Imperfect Masculinities

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Abstract

There has been little research done about Asian American men’s lives and experiences. Even fewer research articles on their experiences and gender identity development available. This literature review helps provide some insight as to how homophobia impacts Asian American men’s lifestyle, from an Adlerian perspective. Recommendations for further research are suggested because of the limited amount of research articles collected that was directly tied to homophobia and/or Asian American men.
Imperfect Masculinities

“Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.”

John F. Kennedy at his presidential inauguration January 20, 1961

John F. Kennedy’s quote helps sum up the two most recurring themes throughout men’s life: negotiation and fear. Negotiating masculinity, manhood and male role coupled with the fear of not being seen as masculine enough or of being seen as unmanly appears to play a significant role in shaping men’s interpretation and meaning of their socialized male gender identity and role. Men are constantly negotiating meaning and interpretation of their male role and gender identity on a daily basis (Kramer, 2005). Men shift their gender identity according to their surrounding and context. Homophobia dictates how men negotiate their life experiences with what Alfred Adler, founder of individual psychology theory, would refer to as the three tasks of life: love, work and association. Love, association and work are the three primary life tasks that Adler named explicitly in his writings (Mansager & Gold, 2000; Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Some Adlerian philosophers contend that there might be at least two more, the life task of self and spiritual; these two additions are something not yet agreed upon (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Regarding this discussion, we are analyzing the three primary life tasks regarded by Adler. Adler concluded that these are the main tasks in life, regardless of the person’s lifestyle that people must act on while living (Mansager & Gold, 2000; Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). The three life tasks are intertwined but yet exist aside from one another too. Adler contends that these three life tasks are where people’s problems of life arise and they must be addressed.

Adler refers to a person’s lifestyle as an interpretation of the person’s life experiences (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Men’s life experiences with homophobia influence how they develop their lifestyle. Homophobia can powerfully limit men’s ability to negotiate their internal
and external sense of masculine identity (McDermott, Schwartz, Lindley, & Proietti, 2014). Homophobia tells men that they can be seen as weak, less than, or, even worse like a woman or female (McDermott et al., 2014). There is nothing worse than having a man be called out or seen as less than a man in Western society (O’Neil, 2013). Masculine characteristics maintain that men are opposite of women, men are superior to women, men cannot be feminine, men are distinct in their actions and behaviors and that they cannot settle on being seen or called women in society (Bem, 1981; Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, Zosuls, Lurye & Greulich, 2014; O’Neil, 1981; O’Neil, 2013).

All male identified individuals, persons who have identified themselves as male or man in this world regardless of their culture, race, ethnicity, biological sex or sexual orientation, are constantly negotiating their masculine identity throughout life (Kramer, 2005). Men’s masculine gender identity is vitally important to who they are in their life tasks, whether that is performing the act of love, succeeding at work, or being protective of their loved ones (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler would have probably said, “discouraged individuals fear what life has to offer and are frightened by the prospect of challenge” (Lingg & Wilborn, 1992, p. 65). From this perspective, we might say that those who do not fear to negotiate the meaning and interpretation of masculinity will have the courage to be imperfect. We can say that men who cannot negotiate are fearful and thus regarded as discouraged individuals.

Asian American men are one group of males that are constantly negotiating their understanding of masculinity in this country. They are not only negotiating their masculine identity but also their ethnic identity (Shek, 2006). Asian American is a broad umbrella term for people who come from Asia (South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia). Through acculturation and assimilation, their ethnic and male identities develop hand in hand as they live out their
lifestyle (Shek, 2006). The social and political forces of sexism, racism and homophobia shape the kinds of masculinities seen in the United States (Kimmel, 1993). Through this statement, we can infer that Asian American men have to juggle racism and homophobia in their meaning and interpretation of what constitutes Asian American masculinities. In analyzing the complexity involved with masculinities, we can observe how homophobia shapes Asian American men’s lifestyle and life tasks.

Utilizing an Adlerian philosophy framework, this literature review discussion seeks to understand how Asian American men lifestyles and life tasks are impacted by homophobia. There is little to no research articles looking at this particular intersection of homophobia and masculinity with Asian American men (Durell, Chiong & Battle, 2007). There has been only a handful of research on Asian American masculinity (Liu, 2002; McDermott & Schwartz, 2013; Pompper, 2010; Shek, 2006). The question being sought after is, how does homophobia impact the lifestyle and life tasks of Asian American men? Our hypothesis is that homophobia locks Asian American men into expressing their masculinity into a specific set of rigidly defined characteristics whether they are gay or heterosexual in the US. These rigidly defined characteristics limit Asian American men’s creative self in all their life tasks.

**Adler’s Private Logic**

Adler’s *private intelligence*, or what is more readily used by Adlerian presently is *private logic* will help us contextualize the discussion about gender (Manaster, 2009; Mozdzier, Murphy & Greenblatt, 1986). Gender is something that is deeply imbedded between the person’s known and unknown thoughts. The person knows their gender but they also do not know at the same time if that is truly their gender. Understanding how private logic functions in a person’s lifestyle can help us in our analysis of Asian American men and homophobia.
Private logic has three components, according to Rudolf Dreikurs “they are long-range goals of the lifestyle, the immediate goals within the situation, and the hidden reason which justify a person’s actions, deeds and thoughts” (Manaster, 2009, p. 6). Another observation about private logic is it is our unique way of thinking about the world through our perceptual selectivity. Perceptual selectivity is observing only what we want based on our biases coupled with how that observation fits into our attitudes, beliefs, and convictions, which can sometimes cause us to fail (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Adler says that individuals do not notice their private logic. An individual’s private logic can manifest itself to cause self-defeating and damaging behaviors in their life (Manaster, 2009). The formula for how a person behaves and interacts in the world is based not only on recognizing their personal biases but also from how they reason and respond to personal biases (Manaster, 2009; Mozdzier, Murphy & Greenblatt, 1986). Each individual person has their own unique private logic of how the world, others and he/she should function based on their own perception of their lifestyle (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999).

As we observed, gender is something that begins early on in a person’s learning of himself/herself, others and the world. As they develop their gender identity, their private logic forms about gender and informs them about what and how they should act, behave and express their gender. This is the link between the conscious and unconscious about a person’s gender; the unconscious mind is filled with unclearly formulated thoughts, ideas, whereas the conscious is the clarity (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). We can observe a man’s private logic about masculinity through his understanding that, “I do not need to prove my manhood to people but I cannot just let them think that I am not a man by not providing for my family. So, if I do not work hard how can I provide for my family? Therefore, I will work hard to provide for my family.” This private logic can propel a man to do what it takes to succeed in the life task of work, even though he
knows he is a good provider already. The man’s actions and behaviors toward his private logic can be his demise; he may lose his familial relationships because his perceptual selectivity bias reasoning is that being a provider for his family makes him a man. He does not embrace the fact that he is already a man and a provider. Rather, he feels that he has to choose the work life task over the life tasks of love and association. According to this logic, being successful in the work life task equates to success in his love and association life tasks too; but this is not necessarily the case. He succeeds at the work life task but fails at the love and association life tasks. Basically, even though he knows that he will fail at the life tasks of love and association by devoting himself to the work life task, he will act on his private logic that contradicts his recognition of himself as a man already (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999).

**Gender**

Analyzing the complexity of gender can help us further understand masculinity, homophobia and Asian American masculinity, particularly for men and boys. Gender is crucial to how individuals experience and determine the world around them. “Gender is incredibly intimate, exceptional, and is often left unspoken until there is a safe space without judgment” (Sampson, 2014, p. 35). Gender is not discussed but often interpreted through our expressions, behaviors and attitudes. Individuals only discuss gender in safe spaces where they know that no judgment will be cast upon them. The reason could be that gender is so imbedded within individuals that no person takes the time to stop and reflect about his/her gender identity. The simplicity of how we observe gender in our culture through associating colors like blue with boys and pink with girls does not allow us to examine the complexity involved with gender identity and formation.
Sexual Identity

Three factors that influence children’s developing sense of gender are: their physical sex; how parents, family members, society interacts with their physical sex; and a deep internal sense of their gender that either conforms or diverts from these outside influences (Marlowe, 1981). Boys learn that they are boys because their genital is different from girls. If a boy’s parents give him jeans and t-shirt to wear he will associate these clothing with boys. The clothing and the child’s appearances will inform others of the gender of the child and how they will associate with the child (Halim et al., 2014). This translation of male and female into masculine and feminine characteristics via clothing, appearances, and objects is known as sex typing (Bem, 1981). Sex typing is at the core of a child cultivating their understanding and observations about gender in their minds (Bem, 1981). Gender is one of the four components of a person’s sexual identity. The other three categories that make up a person’s sexual identity consist of: a) physical sex, the chromosomal make up; b) sexual orientation, who a person desires to have sexual experiences with; and c) gender ideology, the notion of how individuals perceive what is male, female, masculine, and feminine (Striepe & Tolman, 2003). All of these factors make up individuals sexual identity, which enables individuals to make meaning and interpretation of how to interact with each other whether that interaction is through love, work or association. A person’s complex sexual identity leads to a constant negotiation about the individual’s gender identity internally and externally.

