever set of guidelines for practice with men and boys to address “more than 40 years of research showing that traditional masculinity is psychologically harmful and that socializing boys to suppress their emotions causes damage that echoes both inwardly and outwardly” (Pappas, 2019, para. 3). This report

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summarizes a distressing set of statistics indicating that, in the US, men commit 90% of homicides and comprise 77% of homicide victims, that men are 3.5 times more likely than women to die by suicide and, that men have a life expectancy that is five years shorter than women’s (Pappas, 2019). While the reasons for these disturbing outcomes are complex, we propose, and existing evidence supports, that role rigidity contributes by undermining men’s access to social support and connection to others (Wong et al., 2017). A recent meta-analysis revealed a robust negative relationship between conformity to certain masculine norms (e.g., self-reliance) and mental health, social functioning, and help seeking (Wong et al., 2017).

A better understanding and use of alternative coping strategies (i.e., enhanced emotional flexibility) may improve men’s romantic relationships. Research shows that seeking help from and disclosing vulnerabilities to one’s partner creates longer lasting and more fulfilling relationships (see Feeney & Collins, 2014). Men may also reap indirect benefits from being emotionally open with a partner, given that relationships have the potential to yield substantial self-worth and well-being (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Additionally, studies indicate that heterosexual women may prefer to partner with men who have more communal tendencies, particularly if those women are interested in pursuing counter-stereotypical roles themselves (e.g., becoming the primary breadwinner; Croft, Schmader, et al., 2020; Meeussen et al., 2018). Despite these findings, recent studies suggest that when men’s masculinity is threatened, most tend to withdraw from their romantic partners rather than turning to them for support (Lamarche et al., 2020). This withdrawal pattern also mirrors other stereotypic hypermasculine responses that aim to reaffirm masculinity in the eyes of others (while simultaneously denigrating femininity and counteracting any perceived vulnerability; e.g., Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Dahl et al., 2015; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020).
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In communicating the benefits of emotional flexibility, it is worth considering that men and women both tend to experience emotions to similar degrees (Barrett et al. 1998) and there is little evidence that men opt to suppress, deny, or avoid their emotions more than women. However, women tend to notice and understand emotions more than men. This may be in part why they typically engage in more diverse emotion regulation strategies than men including rumination, cognitive restructuring, acceptance, distraction, problem-solving, and social support seeking than men (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012). This is paralleled in childhood, wherein girls tend to exert more effortful control than boys (Else-Quest, 2006). This may lead boys to engage in more impulsive responding to emotional stimuli and cause them to generally employ emotion regulation strategies less, relative to girls. Women also tend to be more aware of and concerned with the emotions of others. While observing these differences, note the effect sizes are small and there are more similarities than differences in how men and women handle emotion. Additionally, some differences may be due to how these constructs are studied or probed. Men may be engaging in unconscious or automatic emotion regulation that they are not identifying as such, and, within the realm of social support, current measures may probe more female-stereotypic support (e.g., talking with a friend about a problem), rather than male-stereotypic support (e.g., engaging in an activity with a friend). One challenge, therefore, is that less is known about how men regulate or respond to their emotional experiences.

The relationship between emotion regulation strategy use and psychopathology is nuanced and complex; however, there are some consistent gender differences. Women’s more frequent use of rumination seems to mediate the higher levels of depression and anxiety seen among women, while men’s use of alcohol to cope is a mediator of the higher prevalence of alcohol use disorder seen in men (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012). Moreover, on average, men are
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significantly more likely than women to report experiencing existential isolation, a subjective experience of feeling fundamentally separate from other human beings, and this effect is explained by gender differences in communal value endorsement (Helm et al., 2018). The social disconnect that men tend to experience may even signal a reduced capacity for adaptively coping with traumatic life events, such as the death of a loved one.

