

Study explores men's ability to manage fear in ways that allow them to exhibit confidence

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An Indiana University of Pennsylvania sociologist's study of mixed martial arts competitors found that these men have unique ways of managing fear that actually allow them to exhibit confidence.

This ability, which Dr. Christian A. Vaccaro and colleagues call "managing emotional manhood," is both an interactional strategy for managing emotion and a means for conveying a [social identity](#) to others. The study finds that successful management of fear by men in [contact sports](#) such as mixed martial arts may "create an emotional orientation that primes men to subordinate and harm others."

Vaccaro's co-authored article, "Managing Emotional Manhood: Fighting and Fostering Fear in Mixed Martial Arts" appears in the December 2011 issue of the American Sociological Association's [Social Psychology Quarterly](#).

"Putting on a convincing manhood act requires more than using language and the body; it also requires emotion work. By suppressing fear, empathy, pain, and shame and evoking confidence and pride, males signify their alleged possession of masculine selves," Vaccaro said.

"By signifying masculine selves through evoking fear and shame in others, such men are likely to more easily secure others' deference and accrue rewards and status. Managing emotional manhood, whether it occurs in a locker room or boardroom, at home or the Oval Office, likely plays a key role in maintaining unequal social arrangements."

Vaccaro's research included two years of fieldwork and interviews with more than 100 mixed martial arts fighters, analyzing how they managed fear and adopted intimidating personas to evoke [fear](#) in opponents.

"We conceptualize this process as 'managing emotional manhood,' which refers to emotion management that signifies, in the dramaturgical sense, masculine selves," Vaccaro said.

"Whereas most scholarship on gendered emotion work focuses on how women manage emotions at work and home in ways that reinforce their subordination, we show how men do emotion work aimed at facilitating domination," he continued.

Vaccaro's research interests are in the study of gender, emotions, identity, and embodiment.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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