Gender Binary

Gender is often thought of as a binary with male and female only (Bem, 1981; Sampson, 2014). This binary says the person’s physical sex matches their gender expression and behavior neatly without question. Anything that diverts from this binary is considered not normal or not
acknowledged (Sampson, 2014). For example, a person who is seen as behaving fluidly between this binary, where people cannot make out whether the person is male or female receives stares or confused looks. People may even hesitate about interacting with the person. This binary understanding of physical sex and gender makes the two terms and its definitions synonymous and interchangeable (Sampson, 2014). There are clear distinctions between gender and sex; sex refers to an individuals’ biological or physical make up (Kramer, 2005; Marlowe, 1981; Sampson, 2014; Striepe & Tolman, 2003), while gender is socially constructed (Kramer, 2005; Marlowe, 1981; Sampson, 2014; Sullivan & McNeely-Nutting, 2014). Some individuals’ gender may be linked to their physical sex while other individuals’ gender is different from their physical sex (Marlowe, 1981). For example, a person with a male physical sex organ of a penis identifying as male and man, while another male physical sex person identifies as female and woman. Gender and physical sex are the pivotal determining points of any ethnic group’s understandings about how to organize the life roles and tasks. The beliefs and understanding about masculine and feminine changes from culture to culture and over time (Kramer, 2005). We can infer from this that the person’s gender identity changes accordingly too. For example, only Hmong men can perform ancestral rituals and rites in the Hmong community. Although, as time progressed, exceptions have been made for accepting women shamans to perform rituals and rites, women generally cannot perform these functions because of their considered lower social standing (Symonds, 2004).

**Gender: Socially Constructed**

Gender being socially constructed means culture, media, society, family, and education influence, interpret and give meaning to what is masculine, feminine, and what are proper male and female roles (Kramer, 2005; Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Movies and TV shows portray men as
strong, heroes, successful, and logical problem solvers, while showing women as less strong, helpless, emotional, and dependent. In the family setting, dad may portray that males are the provider of their family by working to ensure there is food and shelter for his family. Those characteristics whether seen on media or in family become gender stereotypes, a broad base of generalized characteristics and understandings of what is proper for men versus what is proper for women regarding role, expression, and behaviors (Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Sullivan & McNeely-Nutting, 2014). Gender stereotypes become a prescription for how individuals form their ideas and concepts about gender regarding behaviors, expression and attitudes (Perry & Pauletti, 2011).

There are five guidelines that render the ideas and concepts about gender stereotypes as truths: a) traditional gender roles should continue; b) intergroup bias, giving more desirable traits to one gender vs. other; c) ambivalent sexism, a bargain between a weary attitude of other gender and need for intimate contact with them; d) guidelines of dating and sex; and e) masculine ideology, the belief in men and boys being strong and unafraid (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Adlerian philosophy regarding the three life tasks of love, work and association are seen in these guidelines about gender. Men are expected to perform and/or meet the rigid standards of masculinity in each of the three life tasks. If men are taught to be strong that means that in all three life tasks they must be able to competently perform sex in love, be competitive to succeed, and dominate in relationships. Any divergence from this understanding about being strong is seen as unmanly. The conclusion for men is that they must behave appropriately according to their gender presentation in all three life tasks (Kramer, 2005).

Sampson describes gender as something that must be done daily in people’s actions, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings both internally and externally (Sampson, 2014). This is known
as doing gender where the person is trying to perform the expressions and behaviors of their gender according to their understanding of what is manly and what is womanly (Han, 2006b; Kramer, 2005). The person’s private logic would be informing them on how to interpret and reason with their observations about gender. Doing gender means that individuals are constantly making meaning and interpretation of their gender identity by negotiating what is male vs. female throughout their lives. A boy that identifies himself as male and man will try to mimic his dad as a man by wanting to shave, drive, dress, and performing other male gestures like being firm and being in control. The boy’s private logic might tell him that he does not have to do these manly things because he is not masculine. Nonetheless, he feels he must in order for him to have the feelings of belonging and significance with his dad or other men in his life. If cooking and cleaning is seen as a women’s role or job, the boy learns to not perform those roles. We can say that the boy is learning by association, as children normally do, in this case regarding what are male tasks and what are female tasks. Learning through association helps children formulate their gender identities, a representation of their internal selves, how they express that role, and how they behave (Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Sampson, 2014). In short, a person’s gender role is their behaviors and expressions of a particular gender that communicates to others about their gender (Marlowe, 1981; O’Neil, 1981).

Gender Development

From a very young age even prior to birth individuals have been gendered, most notably by the colors pink for girls and blue for boys (LoBue & DeLoache, 2011). These colors often show up during baby showers and invitations to baby showers to share with loved ones the gender of the child. A child becomes a member of a gender by being assigned early on by family, medical personnel, societal values, and cultural values. By the time the child is one year old
he/she has a pretty clear idea of what is male and what is female, as a result of parental teaching (Marlowe, 1981). Adler would agree that parents are the first educators of children regarding gender and this gender identity gets reinforced and shaped further by society at large (Heston & Kottman, 2012). School becomes a place for the children to start solidifying their gender identity, because of reinforcements from peers and other institutions outside of the family home. If a child understands blue to be associated with boys, this belief gets reinforced in every place the child goes. The child starts to make associations as to what is masculine and what is feminine, based on what gender they belong with (Marlowe, 1981). Communities and cultures often put gender labels on assignments, toys, tasks, objects, and roles. Gender labeling further reinforces to children the clear distinctions and associations between masculine and feminine characteristics and traits (Zosuls, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, Shrou, Bornstein & Greulich, 2009). Toys like trucks and cars are often geared towards boys because they are labeled and associated with strength, which is a masculine quality. This labeling and association influences gender identity formation as explained by the gender schema theory (Bem, 1981; LoBue & DeLoache, 2011).

Gender schema theory proposes that the interactions individuals have about their gender and how others perform that gender allows them to draw conclusions of what is appropriate to their gender identity and what is not appropriate (Bem, 1981; LoBue & DeLoache, 2011). For example, boys who hear ‘do not throw like a girl’, ‘man-up and stop crying’ learn that males should not engage in those feminine behaviors. Those same boys will observe girls do the exact behavior but be accepted for those expressions. The boys learn that those are feminine characteristics not to be associated with themselves. This impacts how developing boys manage their life experiences (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). If boys believe in those gender stereotypes and try
to perform it on a daily basis, it puts them in a persistent place of alertness and feeling vulnerable at all times. Boys learn from very early on that they must walk a very narrow path to being masculine (Wellman & McCoy, 2014). Gender schema theory helps explain how children, in these case boys, uphold their identity in comparison to others based on their gender schema (Bem, 1981). That is, if a boy sees himself as not athletic enough, he will compete with others boys to be more athletic so he can be seen as an adequate athlete. Both competition and success are characteristics of masculinity and men (O’Neil, 1981). In Adlerian terms, the boy’s private logic informs him that he must be dominant and competitive in all three life tasks to prove his masculinity. In the life task of love, success means being able to know what he is doing in the relationship by being in control of the relationship. In the life task of work, success means he must work the hardest to show his talents and abilities, sometimes working non-stop. Lastly, success in association is demonstrated by his strong and visionary leadership skills.

Gender influences on children become ingrained understandings of what constitutes male and what constitutes female (Sullivan & McNeely-Nutting, 2014). Children learn the specific behaviors, expressions, and attitudes that are linked to their gender versus the other (Bem, 1981). There are ranges of behaviors, expressions and attitudes that are acceptable for males, men and boys; similarly with females, women and girls too. Some of the masculine characteristics include expressions of anger, aggression, competition, success, and domination, avoiding anything feminine, and avoiding other men’s affection (O’Neil, 1981). Feminine expressions include but are not limited to: weak, emotional, vulnerable, asexual, and nurturing (Kramer, 2005). This self-socialization process about gender, as described by the cognitive theory, determines how children create their understandings of gender. These understandings of gender help children sustain their gender behaviors accordingly. Children will gradually move towards a path of
creating knowledge about their gender. Once that knowledge is created they may stick to strict adherence of that script or maybe create an adapted version of gender according to their beliefs about gender (Halim et al., 2014). Gender then becomes a place of constant change and shifts, depending on the individuals’ interaction with the outside world. Individuals constantly negotiate the meaning of their internal sense of gender versus what are society’s expectations of their gender throughout their life.

The gender role journey theory is a framework that can help explain the constant change and shift with men from traditional manhood towards transcending gender role (McDermott & Schwartz, 2013). Gender role journey theory holds that individuals move through five phases in negotiating their gender identity. The first phase is just plainly accepting the traditional gender norms that are present and reinforced in society about male and females. The second phase is starting to question those traditional gender roles. The third phase is the man being angry about his gender role. The fourth phase is the man getting into feminist activism at all levels. The last phase is where the man accepts an adapted version of his gender identity (McDermott & Schwartz, 2013). This theory is used to show how men negotiate their meaning of masculinity through the layers of sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia in arriving to a place of content with their gender identity.