Specifically, a recent study examining grief narratives in a small sample of bereaved adults revealed a relationship between men’s use of linguistic nonfluencies (e.g., “uh”, “um”, etc.) and their self-reported psychological distress, but this relationship did not emerge among women in the sample (Steltzer et al., 2019). One possible explanation for this pattern is that, because men are socialized to remain tough and stoic, men might have had less practice expressing their grief in emotionally vulnerable ways, which would facilitate their capacity to draw meaning from the experience of loss. And, evidence suggests, emotionally processing traumatic events is associated with a greater capacity for enjoying life’s simple pleasures (Croft et al., 2014). Taken together, promoting the diversification of men’s coping strategies could provide them with increased opportunities to have more authentic connections with others and derive greater meaning from their interactions and experiences.

Cultural and Psychological Barriers to Men’s Emotional Flexibility

The current gender stereotypes that govern most people’s behavior and self-definitions are rooted in our ancestral past, wherein the division of labor was based on biological sex differences between men and women (a process articulated by Social Role Theory; Eagly & Wood, 2012). To summarize the theory briefly, females were primarily responsible for childbirth and rearing, whereas males were primarily responsible for protection and provision (due to their physical size and strength), and by enacting these biologically-based roles, women came to be
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viewed as warm and nurturing, whereas men came to be viewed as tough and strong (Eagly & Wood, 2012). These views of men and women persisted and were reinforced over time because members of each gender group were repeatedly observed enacting only one type of role (either caregiving or providing) and people made inferences about the types of traits and attributes that must be necessary for a person to successfully perform each role. Thus, as people came to associate women with caregiving and men with providing, these associations further solidified by becoming internalized into the self-concepts of boys and girls starting early in life. The internalization of gender creates a feedback loop wherein people expect men and women to behave in distinct ways, leading people to behave in gender-stereotypical ways and developing gender-differentiated traits, thus maintaining the traditional expectations placed on men and women (Eagly & Wood, 2012). This cyclical process of stereotype formation and maintenance is precisely the reason that, as women’s roles expanded to encompass more traditionally masculine domains, societal expectations for and stereotypes about women have shifted accordingly.

Considering the backdrop of cultural and historical processes that propagate stereotype development and change also provides insight into how and why rigidity persists in men’s roles and expectations. An emerging body of research documents a host of internal and external barriers to men’s adoption of traditionally female roles and traits, which underlie the observed asymmetry in changing gender roles and stereotypes (see Croft et al., 2015). On one hand, a boy’s gender category is one of the first things he learns and, subsequently, the goals and values aligned with masculinity become internalized into his self-concept very early in life (e.g., Block, Gonzalez et al., 2018). These internalized masculine goals and values can then go on to predict his behavioral and role choices later in life (Block et al., 2018). On the other hand, even if a boy were to grow up without personally internalizing masculine goals and values, more tangible
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external factors, such as social sanctions, could actively discourage his deviation from traditional
expectations of manly behavior (e.g., Moss-Racusin, 2014; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). The
social (and other) costs for men associated with engaging in ostensibly feminine behavior are so
prominent, in fact, that people exhibit lower support for efforts to mitigate gender inequities in
female-dominated compared to male-dominated contexts (Block et al., 2019). Finally, these
internal and external barriers are further magnified due to a gender status asymmetry wherein
men’s traits, roles, and behaviors tend to be awarded higher status in society than those affiliated
with women (Ridgeway, 2014).

Implications and Policy Recommendations

Systemic and structural changes are necessary to support men’s emotional flexibility. Note, however, that our goal is not to “feminize” men, denigrate masculine techniques for coping, or suggest a hierarchy of emotional regulation strategies. There are myriad ways to be emotionally healthy. As described previously, men are commonly restricted from accessing a number of those ways, such as expressing “feminine” emotions, displaying vulnerability or weakness (e.g., tears or uncertainty), or participating in historically female roles (e.g., stay-at-home parenting, nursing, early childhood education). The following policy recommendations are provided in hopes of expanding men’s access to more diverse means of emotional expression and role participation, in parallel to the way women have gradually gained access to more “ways of being.”

