

'I'll sleep when I'm dead': The sleep-deprived masculinity stereotype

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In the United States, the average American sleeps less than the minimum seven hours of sleep per night recommended by the Center for Disease Control, and nearly half of Americans report negative consequences

from insufficient sleep. This problem appears to be especially prevalent in men, who report getting significantly less sleep, on average, than women.

A cultural complication is the notion that getting less than the recommended amount of sleep signals something positive about an individual. For example, US President Donald Trump has boasted about getting less than four [hours of sleep](#) per night and regularly derogates his political opponent Joe Biden as "Sleepy Joe."

"The Sleep-Deprived Masculinity Stereotype," a new paper in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, examines a possible stereotype connecting sleep and [masculinity](#) along with its underlying mechanisms and its [social implications](#).

Authors Nathan B. Warren and Troy H. Campbell conducted 12 experiments involving 2,564 American participants to demonstrate that a sleep-deprived masculinity stereotype exists. In one experiment, participants were asked to imagine seeing a man shopping for a bed. Then, a salesperson asked the man, "How much do you normally sleep?" The results found that the mean masculinity rating for participants in the lots of sleep condition was significantly lower than the mean masculinity rating for participants in the little sleep condition.

In another experiment, participants were asked to ascribe different attributes to a male character, assigned to either a "very masculine and manly" man or a "not very masculine and not very manly" man. Participants in the masculine condition described their character sleeping 33 minutes [less sleep](#) per night than the characters described in the not masculine condition. A final experiment showed that participants who imagined stating they sleep more than average felt significantly less masculine than participants who imagined stating they sleep less than average.

Collectively, the experiments found that men who sleep less are seen as more masculine and more positively judged by society. The same patterns were not consistently observed for perceptions of women.

"The social nature of the sleep-deprived masculinity stereotype positively reinforces males who sleep less, even though sleeping less contributes to significant mental and physical health problems," the authors write. This may be particularly detrimental because men frequently have significantly more negative attitudes towards seeking psychological help. "Unfortunately, the problems created by the sleep-deprived masculinity [stereotype](#) may reach beyond individuals and into society, as men who sleep less are found to be more aggressive and violent." This is an example of the restrictive and toxic characteristics of masculinity, "which can be harmful to men's health and society at large."

The bright side of this research, the authors say, is that "as [society](#) continues to challenge traditional definitions of masculinity, attitudes toward sleep may become more positive, and all people might enjoy more nights full of healthy sleep."

More information: Nathan B. Warren et al, The Sleep-Deprived Masculinity Stereotype, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1086/711758](https://doi.org/10.1086/711758)

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