

**CRAFTING MASCULINE SELVES:
CULTURE, WAR AND PSYCHODYNAMICS
AMONG AFGHAN PASHTUNS
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ABSTRACT

Based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Afghanistan from 2009 until 2013 within a majority Pashtun ethnic community in the city of Jalalabad and outlying rural districts of Nangarhar province, this dissertation examines concepts of masculinity in a socio-cultural environment that is patrilineal, patrilocal and strongly androcentric, with a firm tradition of female segregation (purdah). Because only individuals of opposite sex who are closely related by blood or marriage can have social relations, the research focused entirely on men.

Given this context, cultural idioms about masculinity acquire extraordinary social and psychological importance. To be considered respectable and honorable, Pashtun men are expected to live up to the demanding standards of a cultural environment that requires displays of fearlessness, courage, aggressiveness and self-assertiveness. This includes a willingness to engage in violence when that is deemed necessary. The dissertation focuses on the psychological dynamics and subjectivity produced by these strict and demanding cultural norms in a sample set

of individual Pashtun males as they matured into adulthood. The findings presented here were derived from multiple psychodynamic and one-on-one interviews with four select informants, which are supplemented with an analysis of more extensive data gleaned from participant observation in the Pashtun community. This methodological approach was designed to elicit material pertaining to these men's deep emotional states, inner thought processes, conscious and unconscious attitudes, and self-concepts that were related to their interpretations and enactments of the cultural mandated norms of masculinity, as well as their resistance to them.

Notable findings include striking evidence for well-established patterns of inner psychological conflict, contradiction and suffering that the men I interviewed underwent as they coped with internalizing the uncompromising standards of behavior and attitude that constituted "being a real Pashtun man." These standards are not static, and the analysis of the data reveals a striking shift toward the legitimization of unprecedentedly violent behaviors that stem from thirty-five years of nearly constant conflict in Afghanistan.