Suggestions for Boys and Young Men

As a first step, intervention must start in childhood. One way to facilitate emotional flexibility in men is to make concerted efforts toward changing the way masculinity and emotions are taught to future generations. Boys, compared to girls, receive markedly less
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guidance and encouragement with respect to feeling and expressing their emotions (Croft et al., 2015). Critical early life role models, such as parents and teachers, are powerful influencers of the emotional development of the next generation. Additionally, socioemotional capacity is not innate, but rather is a socialized, malleable skill that can be taught and improved (e.g., Ornaghi et al., 2014; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012; 2015).

Educational contexts. Educational contexts and early elementary teachers have a profound impact on children’s development. Gender is salient in the classroom, with teachers utilizing gendered language to organize and manage students (e.g., children separated by gender to form lines or seating; Bigler & Liben, 2007). In contrast to traditional models of education, recent gender-neutral approaches avoid unnecessary reliance on gender as a means to categorize children and thereby challenge stereotypic beliefs in the classroom (Meeussen et al., 2020; Shutts et al., 2017; King et al., 2020). Evidence on the effectiveness of gender-neutral preschool programs (vs. traditional preschools) in Sweden reveals that children educated in gender-neutral classrooms were less likely to report gender-stereotypical beliefs and more likely to play with other children of different genders (Schutts et al., 2017). In an intervention study, when children received messages from teachers promoting counter-stereotypical views about toy preferences (e.g., “trucks are for girls”, “dolls are for boys”), children reported less stereotypical predictions about the types of toys their peers might enjoy (King et al., 2020). A similar classroom intervention could promote positive and inclusive beliefs about emotional expression in boys. If teachers intentionally provide messaging that boys are emotional too, then this could shift children’s normative beliefs and expectations about the emotionality of boys.

Fortunately, existing classroom interventions designed to increase children’s socioemotional understanding and empathy demonstrate how these skills can be shaped in
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childhood (e.g., Ornaghi et al., 2014; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012; 2015). Relative to control, children who completed a social and emotional learning program showed stronger empathy and perspective-taking abilities, were better able to control their emotions, had fewer depression symptoms, and were less aggressive toward peers (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Additional evidence points to the effectiveness of engaging children in guided conversations about emotions. Compared to a control group, young children who viewed illustrations depicting emotional experiences and engaged in guided conversations on their own experiences with emotions showed increased emotion comprehension abilities and empathy (Ornaghi et al., 2014). Across all studies, no effects were moderated by child gender, reinforcing the effectiveness of increasing socioemotional skills for boys. Taken together, boys and men are assumed to lack emotional ability, leading to stereotypes that influence socialization practices in early life, prompting the internalization of masculinity norms that suppress emotionality. Fortunately, socioemotional skills are malleable and early intervention may set more boys on a different path.

Role models. People develop a sense of who they are, their place in the world, and who they might become through exposure to role models (Bandura, 1971). Following this reasoning, if men are represented as emotionally invulnerable, then boys are likely to conceptualize themselves similarly. Boys learn about their emotions from various sources. Parents play an integral part in shaping children’s social and cognitive development (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Additionally, boys and young men are taught about masculinity norms through role models represented in the media. However, content analyses of commercials reveal that men are rarely shown demonstrating emotional ties with others (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). Even content analyses of children’s books reveal traditional gender roles, in which male characters
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demonstrate fewer stereotypically feminine characteristics, like showing affection or sensitivity to the needs of others (Diekman & Murnen, 2004).

One way to increase the extent to which boys internalize more emotional attributes into their self-concept is by increasing the prevalence of role models exhibiting these behaviors. For example, a boy who observes his male elementary school teacher expressing vulnerable emotions should come to believe that masculinity is congruent with being emotional, and will internalize those attributes into his future identity as a man. For this to occur, men’s social roles need to become less rigid (e.g., Croft et al., 2015; England et al., 2020). Fortunately, research grounded in Social Role Theory reveals that changes in social role occupations can lead to correspondent shifts in group stereotypes (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

