

Trial of the Century  
A Solo Performance of My Own Design

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Abstract

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Being a man in this world is tricky. Being a man who wants to do better is trickier. Understanding the influences that make us who we are both consciously and unconsciously is trickier still. The following is a piece devised of my own design with inspiration taken from an article on toxic masculinity entitled, "Dear Jonah Hill, The Problem with 'Superbad' isn't Masculinity" by D.C. McAllister.

This assignment was intentionally simplistic in design; one actor, two tables, a few boxes, and a red hat. To provide more would have distracted from the duality of a man on stage arguing for and against Toxic Masculinity. It was my intention going into this piece to A). Risk being disliked by the audience and B). Challenge the audience to look at themselves and access in what ways they promote the toxicity of the patriarchy. This thesis documents my process from before I even knew what it was until the final performance.

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### **“Trial of the Century”: A Solo Performance of My Own Design**

Midway on my research journey, I found myself in dark woods, the right topic lost. I couldn't decide what I wanted to write about and explore. Initially, I wondered why my fiancé didn't understand the importance of sports in my life. I thought I'd write a show that educated women on why men are so obsessed with sports. Then I found myself asking, “Well aren't women fans of sports too? Hell, aren't women athletes too?” So I started looking into gender roles and dynamics in sports and found myself wondering, “Why do I just automatically associate sports with men?” which led to the question, “Why do I associate anything with men the way I do?” I was drowning in article after article on sports and manliness when I started researching two keywords: “toxic” and “masculinity”. After a few more weeks of research, I came across a piece on the ultra-conservative website, The Federalist, entitled, “*Dear Jonah Hill: The Problem with ‘Superbad’ isn't Toxic Masculinity*” by D.C. (Denise) McAllister. A well-articulated and structurally sound point of view, this article quickly became the cornerstone for my solo show performance.

In the fall of 2018, the Professional Actor Training Program had the distinct privilege to invite Shakespeare and rhetoric extraordinaire, Scott Kaiser, to work with the M.F.A. acting and directing students for an extended masterclass covering his book, “*Shakespeare's Wordcraft*”. When I read this article by McAllister, I was suddenly reminded of all the rhetorical devices we

had covered with Scott. Logos, pathos, ethos, alliteration, anaphora, it was all there! I became obsessed; not with what she was saying, which was often entirely false or extremely misguided, but with how she was saying it! She was making a salient argument defending toxic masculinity and redefining it as “traditional masculinity”. By the time I had read through it a few times, my head was spinning. I didn’t know what I believed anymore. Was I as “woke” as I like to think I am? Why did this woman defend toxic masculinity so vehemently? Did she convince me that traditional masculinity isn’t such a bad thing after all? I immediately began forming a counter point to her article to prove to myself that I’m not toxic, I’m not the problem, and that is when I realized that in a court of law, I couldn’t beat this argument. I couldn’t beat this argument not because it was necessarily true, but because it was so well argued. This made me sick to my stomach. I realized I am toxic, I am the problem. I am complicit. This became the backdrop for my Solo Show; a courtroom with both sides expressing their point of view on toxic masculinity.

I knew before I found this cornerstone article that one of my main goals for this project would be: “to risk being hated by the audience”. Although I didn’t exactly know how I was going to accomplish this going in, I knew that my desire to be liked gets in my way as an artist. Overcoming this habit and forming the piece around this idea was crucial, and when I found this article, I found a channel through which to take that risk. I also knew that I didn’t just want to reach out to the left-wing, progressive minds that were sure to comprise a majority of the audiences I would perform in front of. That was too easy, to hate on toxic masculinity with those folks. I wanted to find a way to reach those who “check out” when they hear the term “toxic masculinity”. I knew I needed to gain their trust to get them to listen to me but when it came down to highlighting their complicity, I wasn’t sure how to proceed. I hoped that the

audience would be vocal enough on the night of performance to stress the points I was trying to make and to groan at those points that rang untrue. This happened in ways I couldn't even have anticipated. It was hugely successful thanks to a few key audience members who weren't going to sit idly by while I spewed lies to the people. Laughs, groans, guffaws, you name it.