**Masculinity**

From the above discussion about gender, a conclusion about masculinity could be reached that masculinity is a set of rigidly constructed ideas about what means to be men in this country. These rigidly constructed ideas include but are not limited to: competition, success, heterosexuality, avoiding femininity, avoiding affection with other males (homophobia), etc. (Kramer, 2005; O’Neil, 1981). The following quote sums up gender in men’s lives; “men are
powerfully affected by the experiences of growing up male, having people respond to them as males, expecting and having others expect certain behaviors based on “masculine gender roles,” and having feelings about their masculinities” (Kilmartin, 2007, p. 2). The constant self-evaluation and approval as male, defined by socially constructed rigid male gender role, is the negotiation men must do to be seen as masculine. This negotiation means that men are constantly looking for the meaning and interpretation of what it means to be masculine (Arxer, 2011; Connell, 2005; Kehler, 2007; Moss-Rascusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010; Pompper, 2010; Richardson, 2010). Similarly, Adler would call this search for meaning “phenomenology” the movement towards the individual making sense of the world through what they are trying to become. Adler says that individuals are not just passively consuming information; they are actively constructing their experiences based on the information they receive (Mosak, & Maniacci, 1999). This understanding builds support for all that was discussed regarding gender earlier. The meaning making and interpretation of men’s masculine gender is based on their life interactions and how they are responded too and how they respond to those interactions.

From the time of birth boys are bombarded with messages about how to be masculine (Kilmartin, 2007). Boys draw conclusions that in order to be masculine and a man he must behave according to certain characteristics (strong, sexually potent, provide, and protect) and must not divert from any of these considered male characteristics. As discussed above, these characteristics come through messages from family, school, and media and become rules as to what it means to be a man in the world. His self-esteem and self-concept becomes tied and tangled in his gender schema about who he is (Bem, 1981; McDermott & Schwartz, 2013). Much of these characteristics come from the traditional masculine ideology, which is a common set of ideals prescribed for men to follow and reinforce onto each other. Adler’s idea about the
superiority complex demonstrates this reinforcement about masculinity. In order for a man to feel superior he must put other men down for not demonstrating the true masculine qualities. If he is able to put another man down, he is able to lift himself up and be superior. Conversely, some men feel inferior about their masculinity and will rather uphold another man or group of men’s superior display of masculinity without challenge (Manaster, 2009).

The term masculine mystique was coined in the late 1970s and early 1980s to describe an intricate set of rules and meanings about what it means to achieve the ideal masculinity. These beliefs include but are not limited to men being superior to women, sex being the way to prove masculinity, success being masculinity, and avoiding the feminine (O’Neil, 1981). Again, Adler would call these set of rules or guides that a person holds close to them, whether consciously or unconsciously, the person’s lifestyle. A person’s lifestyle has four convictions that they hold as rules: a) self-concept, I am, I am not; b) self-ideal, men should and men should not; c) weltbild, their understanding about the world, others and life; and ethical convictions, what is right and what is wrong (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999).

Boys and men learn the male gender stereotypes of being masculine means being strong, dominant, successful, being a provider, and protector. They learn men should not be weak, feminine, and show fear, as these are characteristics associated with female and women. As a result, men and boys learn to avoid anything feminine because women are seen as having lower status than men (Halim et al., 2014). The constant put down of women would make men superior to women. These messages of what a man should be or should not be, as defined by community, family and society constitutes the person’s self-ideal (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). The self-ideal constantly informs and shapes the men’s lifestyle and his interaction with people in the life tasks.
In each of the three life tasks, men constantly construct their experiences as to what masculinity means to him and others. We can infer that this constant construction is the act of being his *creative self*. Adler states that individuals are the painter and the canvas at the same time, which is the creative self. Men may not notice that they are the painter and canvas as they move and adapt their meaning of masculinity in each of the life tasks. Likewise, in each one of these settings the man has an opportunity to display his understanding and meaning of masculinity. Each life task is a chance for him to get feedback, validation through feeling belonging and significance about his performance of masculinity. When the man is able to consolidate and adapt his meaning of masculinity with society’s meaning of masculinity he then becomes an individual. Adler would call this observation as men being understood in their social environment (Adler, 2011).

**Hegemonic Masculinity**

These messages sent to boys that continue on with them into their lives as men highlight the observation between many researchers: that masculinity is socially constructed (Anderson, 2008; Carver, 2006; Connell, 1992; Connell, 2005; Mahalik et al., 2003; Kehler, 2007; Keiller, 2010; Kimmel, 1993; Levant, 1996; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Pompper, 2010; Richardson, 2010). As we have already noticed, many of the messages about being a man in the world come from others in the man’s life and their surroundings. These messages and expectations about manhood and masculinity are passed down from one generation to the next with little variations. Many researchers cite that there is a dominant notion of masculinity, often referred to as hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2008; Arxr, 2011; Connell, 1992; Mahalik et al., 2003; Levant, Rankin, Williams, Hasan, & Smalley, 2010; Kimmel, 1993; Pompper, 2010; Richardson, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity is the ideal type of manhood that often sets a standard for
masculinities that are chief in a given society (Pompper, 2010). Even within this dominant form of hegemonic masculinity there is a range of hegemonic masculinities. If this is true, according to R.W. Connell (1992) then men who have access to power, typically those at the top and/or in the upper classes set the standards of what it means to be a man. Laura Kramer (2005) made the same observation that dominant forms of hegemonic masculinities lie with and is shaped by men who are in the upper and middle class, heterosexual and predominately white. These men constantly shape the meaning of hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1992) says that masculinities arrange according to gender relations and social structures. This would imply that higher social class men collectively set a hegemonic masculinity standard but each man displays a variation of hegemonic masculinity making hegemonic masculinity plural and singular at the same time. If lower class men feel inferior they may accept this structure of hegemonic masculinity without question, to find belonging and significance. In the hierarchy of men’s relationships and competition being a masculine value, each man is trying to portray the ideal hegemonic masculinity by putting other forms of masculinity down, thereby subjecting other forms of masculinity to categorize underneath this hegemonic masculinity, if those men feel inferior. Through social media hegemonic masculinities are also accepted and affirmed (Kramer, 2005).

Men who set the hegemonic masculinities have characteristics that include being detached emotionally, financially stable; physically powerful; able to protect women and children; emotionally expressionless and having a strong heterosexual drive (Kramer, 2005). These characteristics rigidly define what constitutes masculinity in each of the Adlerian life tasks. Men’s behavior in each of these life tasks is narrowly defined along with his expression. In the task of love, men must only have sex with women and only show affection towards women. In the task of association, he must maintain emotional restraint leading to detached relationships.
While in the task of work, he must succeed and work non-stop. Success at work becomes his definition of success in life and his legacy. These narrowly defined characteristics of hegemonic masculinity define how men then behave in each of these tasks of life.

The emergence of hegemonic masculinity in this country comes at the crossroads of race, class and gender. This typically implies that hegemonic masculinity is not attainable to men of color because of class and race politics (Kramer, 2005). Power defines the hegemonic masculinity, which is upheld by institutions and cultures (Connell, 1992). Masculinity is constructed in relationship to power in two ways: power over women and power over other men (Kimmel, 1993). Men’s power over other men concerns the distribution of rewards among men by differences across class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation privileges (Kimmel, 1993). The rewards that come along with being seen or affirmed as a man, in Adlerian terms imply that a man finds belonging and significance among men. The rewards associated with belonging and significance range from gaining social status to economic and political status and power (Kramer, 2005).

The portrayal of the vast forms of hegemonic masculinities usually include these four culturally maintained views about men: a) “no sissy stuff”, men are opposite of women; b) “the big wheel”, effective and triumph; c) “the sturdy oak”, assertive, impartial, tough; and d) “give’em hell”, forceful, fierce and brave (Kramer, 2005). These four cultural views of masculinity are showcased via language associated with men, on social media, and reinforced through institutions such as school. This can be easily observed in action packed hero movies like Spider man, Superman, Batman, etc. All these movies in some fashion portray all four of those ideas about masculinity and men. Adler was correct when he mentioned that this is a man’s
world based on men’s views and superiority. Adler and others define patriarchy as a system of male domination over females (Kramer, 2005).

As noted with hegemonic masculinities, masculinities are plural because there is no one standard definition of what it means to be a man; rather there is a range of masculinities (Arxer, 2011; Connell, 1992; Connell, 2005; Levant et al., 2010; Kehler, 2007; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). The range of masculinities is created when each group of men expresses those sets of characteristics in their own way. Masculinity must be seen not as a monolithic entity that is all the same but understood as a heterogeneous entity. Masculinities are shaped by culture, time, and place through the interactions with the system of gender relations (Connell, 2005). The creation of hegemonic masculinity is maintained by these elements as time passes from one generation to the next (Anderson, 2008). “We cannot understand manhood without locating the changing definitions of manhood within the larger context of the economic, political, and social events that characterize American history” (Kimmel, 1993, p. 28). Manhood needs to be seen in the context of where and when it was produced. Manhood cannot be seen in a silo way just in one culture or period of time with larger contexts of what is happening at that time in the world. Masculinities are shaped over history in its interactions with the system of gender relations (Connell, 2005). This means that masculinities regardless of their social places are constantly shaped in relationship to femininities and to other masculinities.