We suggest that stereotypes about men’s emotionality could be shifted by highlighting the social roles they already occupy that utilize these behaviors. For example, although stereotypes of men have remained relatively rigid, stereotypes of fathers are more variable as norms surrounding the “new involved father” have become more prevalent (Banchefsky & Park, 2016). Indeed, in one study participants estimated that fathers would continue to change in the future such that dads will display more stereotypically feminine attributes (Banchefsky & Park, 2016). Importantly, after priming people with men’s roles as fathers, people evaluated men in ways more congruent with fathers (i.e., highlighting more stereotypically feminine attributes; Park and Banchefsky, 2018). Finding ways to shift stereotypes for men should not only impact the way people perceive men as a group, but these shifts also have the potential to redefine the role models that boys observe (and, ultimately, the views that become internalized into boys’ self-concepts). Therefore, the next section provides recommendations for adult men to generate more counter-stereotypic male role models for boys.
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Suggestions for Adult Men

The recommendations above are designed to increase the emotional flexibility of boys and young men, but they may not be effective at shifting norms for adult men, who have been socialized by a lifetime of rigid masculinity stereotypes. Additionally, men may underestimate the extent to which emotional accessibility is congruent with their masculine identity, or how much these behaviors will benefit them and others. In this section, we recommend increasing emotional flexibility among adult men by (a) changing governmental parental leave policies to guarantee that new fathers can be involved in caring for their children without financial or social repercussions, (b) highlighting the ways in which emotional flexibility can be congruent with goals typically held by men, and (c) educating men about the myriad benefits for themselves and others that could result from improved emotional flexibility.

Increasing paternal involvement. In traditional family contexts, men fulfill provider roles, while women take primary responsibility for the care of offspring—even if they also work full-time—due to a gendered division of labor (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Societal norms discourage men from allocating time to directly care for their children, resulting in fewer opportunities to develop and practice essential emotionality skills, ultimately reinforcing stereotypic beliefs that men are not (and should not be) involved in emotionally supporting their children.

Advantageously, research shows that stereotypes ascribed to fathers are less rigid than stereotypes than men, and include more characteristics linked to emotionality, such as being affectionate or nurturant (Park & Banchefsky, 2018). Thus, by increasing men’s opportunities to fulfill parental roles that go beyond being a solely financial provider to include the provision of emotional support for family members, this role shift could also re-define stereotypes (and actual behavior).
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Policies that guarantee parental leave for fathers (specifically) after the birth or adoption of a child can systematically increase men’s caregiving involvement. Worldwide, parental leave policies vary widely and not all policies guarantee workers paid leave. Fortunately, parental leave for fathers is available in a growing number of countries. For example, in Japan nearly half of paid parental leave is offered to fathers (Livingston & Thomas, 2019). Meanwhile, in the U.S., parents can take up to 12-weeks of unpaid leave after the birth or adoption of a child under The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). While a handful of individual states have paid policies for parental leave (California, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Washington, and the District of Columbia), the U.S. has no formalized national paid leave policy.

Parental leave policies not only provide opportunities for caregiving, but they can also signal (and normalize) shifting gender roles (Meeussen et al., 2020). Merely offering parental leave to fathers is not enough to shift norms; even in countries with such policies, women still take a majority of leave time (Miani & Hoorens, 2014). This is likely a result of the social and financial penalties men face for taking parental leave. But providing financial incentives increases men’s willingness to take leave: Sweden introduced a “daddy leave” policy that provides leave specifically for fathers, and importantly, if fathers do not take this leave, then families lose two months of paid leave subsidies. Thus, families would be negatively impacted if fathers failed to take the opportunity, and cultural norms have shifted such that caregiving expectations are incorporated into men’s roles as providers. Implementing similar policies in the U.S. could normalize men’s involvement in caregiving, broaden masculinity stereotypes, and support men’s overall emotional flexibility.