Additionally, creating this piece with sufficient time to memorize lines proved beneficial. In previous classes for solo show performance, I took it for granted that they were my words and when the day came, I could say whatever I wanted. This is a fallacy of self-produced work. That's like trying to get to your newly bought house and saying, "It's my house. I'll know it when I see it" even though you've never been and don't even know what it looks like yet. Applying this and other lessons from Solo Performance with Valerie Curtis-Newton as well lessons from Alexander Technique with Cathy Madden were integral in creating the environment to thrive under the conditions that were assigned. Lessons that included:

- Doing the thing before assigning value.
- Attempting a task with a constructive, conscious kindness that is based on the fundamental belief that where I am today is enough.
- Healthy disconnect or "oh well". A mantra that promotes seeing one's worth outside of their artistic accomplishments.

I also experimented with dialects and channeling different resonance points to differentiate characters on stage. I used slow tempo from Suzuki training to accentuate the final moments of my piece and draw out the agony of the reality that toxic masculinity abounds and is constantly getting away with intolerable behavior. Movement was always an aspect that I wanted to incorporate into this process, but this didn't become clear until I heard a song by

Dean Martin. “My Rifle, My Pony, and Me” is a perfect representation of the romanticism that every man feels about his own masculinity. It’s a song about a lone cowboy who is one with nature. He doesn’t need anything or anybody, just his rifle (giving him the ability to dominate his surroundings), his pony (giving him the ability to go anywhere at any time, ultimate freedom), and himself (which embodies all that a man is and will ever need to be). It’s nostalgic, it’s toxic, and it’s absolutely beautiful. From the moment I heard this song, I knew this was how my piece would end.

In the week following our Solo Show performances, one of my classmates said something to the effect of, “We didn’t have any help, we did it all on our own!” This is true and not true at the same time. While it is true that we were absolutely thrown to the wolves and told to fend for ourselves, we were absolutely given the tools to not only survive, but thrive under those conditions. Those wolves never stood a chance. The previous two and a half years were a boot camp leading up to creating our own work. And this thesis project is only barely scratching the surface. One of my main reasons for coming to graduate school in the first place was that I wanted to create and produce my own work. I remember telling Valerie Curtis-Newton in a hotel room in New York during URTA’s that I was “a good puppet”, meaning I was very skilled at giving the director what they want, but one of my goals was to “cut the strings”. Well now the time has come to cut that final string and see what happens.

Sources cited:

McAllister, Denise. “Dear Jonah Hill: The Problem With 'Superbad' Isn't Masculinity.” *The Federalist*, 18 Feb. 2019, [thefederalist.com/2019/02/18/dear-jonah-hill-problem-superbad-isnt-masculinity/](https://thefederalist.com/2019/02/18/dear-jonah-hill-problem-superbad-isnt-masculinity/).

# Trial of the Century

A fictional memoir inspired by the writing of D.C. McAllister

By

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## Characters:

**Judge Manly**- Never seen, only heard.

**Bailiff**- Never seen, only heard.

**The Prosecution**- representing Humanity in this case. Very self assured in his righteousness. Up and coming young professional. Personally affected by Toxic Masculinity.

**The Defense**- representing Toxic Masculinity but is convinced he is defending all of masculinity here today. A polished southern gentleman who is much more experienced in law.

**Foreman**- lead juror, never seen, only heard.

**Jury**- The audience.

*Blackout.*

*Lights up on a courtroom. There are two tables side by side with space in between them. Stage left is the defendant's table which has two chairs, both empty, with a red cap on the table in front of the chair which is furthest stage left. Stage right is the prosecution's table which has one chair, where we see the prosecuting lawyer sitting, eagerly searching through his boxes of files. His table is covered in documents and file boxes. The defendant's table has nothing but that red cap on it's table.*

*The judge "enters" though not into the space. We hear his voice as well as that of the bailiff but never see either character.*

**Bailiff (voice-over):** All rise. (*Humanity rises.*) Presiding over the case "Humanity vs. Toxic Masculinity" is the Honorable Judge Manly.

**Judge (voice-over):** Be seated. We will now hear closing statements beginning with the prosecution. Please keep your comments brief.

**The Prosecution:**

Thank you your honor. People of the jury, I'm sure you are as anxious as I am to put all of this behind us. During our time here together in this courtroom, you have been presented with sufficient evidence to find the defendant, Toxic Masculinity, guilty all charges against Humanity. You know the dangers of allowing Toxic Masculinity to leave this courtroom a free man and continue poisoning the minds of your peers, friends, loved ones, your children. You all have, undoubtedly, been the victims and sometimes the offenders of Toxic Masculinity. As a cisgender, heterosexual, half-white identifying male, I will be the first to admit I constantly have to evaluate both sides of the coin.

In a moment, you are going to leave this room, and you are going to deliberate, and I want you to come back with a verdict of guilty. But before you do I want to remind you of some things that we have covered here today.