**Other Masculinities**

Often times, hegemonic masculinities dominate the arena of what it means to be a man (Arxer, 2011). Huge populations of men are left out of this hegemonic masculinities construction (Kramer, 2005; Sullivan & McNeely-Nutting, 2014). Anything that goes beyond those meanings are considered non-hegemonic masculinities and considered either as opposite or in opposition to
the hegemonic masculinity. This does not show the relationship of how these non-hegemonic forms of masculinity influence and shape hegemonic masculinity and vice versa (Arxer, 2011). For example, because domination is a quality of masculinity, masculinity can be observed as a top down structure regarding influence. We can assume that Adler would agree that because superiority is a masculine value, in order to dominate, there must be those that are made to feel inferior. What we would not observe are the influences from men who are at the bottom of the hierarchy, when superiority is valued. If masculinities are constructed relationally in the sphere of men’s interactions with other men, boys, women, and girls, this shows that men are constantly acting on the information about the meaning of manhood from all sides not just the hierarchal structure of masculinities.

These interactions result in creating an image of hyper-masculine characteristics for men of color (Arxer, 2011; Pompper, 2010). Hyper-masculine characteristics are often seen as a counter to hegemonic masculinity. Hyper-masculine qualities tend to be the extreme portrayals of the standards of manhood; for example, Asian American men’s strength is expressed via martial arts skills like martial artist Bruce Lee through his movies (Kramer, 2005). These perceived extreme portrayals of masculinities are seen and understood as too much expressions of manhood making it difficult for men of color to be considered masculine. Men of color’s negotiation with meaning and understandings of manhood is complicated since their manhood falls squarely at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

**Heterosexuality**

A key message that all men receive as boys in the Western world is that masculinity must be exclusively heterosexual (Anderson, 2008; Connell, 1992; Connell, 2005; Eguchi, 2011; Gross, 1978; Durell, Chiong & Battle, 2007; Han, 2006b; Kehler, 2007; Nayak & Kehily, 1996;
Pleck, 1976; Richardson, 2010). In order to be a full man, men must be attracted to women and have sex with only women. They cannot be attracted or have any feelings towards other men. They learn that loving and affection towards other men is considered gay (Kehler, 2007). Men are on the constant lookout to cast off male affection of any kind (Bem, 1981). As a result, young men learn that masculinity is about having sex; this sex being vaginal sex and none other. Men who are asexual or do not have vaginal sex are considered gay (Richardson, 2010).

Heterosexuality is presumed from the get go when a baby boy is born (Bem, 1981). Men must hold this characteristic closer than the other characteristics. This message informs boys that they must prove their heterosexual masculinity through having sex only with girls, by all means if necessary, so being a man means having sexual conquests (Arxer, 2011; Connell, 2005; Gross, 1978). Sex is then perceived as physical acts only. Men’s sexuality becomes based on biology and less about emotional connection, creating the idea that men’s sex drives are higher than women (Gross, 1978). Men’s heterosexual and masculine identity is developed via their genitals (Gross, 1978; Pompper, 2010). Sex becomes only about the sensation of the genitals and physical contact only. This is consistent with men being emotionally detached and independent (O’Neil, 1981). Men learn that love and intimacy are about the physical act of sex only, in their weltbild. It becomes a rule that dictates how men have relationships with women and others in the life task of love. The life task of love becomes physical and material acts only, since men are to be emotionless beings. Men’s private logic in love then becomes: I know she loves me but love is when she has sex with me; if she does not have sex with me then she does not love me. This guiding principle gets reinforced over and over and can eventually become true based on their experiences with women.
Furthermore, through the topic of sex men create surface level bonds but still based on a hierarchy by the number of women they have slept with (Richardson, 2010). What some men learn in their strive for superiority is that to be real men they must have as much sex with as many women as they can. This reinforces their self-ideal rule that men should only have sex with women. In striving for superiority men may forget and dismiss their self-concepts and ethical convictions about who they are and ability to respect women and girls, this is the contradiction of their private logic. Alan E. Gross (1978) states sex for men is to be observed and understood as something that is vital and keenly exciting for men. Gross goes further to state that for some men sex is like needing to care for their hygienic needs. Lastly, this understanding of heterosexuality may also create the foundation for the gender schema to develop (Bem, 1981).

Men learn that the ideal masculinity in this world is heterosexual. This understanding challenges gay men’s understanding of who they are. A gay man’s self-concept is “I am gay”; the contradictory message he also holds about his ideal self is that men should not have sex with other men. Men learn at an early age that behaving outside of this heterosexual masculine norm has consequences (O’Neil, 2013; Wellman & McCoy, 2014). In order to find significance and belonging as Adler proposes, both gay and heterosexual men will have to hide their feelings and thoughts about affection towards other men (Marlowe, 1981). If not, both gay and heterosexual men will be labeled as fags or by other derogatory names. There are also economic and social consequences for men who step outside of the stereotypical roles of what a man should be (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). These consequences, tied to same sex affection frame how gay men and heterosexual men negotiate their need for affection and love in all three life tasks, especially association and love. However, the desire for affection and love is contradicted by the private logic that men must be emotionally unattached (O’Neil, 1981). All of these consequences cast
men who are in touch with their feminine characteristics (emotional, vulnerable, and fearful) as unmanly.

Heterosexuality is a theme that is found across many communities and formed through the generations. Through the creation of hegemonic masculinity love and affection towards other men were cast out of the masculine narrative resulting in hegemonic masculinity, being solely heterosexual (Connell, 1992). The heterosexual identity is vital to every man’s lifestyle and development because this is where his masculinity is developed, discussed, and challenged (Richardson, 2010). Heterosexuality validates manhood. It is important for men to express their sexual behaviors only towards the female gender (Bem, 1981). Men avoid being labeled as gay, especially when they are in their developing years as young men. This positioning of heterosexual masculinity allows heterosexual men to position themselves on top, with anything that differs such as gay below; this is a way for heterosexual masculinity to validate their manhood and superior status (Kehler, 2007).

Gay or asexual men’s strive towards superiority within masculinity is complicated by the fact that they must hide their sexual orientation from everyone. These two groups of men are expected to behave sexually too. Gay men must act heterosexually towards women to keep their self-concept; I love men, at a distance. This keeps gay men in the closet. Gay men’s sexual behaviors are hidden in places and spaces where no one looks. Heterosexuality becomes a mechanism to control, manage and maintain what is considered masculine and what is not (Richardson, 2010). Rich (1980), as cited in (Richardson, 2010, p. 746) stated that “heterosexuality may not be a “preference” at all, but something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force”. The bombardment of male heterosexual images, acts, behaviors, and situations inform gay men that they must not be caught
expressing love towards other men. Not only do gay men learn this, heterosexual men learn this same message too. Men learn that their expressions of love towards men results in outcast, shame, and negative labels, which include being seen as less than a man, the manifestation of homophobia. If life is about finding significance and belonging in all areas of the Adlerian life tasks, emotionally bound men may find it harder to find belonging in all three areas. Gay men, along with heterosexual men, are not permitted to cultivate new objects of want because of the gender order (Connell, 1992). If men are born as men they must only desire women and women must only desire men. This assumption is imposed on all individuals and is strictly controlled in circles of men, as shared previously.

**Power and Control**

In the hierarchy of men there is power and control in being masculine. Power is the main definer of masculinity throughout history (Kimmel, 1993). Men are socialized to compete and dominate through power and control (O’Neil, 1981). The masculine identity seeks power constantly, which shapes men, and men seeking information in return shapes the masculine power collectively. Adler calls this exchange process feedback and feedforward mechanisms in the creative self (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Adler says the feedback is often seen as stagnant way to give information back to the person(s) to maintain the status quo. Feedforward allows for men to be active seekers of information about the expression of masculinity. Even though each man is shaping his meaning of masculinity through these exchanges, men collectively are shaping the meaning of manhood via power and control, simultaneously, in relationship to the gender order to ensure that status quo is maintained. This seeking out of power helps hegemonic masculinity maintain its position at the top of the gender order throughout history. Other
masculinities must continuously vie to be in relationship too, or overthrow hegemonic masculinity or be rendered invisible.

