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SOCI 6900

Op-Ed #2: Masculinity and the Military

As part of our course work in Sociology 6900 during the fall of 2015 we were required to write two short papers 5 pages in length. The second of which centered around the viewing of the film *The Mask You Live In,* and discussing a central theme of your choosing. I chose to discuss modern masculinity in the United States and its connection to suicide rates in the military. Currently suicide rates in the armed forces of America have reached great numbers even surpassing the number of American service members killed in both the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns combined. This being the case, what is being done to curb this trend and does masculinity have anything to do with this.

According to the film, masculinity in America does not let men express themselves in a healthy way. As men grow older they no longer cry as often or share with close friends, they also believe they need to continuously prove their masculinity. All of these factors push to further upset a situation involving post-traumatic stress or the stressful lives of service members who are kept away from friends and family for weeks or months on end several times a year. Having experienced this stress myself, I can say that it can quickly bring one closer to depression. I spend six months in Afghanistan and in that short time I experienced more stressed than I had previously felt in my life. Working long hours in extreme conditions, attempting to keep in touch with family who are living on polar opposite schedules to you and possibly no liking those you work with everyday of the week, all of these stresses in an overseas situation can push anyone to do things they would not normally do.

Suicides in the military have a detrimental effect on the over all cohesion and the military effectiveness. This being the case the United States armed forces has made attempts to stop this high suicide rates include training members to better understand the warning signs of suicide and better ways to help those who may be heading down the path of suicide. This attempt by the military to slow suicide rates is a step in the right direction but there is still more that needs to be done in order to alleviate this issue. Men should be raised to know that they are allowed to express themselves without fear of judgment or harassment. This is one the facts that the film discusses, those who mentor young men need to condone a better form of masculinity. This form of masculinity will allow young men to fully understand that sharing feelings is a positive practice that does not have negative consequences.