*Highlighting agentic aspects of emotional flexibility.* People typically behave in ways that fulfill important internalized goals, and these goals are informed by gender-role stereotypes
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(Diekman et al., 2010). Thus, men may hesitate to cultivate their emotional flexibility because it is perceived as incongruent with masculinity stereotypes. Reframing the way an action is described can increase a person’s interest in doing the action if the description highlights how that action aligns with the person’s goals. For instance, women’s interest in STEM careers increases when collaborative/communal aspects of the job (e.g., team-based science) are highlighted, because this framing emphasizes the alignment between STEM and the female-stereotypic goals that women have internalized (Diekman et al., 2011). We propose a similar strategy to increase men’s emotional flexibility, via reframing their inferences about emotion expression. For example, while emotional support seeking is typically viewed as communal, highlighting the initiative required in asking for help emphasizes an agentic aspect of the behavior. This way, requests for emotional support could be viewed as signs of strength, indicating one’s ability to “take charge” and ensure that they can get what they need, rather than signs of weakness. Similar techniques could also be developed to encourage men to emotionally support those around them. Providing emotional support involves communal attributes, such as helping others, but it also involves agentic attributes, such as initiative, decision making, and analytical skills.

Implementing large-scale workplace policies that reframe and normalize seeking/offering emotional support would reinforce explicit discussions of emotional challenges and facilitate employees’ emotional flexibility. An example is “safety stand downs” - a common occurrence in the construction industry in which the whole site pauses work and focuses on education about a specific safety issue, such as falls. Recently, “stand downs” have occurred focusing on mental health-related safety issues, such as suicide and substance abuse. Workplaces could establish this reinforcement in various ways, such as holding formal training sessions led by experts,
demonstrating obvious buy-in from company leadership, or subsidizing regular “emotional flexibility check-ins” with professionals.

**Emphasizing the benefits of emotional flexibility.** Finally, community engagement programs can normalize the idea that men can and should be emotionally healthy by emphasizing the benefits of emotionality and communicating resources available online and locally. Men often refrain from engaging in emotionally supportive behavior because they are concerned that violating gender stereotypes will generate unpleasant feelings and social backlash, and they worry that they lack the necessary skills (see Croft, Atkinson, et al., 2020 for a review). We propose leveraging community organizations and government funding to develop and provide readily accessible resources that support men’s emotional flexibility by providing opportunities to practice and increase their emotional competency skills.

In the United Kingdom, for instance, there are several men’s community engagement programs specifically designed to promote more positive norms around men’s emotional vulnerability and to teach men how to ask for and provide help. For example, Men’s Sheds is a program that seeks to reduce men’s experiences of loneliness and social isolation by bringing together local communities (https://menssheds.org.uk/). A Men’s Shed is a shared space where men can gather and pursue their hobbies and practical interests while building friendships and connections with other likeminded individuals. Similarly, the 12th Man Campaign (https://12th-man.org.uk/) provides mental health first aid training to men’s community trades and interest groups to empower men with the techniques to help others in their lives. The campaign encourages men to show their emotions to break the stigma around men’s mental health and encourage them to support the emotional needs of one another.
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Finally, government funded programs, such as the MassMen Project (https://www.massmen.org/about/) or ManTherapy (https://mantherapy.org/) continue to be instrumental in shifting norms and supporting men’s emotional flexibility. The MassMen Project is a government funded, community suicide prevention program in Massachusetts designed to promote wellness and provide men with tools and resources to improve their psychological and physical health. Additionally, the program offers education for people looking to support the emotional, mental, and physical health of the men they care about. ManTherapy presents mental health and suicide prevention content using masculine stereotypes and humor. Programs like these not only shift the social norms around men’s emotional vulnerability, but they also provide men with concrete skills so that they know how to cope with their own emotions and how to identify and help other men who are in need of support. Further, programs like these expand the language around emotional and mental health by harnessing men’s existing internal worlds.

Conclusions

Our goal was to synthesize research on masculinity, gender stereotypes, and emotional flexibility to provide a roadmap for policy decisions that are grounded in empiricism and supported by a strong theoretical foundation. Women’s roles (and their associated stereotypes) are changing much faster than men’s, and this asymmetrical pattern of change systematically reinforces existing gender imbalances across domains. We suggest that mitigating rigid masculinity norms and supporting men’s emotional flexibility could have implications for promoting broader gender equality, by chipping away at the persistent gender stereotypes that govern both men’s and women’s behavior.
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