The manifestation of power and control is carried forward in men’s intimate and personal relationships with other men, boys, girls and women (O’Neil, 1981). The expectations that men must be strong, protectors and providers all carry weight about power and control. Men must not show any signs of weakness and must adhere to emotional restraint (Arxer, 2011; Gross, 1978; Kehler, 2007; Levant, 1996; Levant et al., 2010; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). In men’s meaning making and interpreting these expectations, men take the helm of responsibility to ensure they are behaving in alignment to being a provider and protector with strength. For example, living out the characteristic of protector in the life tasks of love and association means that men must protect their family at all cost even if this includes the use of violence to keep the family safe. He loves his family and wants to protect them from harm, so he must control who his family members see, hang out with, and are surrounded by. Ronald F. Levant (1996) states that because of how men are socialized to restrain emotions, a consequence is men experiencing more aggression and turning their vulnerable emotions into anger and communicating aggressively. Again, the stricter the adherence to the masculine gender roles the more men may feel vulnerable (Wellman & McCoy, 2014). Self-control is seen as a valuable asset for men to have and hold onto, while showing vulnerable emotions makes men out of control (Arxer, 2011). Anger and aggression become acceptable ways for men to express their vulnerable emotions of fear, sadness, frustration, etc., because of the overarching expectation that men must not be seen as weak. Weakness is a feminine characteristic. These emotions are considered weak and if men show emotions they are seen as weak, less than a man, and this is evidence of being gay.
Avoid the Feminine

Below men are women, below masculinities are femininities; femininities and women are what men should avoid being or being seen as at all cost (Anderson, 2008; Arxer, 2011; Carver, 2006; Kehler, 2007; Levant, 1996; O’Neil, 1981; Pompper, 2010; Richardson, 2010). From this reasoning, we can assume in Adlerian terms that men are superior and women are inferior, to be women is to be inferior to men. People view femininity and women not as a complement to men but rather an opposite of men, which is considered less than men. Adler shares that the feminine is about shortages, weak, submission, insufficiency, etc. (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Scott W. Keiller (2010) called this the gender polarization, seeing femininity and masculinity at opposite polar ends of a singular line. Keiller (2010) says because of biological essentialism, gender is based on what is between a person’s legs. Biological essentialism helps shape and ensures that men stay in their masculine places and not cross over to being women. Women are expected to stay feminine and female and are not expected to have any masculine traits. When men do cross the gender boundaries they are mocked, excluded, or corrected (Keiller, 2010).

This pressure to conform to masculine traits that are perceived to be totally opposite from feminine traits is something that falls harder on men than women (Keiller, 2010). Men risk losing being validated as a man and risk being seen as gay or as a woman, all of which are the manifestation of homophobia. Terrell Carver (2006) says, “men have far more wealth, power, influence, prestige and control than women” (p. 450). Perhaps, this is the reason why the risk of being seen as emasculated through masculinity is detrimental to men. The power stakes are high for men and when power is gone, power is hard to gather up and re-build. Men cannot risk falling short in one of the life tasks because if they fail in one area, for example by being seen as emotional through the life tasks of love, association or work they lose being seen as a logical and
rational man. This is because, again, men continuously seek to find belonging and significance through validation of their manhood from the men around them; this becomes the invisible journey in their lives, which is to fulfill, show and verify their masculinity (Kimmel, 1993). This invisible journey is the man’s private logic that develops incongruence to who he is, and of which he is unaware.

In this discussion, we can infer that avoiding the feminine does not place a distinction on whether the man identifies as heterosexual or gay. Avoiding the feminine within masculinity says to men no matter what sexual orientation a man identifies with he must not portray any feminine acts or behaviors. Avoiding feminine characteristics is a central organizing principle along with homophobia (O’Neil, 1981). So long as men avoid feminine characteristics they are not be labeled as gay or as less than a man. The more men are able to rigidly adhere to the traditional gender roles the more significance and belonging they find along with being superior.

**Male Gender Role**

Much of what cultures and communities know is that men and masculinity goes hand in hand. As discussed previously, babies with penises are assigned the male gender at birth, which equates them to being masculine because of the non-distinction between physical sex and gender. The gender roles attached to being men are attached to being masculine, which are to provide for family, protect family, speak for family, and make decisions for family. All of these are male gender roles that are associated with men in their association life task to others in life. The male gender role informs men how to behave, act, and take action on behalf of themselves and others. Masculinity is intently connected to the male gender role (Arxer, 2011; Carver, 2006; Connell, 1992; Gross, 1978; Kehler, 2007; Levant, 1996; Mahalik et al., 2003). He must learn how to perform this role well. If he does not learn how to perform this role well, again he is mocked,
critiqued and ridicule by his male peers. All things that are feminine including women, girls, and the performance of the female gender role are taboo for men to exhibit (Kehler, 2007).

**Homophobia**

Weinberg coined the term homophobia in 1972 to describe the experience of heterosexual individuals who are frightened to be in close proximity to gay people (Lock & Kleis, 1998). This understanding leads to homophobia producing anxiety in many ways for individuals (McDermott et al., 2014). Homophobia as stated above is a mechanism to keep men striving for the ideal image of masculinity and to inhibit all those characteristics even if it harms or contradicts the individual man and his private logic. Homophobia is the enforcer of boundaries between what it is male, manly, men and everything else (Durell, Chiong & Battle 2007; Funk & Werhun, 2011; Gramick, 1983; Kimmel, 2001; Lock & Kleis, 1998; Lund & Haddock, 2002; Madureira, 2007; McCann, Plummer & Minichiello, 2010; Morin & Garfinkle, 1978; Rasmussen, 2007). This concept is vitally important to understanding how homophobia shapes men’s life tasks. Discouraged men will achieve masculinity at all cost, based on their rigid views. This enforcer shapes how men behave and the meaning of what it means to be a man. Jackson Katz, founder of Mentors in Violence Prevention, states, “homophobia is one of the most, if not the most, powerful policing mechanism in male peer culture. Men and boys police each other’s attitudes, behaviors, and definitions of manhood, even more so than the law enforcement community” (Lund & Haddock, 2002, p. 106). This demonstrates the narrow way masculinity has been understood, as discussed previously. Masculinity becomes defined through a very small frame, with anything outside of that frame being considered opposite to it and inferior to masculinity. Homophobia enforces and maintains the traditional view that women and girls are
less than men. As a result homophobia is primarily a men’s issue, men reporting homophobia more than women (McDermott et al., 2014).

**Fear as a Boundary**

Homophobia is often thought of as the fear of gay people (Adams, Wright & Lohr, 1996; Gramick, 1983; Kullasepp, 2007; Madureira, 2007; McCann et al., 2010; McDermott et al., 2014; Morin & Garfinkle, 1978; Nayak & Kehliy, 1996; Tognoli, 1980; Zeichner & Reidy, 2009). Some researchers contest that homophobia is not a phobia (Adams et al., 1996; Ahmad & Bhugra, 2010; Gramick, 1983; Madureira, 2007). There is no evidence that demonstrates the homophobic person is avoiding the gay person out of fear (Adams et al., 1996). Homophobia does not appear in the DSM, the handbook for many mental health practitioners. The term homophobia is inappropriate to reference the meaning of fear of the same sex; rather the term *homosexphobia* would be more appropriate because it means fear of the same sex (Gramick, 1983).

This fear is so deeply engrained in men’s private logic that it can discourage them rather than encourage them to be their fully creative self. MaryAnn Lingg and Bobbie Wilborn (1992) state that “discouragement describes an attitude, feeling or belief that one is unable to succeed in a constructive and cooperative manner, is inadequate, or is a failure in attempts to meet the demands of life.”(p. 65) Operating from this discouraged place means again that men cannot be caught having feelings for or thoughts about other men. Fear of displaying affection towards men, moves men to only have surface level associations. In men’s life task of association, it makes the boundaries of being emotionally independent very clear but hard to regulate as men desire affection too. A mere hug or hand holding gesture may prove to be fatal if observed by others and mistakenly interpreted as an intimate gesture of desire to sleep with each other. Men
learn to isolate their feelings and keep it to themselves, which supports the masculine characteristic of being emotionally independent or unattached. Men learn to not have any intimate feelings with or for other men and others in their life tasks of association and love. Men can then commit a huge portion of their time and energy to success, competition and domination in the life task of work to prove their masculinity.

Homophobia discourages male bonding and is the boundary to ensure that deep emotional bonding does not happen. This fear is not only placed on men to keep the boundary with each other but is a boundary that separates heterosexual men from gay men. Fear can turn into hate and then violence towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons (LGBTQ) (Durell, Chiong & Battle, 2007; Funk & Werhun, 2011; Gramick, 1983; Lock & Kleis, 1998 Morin & Garfinkle, 1978; Thompson, Grisanti & Pleck, 1985; Whitley, 2001;).

Violence against LGBTQ individuals as seen and portrayed through media and stories create real fear for LGBTQ folks (Ahmad & Bhugra, 2010; Lund & Haddock, 2002; Zeichner & Reidy, 2009). Heterosexual men who feel threatened will use violence to counter this perceived threat towards heterosexual masculinity. These acts of violence against LGBTQ folks are not only to silent gay men but to make sure heterosexual men stay on top in their places as men.