Toxic Masculinity has placed a monopoly on what should be an infinite amount of ways for a man to express himself. He has cornered the market and said, "if you don't behave this way, you are not a man. You do not belong." At the core of each and every one of us is a desire to belong to something greater than ourselves, regardless of gender. Some people turn towards religion, others towards their careers. Some people participate in sports or other group activities. Some people just desperately want to fit in. It's who we are. When that core element of belonging is fundamentally tied to toxic, controlling, dominating, aggressive, violent, and oppressive behavior, we have failed as a community.

Toxic Masculinity is inherently hegemonic. In fact the terms “toxic masculinity” and “hegemonic masculinity” are directly interchangeable.

“Hegemonic Masculinity”, as I’m sure you all remember, can best be described as “a custom that legitimizes powerful men’s dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of lesser men and women, and other marginalized ways of being a man”. It is the “standardized method of manliness”. It is the ideal. Toxic Masculinity is what we all should aim to be. Dominate, control, use violence when necessary.

The President of the United States has a personal motto that he picked up from Roger Stone, a good friend of his. Roger Stone has four rules of business, each more despicable than the last, but the number one rule: “Never admit defeat. Never admit you are wrong.” Humanity is not black and white, people of the jury. We are complex, emotional beings capable of compassion, empathy, compromise... when we cut ourselves off from these core elements of humanity we are lowering the bar as a species. We no longer need to compete with other species on this planet for control. We did it. We won. We can let go of this need to compete and evolve in how we think and behave with one another.

I’ll remind you of exhibit AAA-175: “The American Psychological Association’s Guidelines for the Psychological Practice with Boys and Men”. A published study on “traditional masculinity” and it reads, “Boys with feminine identities or expressions may face especially negative reactions to non-normative gender expressions, including emotional expressions such as passivity or crying, and experience strong pressure to demonstrate and conform to masculine expressions.” The report states, “Research has demonstrated the more boys violate norms of masculinity, the more verbal and physical abuse they may face from peers. These experiences may lead to mental health problems, including depressive symptoms.” Is it any wonder men are three and a half more likely to take their own lives than women? Regardless of gender, is it any wonder we are facing a mental health crisis in America today? Men are not allowed to compromise, show empathy or compassion for each other or themselves without being made to feel like they are somehow less than the “standardized method of manliness”.

On a personal note, I am constantly checking myself against what I believe to be toxic behavior. I have choose to have difficult conversations with myself and with others because I recognize the toxic society I was raised in. “Am I mansplaining right now? Am I giving information that is not necessary, or wanted, or appropriate? Am I controlling the room? Am I imposing my ideals on others? Is my gaze welcome?”

I owe it to myself and to you to do better. And we owe it to ourselves and each other to do better. It’s not too late for me and it’s not too late for you. Do not give up. Hold yourselves accountable. But most of all, hold him accountable (*points at the defendant*).

*Lights shift.*

*The performer takes on the persona of **The Defense** as we hear the judge's voice.*

**Judge (voice-over):** The court will now here the closing statements from the defense. Again, please keep your comments brief.

**The Defense:**

Thank you your honor.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, Toxic Masculinity isn't on trial here today... all of masculinity is on trial here today. The prosecution would have you believe that what it means to be a man is a culmination of poor behavior. But poor behavior is just that... poor behavior. A concept that women are not unfamiliar with. But we don't go around spouting phrases like "Toxic Femininity" do we?

The key weakness in the prosecution is actually quite simply stated: There is an objective truth, an objective reality inherent in masculinity. The individuals within this group of masculinity are plagued with nothing other than being a part of the larger, traditional group. Now, masculinity can be expressed in many kinds of ways, but the internal core of what it means to be a man is fundamentally without question.

Much like masculinity, humanity comes with an objective reality. Much like masculinity, humanity can be expressed in many kinds of ways, but there is an objective reality to what it means to be human that isn't imposed on them by society but rather, their creator.

All men are inherently masculine. A select few stray from the larger, traditional group due to either genetic variance or their decision to express themselves differently. They create their own subjective reality of what it means to be a man and impose their subjective reality on the objective reality of what it means to be a man. If I suffered from a mental disease, and this is no laughing matter, if I suffered from a mental disease that caused my brain to believe, however sincerely, that the sky was green, you would not sacrifice the *truth* of objective reality to accommodate my subjective reality, now would you?

