

Too hunky to help:

A person-centered approach to masculinity and prosocial behavior among adolescent boys.

THE GIST: Our study explored how young boys navigate social expectations and relationships, revealing three distinct social patterns. The largest group (50%) displayed traditional masculine behaviors and strong social skills but felt pressured to conform to masculine norms and were less likely to engage in prosocial behavior. Another group (41%) was socially confident without relying on traditional masculinity, showing kindness and cooperation while feeling little pressure to conform. A smaller group (9%) struggled socially and did not strongly identify with masculine norms. These findings highlight the different ways boys develop social identities and the role of gender expectations in shaping their behavior. Parents and teachers can use this insight to foster healthier social development by encouraging positive, inclusive forms of confidence and connection.

THE TAKEAWAY: Parents and teachers have a powerful role in shaping how young boys navigate social expectations. While traditional masculinity can encourage social connection, its link to lower prosocial behavior is concerning. Encouraging boys to associate masculinity with kindness and cooperation can help foster healthier social development. At the same time, we must support those who struggle socially, ensuring they feel included and valued. By promoting positive, inclusive social norms, we can help all boys build strong, compassionate relationships.