Boys who are raised with rigid masculine beliefs become men who have anti-gay beliefs (McDermott et al, 2014). In order to maintain and sustain these rigid values about masculinity homophobia is used as an enforcement tool (O’Neil, 1981). Homophobia has been accepted as a system that supports the discrimination against of LGBTQ people. Heterosexual masculinity enforces homophobia to maintain these stereotypes, which in turn sustains the narrow view of traditional masculinity (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978). Additionally, the traditional gender roles for men and women reinforce stereotypical views of LGBTQ people (Whitley, 2001). The stronger
the belief in traditional gender roles, the more people have increased judgment against LGBTQ (Lock & Kleis, 1998). LGBTQ folks are seen as a threat towards heterosexual masculinity (Durell, Chiong & Battle, 2007; Gramick, 1983; Lund & Haddock, 2002; McDermott et al., 2014; Rasmussen, 2007; Thompson et al., 1985; Whitley, 2001; Zeichner & Reidy, 2009). The fear of LGBTQ folks, or gay men especially, is threatening to the notion of heterosexual masculinity and, therefore, homophobia does not encourage the acceptance of LGBTQ folks. Traditional masculinity is shaken up at the core if men are encouraged to have affectionate relationships with other men. Homophobia gets deconstructed if men are encouraged to get close with each other (Marlowe, 1981). Steven L. Arxer (2011) notes that some researchers find importance in discussing homosociality, the term given to describe the nonsexual feelings clenched by men or women for individuals of the same sex. This space is important since it creates a barrier for understanding men and women meanwhile drawing boundaries between the genders (Arxer, 2011). This can be a useful frame to decipher a man’s nonsexual feelings of love towards other men without being suspected of being gay. This concept can be helpful to dismantle this fear and boundary between affection and attraction.

**Adler’s Masculine Protest**

Some men learn to strive for superiority to ensure that they are not seen as less than a man. Adler’s masculine protest defines this more in depth regarding the drive for superiority because of men’s inferiority feelings regarding the value of traditional masculine ideals (Mosak, & Maniacci, 1999). If men have inferior feelings this might mean they are unmanly, thus men may strive to overcompensate by the masculine protest (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The masculine protest is illustrated in the discussion about homophobia where men are discouraged to have any emotional bonds in all three life tasks. Men strive to strictly adhere to the rigid roles
of being masculine, which includes having strength, avoiding the feminine, being a protector, having success, and being aggressive. The masculine protest implies this inclination to express an embellished form of masculinity that strives for power to avoid anything feminine (Nelson, 1991). Adler shared this inclination was not only seen in men but also women as well if they feel inferior because of the over valuation of masculine ideas (Eirik, 1998; Mosak & Schneider, 1977; Nelson, 1991). This emphasis on masculine ideal leads children to learn and understand that men’s power is superior to women’s power. Through meaning the child learns to strive for masculine characteristics to be superior. These masculine traits being ones discussed earlier – control, confidence, and independent (Heston & Kottman, 2012).

Some women strive to compensate with masculine ideals too. The masculine protest is not about women hating men and their power or getting men to have more power. The masculine protest is the idea of striving for superiority to compensate for masculine traits that are seen as valuable in society because society values men. Cultures where men are dominant create environments that are subtle for men to succeed and favor men more so than women (Eirik, 1998).

Adler believed that laws and culture help structure and guide gender. This understanding helped influence Adler to see gender as a social construction. This further supports and is consistent with the previous discussion about masculinity and gender. He pushed for the equality between the sexes. Adler pushed for the equality between the sexes to help deconstruct the value placed on the ideas about masculinity. Adler believed that if men overcompensated in their striving to be real men, they could venture into the place of neurosis (Mosak & Schneider, 1977; Nelson, 1991). James O’Neil (2013) who created the Gender Role Conflict scale (GRC) tool to access individuals’ psychological distress as related to their beliefs in socialized gender roles
would agree with Adler about neurosis and men. O’Neil (2013) says that narrow definitions of
gender can result in harmful psychological results for men. Adler later replaced the masculine
protest with striving for superiority (Nelson, 1991). Health consequences for men who are not in
touch with their bodies mean not being able to pay attention to how fear, anxiety, stress etc.
manifest into illness, heart failures, or even early death (O’Neil, 1981). This action of striving
can also influence men to behave in ways that are violent or abusive to be seen as real men, as
the feeling of inferiority may result in actions such as: sexual conquest, maintaining power, or
being aggressive (Mosak & Schneider, 1977). The violence used towards women and children is
a manifestation of men’s vulnerable sense of masculinity, so sex becomes power and violence
becomes a way to control their masculinity (Nelson, 1991).

Sexual conquest, maintaining and striving for power and being aggressive are all the
hallmarks of manhood valued to be masculine, as discussed earlier. How these hallmarks show
up in the men’s life tasks is sexual conquest through love, competition through work and through
aggression in association. Sexual conquest is especially important for validation as they learn
early on that they must have sex with girls no matter what. The conquest of the female body is
another hallmark of success to being a heterosexual hegemonic masculine man. Failure to live up
to these external hallmark messages leads to real feelings of inferiority. Men who strive to be
superior will behave accordingly and avoid the feminine traits (weak, vulnerable, and
conformity) so they can be seen as competent and independent. Again, once men are validated as
masculine through these hallmark traits, they find belonging and significance.

Feminine traits held and desired by men are hidden or rejected. The over valuation of
masculinity and clear gender roles makes it hard to hide feminine traits. When there are no
gender role guidelines and masculinity is not valued, then hiding feminine traits become less
challenging. Gay men who hold feminine traits and who are not afraid to express themselves are seen as a threat to heterosexual masculinity values (Nelson, 1991). Gay men are seen as a threat to male dominance and superiority. Men would no longer know how to behave if this construction fell. Men’s intimate feelings for other men and men’s feminine traits would be exposed. Men who cannot live up to the prescribed male gender role are seen as losers who failed at patriarchy (Eirik, 1998).

**Asian American Men and Masculinity**

In order for us to understand Asian American masculinity we must understand the historical, political and social context of how it has shaped Asian American men’s lifestyle (Espiritu, 2004). This understanding helps inform the context in which Asian American men’s lives are shaped and their masculinity perceived in society. The research on Asian American and specifically Asian American men is limited (Liu, 2002; Shek, 2006). Further research regarding Asian American men and their experiences are needed. Many of the articles found in the literature review were articles about masculinity and homophobia written predominately for the mainstream community. The literature review included little understanding or information about men and boys of color and their relationship to gender and homophobia. The inferences made are general and cannot be applied directly to a specific Asian American group. Additionally, more culture specific data are needed when looking at Asian American experiences.

Asian American is a term used to describe a diverse group of people who are collectively of Asian American ancestry, as well as those who identify collectively as Asian American, and those who have common Asian ancestry living in the US (Okazaki, 1998). Asian Americans are often seen as a homogenous group with very few differences. They are portrayed as similar because of some common traits they share together such as their physical features, when in fact
there are many various cultures, languages, and customs that are from East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008; Chao, Chiu, Chan, Mendoza-Denton, & Kwok, 2013; Liu, 2002; Okazki, 1998; Shek, 2006). Each one of these populations have their own subgroups of Asian Americans that have come to the US at different points in time and for different reasons; while some came as immigrants, others came as refugees. Most of the earlier groups of Asian Americans came as immigrants for a better life such as, Chinese coming because of the gold rush and Filipinos who came because of the sugar plantations in the South. Meanwhile, most refugees were fleeing persecution, as a result of the Vietnam War; they are more recent arrivals in the last 30-40 years, mostly from Southeast Asia.

For us to understand the impact of homophobia on Asian American men’s lives is for us to recognize this diversity that exists within the Asian American community. The lumping of Asian Americans into one group enables for an easier way to stereotype (nerd, martial artist, and asexual) Asian Americans. Countering these stereotypes is the diversity that exists within the Asian American umbrella, which serves to help deconstruct the stereotypes this collective group faces. The advantage of lumping them into an umbrella group enables for an easier understanding of Asian American men’s common experiences. Nonetheless, there are a number of shortages in research about Asian American as a broad group too.

Impact of US Laws

Men from China, Japan and the Philippines were first to immigrate to the US in the 1800s. Very few women came over with these men; the few women who did come were sex slaves to the small Chinese community (Okazaki, 1998). What prohibited the influx of Asian women coming to the US in the early days were US agreements and laws such as the Page Law of 1875, Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882, and The Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 with Japan
The Page Law of 1875 banned Chinese, Japanese and others from “Oriental” countries to come to the US. The Page law banned women from these same countries from coming over. The law allowed some merchants to bring their wives. This law helped shaped the image of asexual and bachelor societies for Chinese immigrant men (National Women’s History Museum, 2014). This law led to Chinese men’s gender identity being observed as questionable.

In 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act passed banning all Chinese individuals from coming to the US. This was the first time in history that an act of legislation banned immigrants by race (National Women’s History Museum, 2014). The act was renewed every 10 years until it was repealed in 1943. During that year, even though the law was repealed a quota was set on the number of Chinese immigrants coming to the US. Pertaining to the Gentlemen’s Agreement, this act limited the number of Japanese immigrants coming to the US. This law subsequently helped create photo brides, wherein Japanese men living in the US could choose to marry their potential spouses by looking at photos sent from Japan (Sax, 2011). These laws led to very few Asian women coming over with men who were married and left few options for men who wanted to get married. Anti-miscegenation, immigration, and labor laws all regulated the movement of Asian American masculinity. These laws helped shaped American views about Asian men and placed early Chinese and other Asian American men into jobs that were mostly seen by society as women’s jobs, such as cooks, laundry workers, housekeeping (Han, 2006a; Han, 2006b; Liu, 2002; Phua, 2007; Shek, 2006). These jobs did little to improve the image of Asian masculinity.