The same is true of objective masculinity. The essence of objective masculinity is directly tied to a man's role as procreator, protector, and provider alright? I'll say that again: Procreator, protector, and provider. Now let's go through each one:

Both men and women procreate, this is true, but the man is the aggressor... erm... the initiator if you will. The woman is the receptive party and bears the product of this procreation. A woman's body is designed for this purpose, to bear children. A man's is not. Therefore, we can say that men are, objectively speaking, more expendable than women. I think that's something that all the ladies in this courtroom can agree to. Now, because men are not designed to give birth, they are, naturally, designed to counter a woman's strengths by being supplied with tools to *provide* for the pregnant woman and *protect* the pregnant woman including a denser bone

structure, thereby making man larger and stronger, as well as a little hormone called testosterone which sharpens the senses, and is designed for men to take greater risks in order to insure their survival. Safety... what is so evil about that?

The prosecution would have you believe that with modern day technological advances, these gender roles are out dated and no longer necessary. You mean to tell me, you wanna bet the entire survival of our species on technological advances that can be taken away (*snaps fingers*) just like that? Now, I'm gonna do some math for ya, so bear with me:

If you are Christian, and you believe that humanity is around 5,000 years old, and that's the most conservative number out there. And let's conservatively say that most of the modern day technological advances we rely on have been invented in the last 50 years... that's 1% of the human experience you wanna rely on.

If you're more of a scientist, and you believe that humanity is closer to 200,000 years old, based on empirical evidence saying it is, and we apply the same presumption, which I think is fair, of 50 years... 200,000 divided by 50... that's less than a hundredth of a percent of our existence as a species. To be exact, because you're all scientists, that's 0.00025% of the human experience. Are you so arrogant that you are willing to bet our entire survival on what we have learned in a microscopic amount of time? Well what happens when that technology fails us? Which, it very easily can. Humanity's greatest protection, historically speaking, will then be obsolete. And for what? What was it all for? To accommodate the few subjective opinions on how we should proceed?

Referring back now to the literature that the prosecution presented from the "American Psychological Association's Guidelines for the Psychological Practice with Boys and Men", the APA chooses to redefine masculinity in order to accommodate the minority of men who do not subscribe to this objective reality. They even go so far as to say that masculinity is socially or culturally constructed. Their goal then, is to change the objective masculine standard into something it isn't, thereby chopping it up into a bunch of little subjective pieces, thereby dividing us further.

These smaller groups, as united as they are with each other, will never be satisfied until they are the new standard. It's in their blood. It's in all of our blood. You can't escape it any more than I can. Survival of the fittest is the story of 100% of our history. And that's the number the prosecution needs from you today. You have to be 100% sure, not 99.99975% but 100% sure if you are going to condemn this man to death. In any other situation you would not sentence a man to death for something you were not 100% sure of. If there is even 0.00025% of your hearts that recognize this man's necessity in our society, you will acquit. You *will* acquit.

(beat)

Thank you your honor. And thank you ladies and gentlemen of the jury.

*Lights shift.*

*We hear the judge's voice as the performer takes on the persona of **Toxic Masculinity**, wearing a red cap, sitting at his table, hands laid bare on the table in front of him, head hung in shame.*

**Judge (voice-over):** *"Has the jury reached a verdict?"*

**Foreman (voice-over):** *"We have your honor. In the case of Humanity vs. Toxic Masculinity, the jury finds the Defendant, Toxic Masculinity... not guilty of all charges against humanity."*

*Lights up.*

*"My Rifle, My Pony, and Me" by Dean Martin begins to play as Toxic Masculinity slowly looks up at the judge. The remaining stage directions are all done in slow tempo, not slow motion, slow tempo:*

*TM, while looking at the judge, slowly begins to stand in a state of disbelief. He looks over to his lawyer and makes a look at him like, "Well alright then!" He lets out a smile, still in disbelief. He sees his lawyer's hand extended towards him. He takes it. He shakes it as his lawyer leans in to whisper something in his ear. TM nods his head and lets out a big shit eating grin as he releases the lawyers handshake and turns to walk stage left around the table. On his way towards the door, TM slowly makes eye contact with every single jury member in the audience. His look is one of supreme confidence. He is untouchable. Halfway towards the door he looks up at the judge and shares a knowing nod of approval towards him. Just before he gets out the door, TM has a thought, stops in his tracks, turns slowly towards the prosecuting attorney, shoots him a finger gun and winks. He slowly turns back around and on the final, "...my rifle, my pony, and me." TM breaks his slow tempo and walks out of the courtroom with his head held high.*

*End.*