David Eng states Asian American masculinity is constantly being shaped, developed, maintained and stabilized through policing of their gender, as a result often stereotypically showing Asian American males as asexual and/or feminine (Han, 2006b). These laws did exactly what Eng states, by excluding Asian women from coming over, which resulted in the depiction
of Asian American men as less masculine and unattractive mate selections. These laws impacted Asian American men’s masculinity collectively whether they were heterosexual, gay or bi-identified. However, gay men are impacted deeply since they have to navigate racism, homophobia and heterosexism, since their identities are developed at these merging points (Han, 2006b). The laws implicated that Asian American men did not have masculine characteristics nor would be able to attain masculinity in this country. Asian American’s starting point to achieving masculinity is from the very bottom echelon having little masculine characteristics.

**Gay Asian American Men**

This portrayal of Asian American men as asexual and feminine helped solidify gay Asian American men’s feminine stance and that they cannot achieve masculinity (Eguchi, 2011). Gay Asian American men are seen as exotic and as a fetish for and by gay white men; this is consistent with the view that Asian American women are seen by and for heterosexual white men (Eguchi, 2011; Han, 2006b). Shinsuke Eguchi (2011) says “…gay Asian men are socially positioned as feminine in the Western *heteronormative* masculine power structure” (p. 38). Gay Asian men are observed to play the feminine role in gay relationships and hold feminine characteristics of weak, dependent and submissive. This view moves them to the bottom of the hierarchy of masculinities. However, because gay Asian American men and heterosexual Asian American men are both viewed as having similar stereotypical feminine characteristics and physical features, there are no clear distinctions regarding the starting place to achieve masculinity for both groups (Han, 2006b). This blurriness between how gay Asian American and heterosexual Asian American masculinity are expressed further supports the notion that Asian American men cannot achieve masculinity in this country regardless of sexual orientation.
Gay Asian American men are marginalized by their gender, race and sexual orientation. These complex intersections constantly shape gay Asian American men’s understanding of masculinity (Han, 2006b). They are in a place of constantly behaving and negotiating their gay and Asian male identities (Eguchi, 2011). Gay Asian American men who are openly gay or show predominately feminine characteristics, described above, face discrimination from heterosexual Asian American men because of their sexual orientation. They also face discrimination from mainstream society because of their race (Cheng, 2011). These complexities are often lacking in research regarding Asian American men generally. Gay Asian American men feel they often have to choose belonging and significance, either that is in the mainstream gay community or their ethnic Asian American community (Han, 2006b). Sometimes they can find belonging and significance in the mainstream gay community because of their sexual orientation. Other times they can find significance and belonging in their ethnic community because of shared cultural experiences, but their sexual orientation will cast them out of the community. Most of the time they find it hard to find a space that can hold both identities (Han, 2006a; Han, 2006b). This makes it challenging for them to navigate the three life tasks because they may find love with a man but because of their association with their ethnic community that does not accept same sex relationships they will feel constrained. Their journey to masculinity is still tied to the experiences of heterosexual Asian American men because of the blanketed stereotypes about Asian American men collectively.

**Impact of Asian American Male Stereotypes**

Asian American masculinity is not even seen as plural because of the plight that gay Asian American men face. The general blanket perception that all Asian Americans look alike does not help with deconstructing the singular masculinity perceived by society about Asian
American men. Asian American men were viewed early on as sexless or feminine persons. The portrayal that they are shameless individuals enticing white American women into delinquent activities did not help boost their masculine image either (Phua, 2007). Asian American men were seen to have delicate features, smaller statures, and because of performing more feminine roles were seen as capable of only performing those roles (Han, 2006a). Asian American masculinity ends up not fitting the Western understanding of masculinity (Phua, 2007). This solidly supports hegemonic masculinity as belonging only to white men in the Western world (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008; Han, 2006a; Han, 2006b; Liu, 2002; Liu & Iwamoto, 2006; Okazaki, 1998; Phua, 2007; Shek, 2006; Wong, et al., 2012; Wong, Owen, Tran, Collins & Higgins, 2012).

Asian American men could not fully fill all four culturally dominant versions of masculinity: a) no sissy stuff, b) the big wheel, c) the sturdy oak, and d) give ‘em hell (Kramer, 2005). Asian American men are observed to have feminine characteristics so they would be considered sissies already. They are observed to be asexual which does not boost their masculinity with the sturdy oak version of masculinity. Asian Americans can fulfill the big wheel and the give ‘em hell versions of masculinity but as stated, in only the extreme versions. Success comes at the cost of being seen as an asexual nerd. Martial artists like Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and others tried to create an alternative image of Asian masculinity by showcasing strength through violence to fulfill the give ‘em hell version but that made Asian American men seen as uncontrollably violent individuals. Asian American men will always have to fight to be seen as masculine in the hierarchy of masculinities.

Since the ability to perform and have sex is seen as crucial to achieving masculinity, Asian American’s perceived small sexual body organ only deepens the climb (Phua, 2007).
Asian American men are already seen as less sexually attractive. This perceived notion about their sexual organ further validates their sexless and asexual images. Sex with women is needed to validate hegemonic masculinity. Asian American men were and continue to be seen as not capable of performing sexual acts as prescribed by masculine values compared to their white counterparts who are able too. Even when perceived heterosexual Asian American men are portrayed as heroes in media they still do not end up with the woman or having sex with her on screen (Han, 2006b). They are seen as less attractive and less desirable as mates to women (Han, 2006b). Their manhood is questionable, which makes them be observed as unable to be the man, father or husband needed in a relationship to carry out provider and protector roles needed in family.

Asian American men’s perceived social incompetence such as being shy, distant, unfriendly, and lacking of warmth does not help either (Wong et al., 2012). The odds appear to be stacked against Asian American men towards achieving masculinity and being seen as masculine in the Western frame. When Asian American men are seen as masculine it is often in the hyper-masculine form, which is the extreme image of masculinity discussed previously. He is portrayed as the marital artist or Kung Fu fighter. He is strong but ill tempered and violent or brutal, which plays into his lack of social competence. He is a hero but one who is a loner and isolated from others because of his lack of ability to connect beyond saving people. This hero image of Asian American men is an exaggeration of human abilities rather than showing all of his humanity in being a hero (Wong et al., 2012). The counter image to this is the one who lacks masculinity.

The general myth about the image of Asian Americans as the model minority deepens their lack of masculinity. The model minority paints Asian Americans as excelling in education,
having intelligence in the areas of math and science, being hard workers, very successful in their fields and free from social or personal problems (Chao et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2012). The model minority image came about in the mid-1960s, showcasing Asian Americans as achievers of the American Dream (Chao et al., 2013). This portrayal does not show the uniqueness and experiences of each different ethnic group within the umbrella of Asian Americans. There are vast differences in each of the ethnic groups regarding class, education level, length of time in the United States, and how they came to the United States. However, because this myth holds presently as reality for all Asian Americans it becomes difficult to help decipher and see the vast differences within Asian Americans. The model minority image says that Asian Americans are able to overcome harsh realities and make it in this country no matter what. The result is few social services or attention paid towards Asian American because they are able to achieve at a high rate of success. Those who fail to achieve the American Dream because of their socio-economic status are invisible (Chao et al., 2013). The model minority myth reinforces that Asian American men can be heroes but not enough to be true men.

All of these stereotypes make up how Asian American in general are perceived but when considering Asian American men, specifically, these images portray men who are not masculine and cannot fit the Western definition of masculinity. Asian American men are observed to be physically weak but with the intelligence to succeed. Asian American men are observed to be nerds who are isolated individuals with lack of connectedness with others. They constantly have to negotiate how to be masculine in a society that does not see them as masculine. Asian American men are already seen as less than men. Asian American men have twice as much work to do to be validated as men societally and relationally because they have to navigate their own cultural values too.
Cultural Values

Although there are a number of different cultures, customs, language, and rituals among the numerous different Asian American groups, many of the groups do hold some cultural values that are similar. These values can sometimes be connected to the rigid gender roles and relationships between men and women. Gender values, like men are decision makers in Hmong culture (Symonds, 2004) informs men and women in the culture how to behave and interact with each other. Similar cultural values about gender help shape the meaning of masculinity within the collective Asian American community but not the larger society because of the prevalent stereotypes that exist.

Family values would be the first place to start in understanding cultural values of Asian American families. Family relationships are valued deeply as family includes not just the immediate family but extended family such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, in laws, grandchildren, etc. Children learn to think collectively about these individuals as they carry out their gender roles. Families are organized by age and birth order; parents being at the top with dad being the head decision maker and mom being the one who takes care of the children and their emotional wellbeing. Sons are typically valued over daughters because of the patriarchal structure (Okazaki, 1998). Male and masculinity are tied to these cultural values about gender roles, as in the Hmong culture where the division of labor is a reflection of their understandings of gender, with women taking care of the domestic chores and men doing work outside of the home (Symonds, 2004). Men doing the work outside of the home, which requires strength and agility like hunting and silver work, places importance on men and their superiority to women in the Hmong community (Symonds, 2004).
Children are taught to honor their parents and other elders in the family by not challenging or speaking back to them. Children are to be loyal, loving, respectful, obedient, and considerate towards their parents; this is known as filial piety (Phua, 2007). Similarly, wives are to honor their husbands in the same ways as children honor their parents. In return, the husband would do the same towards his parents, too. Similar to Western society, in the Hmong community there is a belief in men’s superiority over women (Symonds, 2004). The practices in honoring elders and men reinforce the concept of men being the superior gender within the patriarchal hierarchy that privileges men over women. Chinese Confucian teachings value male domination (Halim et al., 2014). This influence reinforces Chinese American men’s ideas about masculinity being superior to femininity.

This line of honoring and respect goes on forever in a cycle from one generation doing it to the next generation and so on. The patriarchal structure places more emphasis on men and boys to be honored and respected at a greater extent than women and girls. These actions of honoring men and boys are visible in communities by valuing the birth of sons as an example. Sons can only be the ones to carry on family names. Sons are also expected to uphold the traditions, which will be passed down from one generation to the next. These gender role expectations shape the meaning of masculinity, especially heterosexual masculinity for boys. When gay sons are not able to carry on family names they are seen as not appropriating proper gender behavior (Han, 2006b). These family values crossover into the community too as the community also shapes the familial values.

Children learn that their specific community holds the meanings of filial piety too. In the Adlerian sense, these values are helping children build their lifestyle through their self-ideal, self-concept, weltbild, and ethical convictions. Asian Americans place significance on
individuals thinking of others first before themselves; collectivism and humility are held to high regards (Wong et al., 2012). Individuals should and need to think of their families name and not bring any shame. Pride, or the sense of saving face as termed in Asian American communities, is significant in that individuals behaviors and actions are not just theirs but reflective of their entire family or group (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008). If families or individuals were to lose face they would bring much shame upon the family and potentially marking the family for generations to come. This collective thinking and responsibility does not allow the individuals to think about themselves much.

With respect to masculinity, men are expected to uphold these values closely and regulate them since they are valued more in community and family settings. We can assume that masculine values become cultural values; they are one and the same, both in Asian American communities and mainstream communities. Asian American men are to perform their gender roles appropriately in public as to enforce these values (Han, 2006b). In the binary gender roles that Asian Americans live in, they are constantly asked to perform those specific gender roles in relationship to each other in community. These constant performances of gender roles are driven by cultural values that dictate their gender (Han, 2006b). When Asian American men step outside of these values and their prescribed gender role their masculinity is questioned along with their Asian American identity.

Emotional restraint, where individuals should not show their true feelings to others, is important in keeping with the value of humility and collectivism (Gonzales, Ramos-Sanchez, Tran & Roeder, 2006; Liu, 2002; Liu & Iwamoto, 2006; Okazaki, 1998; Wong et al., 2012; Zhang, 1999). Individuals are expected to keep their emotions under control. They are not allowed to share their emotions about a situation or what is happening, which leads to a passive
aggressive stance. Emotional restraint is tied with the cultural value of saving face also; individuals’ emotional display is a reflection of their family not just them (Liu & Iwamoto, 2006). The stereotype associated with Asian American men as lacking social competence may stem from this cultural value of emotional restraint. Humility and collectivism imply that individuals are to keep their emotions under control, be humble and think of how others may feel or be impacted by the person’s emotions. Asian American men are valued when they can control their emotions, not letting their emotions get the best of them. This would be consistent in supporting the Western masculine value of having emotional restraint. As previously discussed, men who show emotions too much are considered weak and feminine. Asian American men are seen already starting from the feminine place; because of laws, stereotypes and the cultural value of emotional restraint, they are seen societally as emotionless and not needing any help. These cultural values place a considerable amount of strain on Asian American men’s masculinity and make it difficult to attain masculinity (Liu & Iwamoto, 2006).

**Asian Homophobia**

There is a limited amount of research that looks at how Asian Americans depict and describe homophobia. Much of the research that pertains to homophobia in mainstream communities does not break the data apart further to look at specifically how homophobia is produced, recorded, and observed by the Asian American communities. The limited research on homophobia in Asian American community leads to the conclusion that probably how Asian American communities depict and express homophobia is through their experiences of acculturation and assimilation in the US.

One article that provides some insight into homophobia in Chinese culture was the analysis of the film *Farewell My Concubine* (1993). Benzi Zhang (1999) provides a frame for
how homophobia is represented in the film and how Chinese culture understands, documents and expresses homophobia. Zhang (1999) states that, “In China, [being gay] is never a pure “sexual” problem, but an issue that raises questions about the violent discourse in which the peremptory heterosexuality has been a pre-dominant force as the rule of normality” (p.101). Chinese men are seen as normal and are the center of Chinese culture and foundation (Zhang, 1999). Similarly, Hmong men are seen as the norm, which equates Hmong culture and Hmong men as one and the same thing (Symonds, 2004). We can make a similar observation with some of the values that are found in hegemonic masculinity being held as values in culture. For example, a man that is able to restrain his emotions is observed to be more of a rational thinker than a man who is not able to do so. Society values rational and logical thinkers who can control their emotions, as a result masculine values in a patriarchal community or men’s world become societal values too.

In patriarchal cultures, men generally are observed to be the authoritative figure that supports and provides for the family. The value placed on women is second to that of men. Chinese masculinity and manhood in ancient China was tied to the number of wives that a man marries (Zhang, 1999). Zhang describes that homophobia is the result of fear about women’s sexuality. Women’s sexuality and being gay were strategies used to blame social, political and moral problems on when something was out of the norm (Zhang, 1999). Fear of male affection and avoidance of feminine are characteristics of Western masculinity too.

    Again, with limited research on Asian Americans and gender, some conclusions can be drawn regarding how homophobia impacts Asian American lives. Asian American communities have values about emotional restraint, men being superior, men being protectors, men being providers, and the other gender-related characteristics that are similar to Western ideas about masculinity. What is difficult to predict is how homophobia is recorded and understood outside
the context of Asian American acculturation and assimilation factors. That being said, we can conclude that Asian American experiences with homophobia, as discussed, does significantly shape how this population of men negotiate their meaning and interpretation of masculinity in each life task. From the research and discussion, we can presume that homophobia along with Asian American values discourage emotional connection, so men are not encouraged to be emotionally connected. This also leads to the portrayal of Asian American men as unemotionally connected individuals who are violent. These are some conclusions that can be drawn based on this discussion about Asian American masculinity and homophobia. These conclusions that Asian American men are locked into rigid and narrowly defined definitions of manhood support our initial hypothesis. They have little room to be or to recognize their creative self. Lastly, their private logic can be a barrier to their failure at masculinity.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

This appears to be one of the few first analyses on how homophobia as observed in this country impacts and shapes Asian American men’s lifestyles from an Adlerian perspective. There is limited research on Asian American men’s gender identity development. There is even less research on Asian American and homophobia (Durell, Chiong & Battle, 2007). Much of my discussion drew inferences about characteristics of masculinity as shared across cultures. There are some cultural notions of masculinity that may have gotten lost and current research does not give a full picture of how homophobia fully impacts Asian American lifestyles.

Further research could deepen the understanding about what Asian American homophobia entails. One such question that arises is how do Asian Americans depict homophobia in their communities? Being able to understand gender identity development as it relates to Asian American community broadly or specifically to a cultural community would
give more detailed analysis. There are a limited number of books and articles that discuss the understanding of specific Asian American cultural construct of gender. Further consideration should be given to studying one particular Asian American group, which might be beneficial since Asian American is a large umbrella term encompassing hundreds of cultures, languages and customs. Lastly, one area that research has not yet touched on much is trans men’s experiences with masculinity and transphobia. It would further our understanding about gender, if we can analyze and research how trans men retain and maintain these masculine ideas and transcend our thinking about masculinity.

**Conclusion**

Gender greatly impacts and shape individuals’ lifestyle, in this instance Asian American men. Most importantly gender helps individuals define their place of significance and belonging in the three life tasks identified by Adler of love, work and association. As Asian American men grow up in this country they are bombarded with messages about hegemonic masculinity, and often times they do not fit that profile. Asian American men are constantly negotiating their meaning and understanding of what it means to be Asian American and men through their lifestyle and private logic. However, homophobia generates and plays a largely limiting stance on Asian American men’s creative self. Homophobia discourages Asian American men from being in touch with their feminine side. Homophobia discourages Asian American men in finding belonging and significance in their larger understanding of hegemonic masculinities. Supporting Asian American men means helping them transcend pre-conceived notions of masculinity and facilitate space for their creative self to emerge.
References


IMPERFECT MASCULINITIES


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