THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-YEAR

COLLEGE MEN RELATING TO THEIR

IDENTITIES AS MEN

by

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ABSTRACT

For men in college, caring enough about their education may not be a viable option. The current research will look at the way in which male students view and experience masculinity during their first year of college. One goal of this project is to gain a better understanding of how male college students think about masculinity. Because men are attending and succeeding at college at lower rates than previous years, more knowledge and research about men's experiences is needed to understand this trend. If it is expected that men will ignore education as a way to reinforce their masculinity, then improving the achievement rates of men will have to start with a healthier depiction of "men" at an earlier age, such as the encouragement of academic success rather than disinterest.

This thesis draws from in-depth interviews to discuss masculinity as it relates to university students. The interviews for this project were semi-structured in form. I conducted fifteen in-depth interviews with randomly volunteered male students who were willing to share their personal narratives about their first year of college. This thesis discusses and explores the reflections of these men during their first year. Within these discussions, men identified two forms of masculinity and two different viewpoints through which they look at masculinity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Men and women experience college differently. For example, more women report a preference for dating rather than hooking up (Bradshaw, Kahn, & Saville 2010). As another example, men report lower rates of relationship satisfaction and feelings of support from others (Conley, Kirsch, Dickson, & Bryant 2014). A 2009 study conducted by Pew Research Center's Social and Demographic Trends Project highlights several differences between men and women's college experience (Wang & Parker 2011). For example, more women enroll in college and graduate school than men. Women are also more likely to report college helped them grow intellectually and personally. Further, more Americans agree that a college education will help women, as compared to men, get ahead in life (Wang & Parker 2011). However, no research indicates that this common perception is true.

Researchers have studied both pre-college factors and in-college factors that contribute to the low achievement rates of men in college. There is evidence that suggests men are challenged greater during college in the areas of full-time attendance, social integration, and academic performance. These challenges may deter men from completing their degrees (Ewert 2012). While male students may face these barriers at a greater proportion than female students, men in general are expected to be less interested in the educational aspect of college (Caproro 2010, Davis 2010).

From early childhood, boys learn how to perform masculinity, or act like men, from parents, peers, and media. Boys are socialized to repress emotion, be strong, compete with other men, and show both interest and disregard for women (Keith 2011).

These actions are fully expected of boys and often excused via maxims such as the well-known expression "boys will be boys" when physical harm or disruptions occur. While boys begin learning how to act like men from an early age, these ideals are reinforced as they grow up and continue into early adulthood. Michael Kimmel (2008) describes "Guyland," the "world" in which young men live. Guyland is engulfed with uncertainty for one's future and features an environment that encourages complacency. Neither uncertainty nor complacency positively affects the educational attainment of men.

The beginning of college marks a crucial point for men as a stage of development. During the first year, men are simultaneously subjected to feelings of adventure and vulnerability (Capraro 2010). During the first year of college, students enter a new environment, change social circles and connections, and gain more autonomy. Students may be especially vulnerable during this time period as uncertainty and transition mediates the opportunity for different and new experiences. Historically, many students do not return to college after their first year. For example, in 2012, twenty-eight percent of students who were enrolled full-time the year before did not return to college (National Center for Education Statistics 2014).

For men in college, caring enough about their education may not be a viable option. This research will look at the ways in which male students view and experience masculinity during their first year of college. One goal of this project is to gain a better understanding of how male college students think about masculinity. Because men are attending and succeeding at college at lower rates than previous years, more knowledge and research about men's experiences is needed to understand this trend. If it is expected that men will ignore education as a way to reinforce their masculinity, then improving the

achievement rates of men will have to start with a healthier depiction of "men" at an earlier age, such as the encouragement of academic success rather than disinterest.

This study draws from in-depth interviews discussing masculinity as it relates to male, university students. The interviews for this project were semi-structured in form. I conducted fifteen in-depth interviews with randomly volunteered male students who were willing to share their personal narratives about their first year of college. This thesis discusses and explores the reflections of these men during their first year. Within these discussions, men identified two forms of masculinity and two different viewpoints through which they envisioned masculinity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In relation to other equally significant topics, scholars have not produced an extensive body of literature that engages masculinity as an experience, embodiment, or identity. This review of the literature focuses on three areas of interest: 1) the performance of masculinity, 2) a recent trend towards "Bro culture", and 3) masculinity in the university context. These three areas synthesize the college male literature and frame the current study.

THE PERFORMANCE OF MASCULINITY

Facilitated by family structure, gender socialization begins from a very early age (Kimmel & Messer 1998). Starting from around the time the child is born, parents assign colors and names based on their child's biological sex, and interaction with children in particular ways depending on their sex. Boys are allowed to play with trucks and show aggression more than girls. Girls are encouraged to play with dolls and wear colorful, bright clothes more so than boys. Girls are discouraged from doing what boys are allowed, and boys are discouraged from doing what girls are allowed. Agents of gender socialization expand as children grow. Schools, peer groups, and media also influence individuals' gender identity development. These sources teach boys how to act like boys and girls how to act like girls, and those who deviate from culturally defined 'appropriate' gendered behaviors are punished.

For boys, male peer groups male peer groups have a strong influence in identity development (Kimmel & Messner 1998). Male peer groups tend to form a hierarchy of

members, and boys often face tests to establish themselves within the group (Martin &

Harris 2006). Boys who can demonstrate physical prowess, such as running the fastest or

throwing the farthest, occupy the top hierarchical positions. Those who lack athletic

ability find it difficult to stay in the boy-controlled spaces and can be expelled from male

peer groups.

Throughout history, men have long searched for their manhood, which is socially

constructed and varies across time and cultures. In *The History of Men,* Kimmel (2005)

argues that the evidence and artifacts of a true man have changed over time. The

searching for manhood is not literal, but men have often felt as though their masculinity

has been challenged. As a result masculinity consumes men and their time (Kimmel

2010). The constant need to prove oneself as a man, and thus, the search for one's

manhood is a continual process that has been observed throughout history. Masculinity

becomes an object one gains and possesses; something that can be worn as a badge of

pride and a decoration for one's accomplishment as a man.

Men focus on their physical bodies as artifacts of their masculinity (Kimmel

2005). Men and women alike accept physical prowess as evidence of masculinity, and

consequently men rush to emphasize muscularity. Some men opt to supplement their

grooming practices with medication that causes bodily hair growth or aid in muscle

development, such as the use of steroids that result in the growth of muscle faster than

normal. The focus on the male physique as a marker of one's manhood encourages men

to adopt questionable health habits in order to fit in with other men.

In an environment where everyone could be perceived as part of the same group,

students may feel particular pressure to fit in or act a certain way (Oakes, Turner, &

Haslam 1991). A 2009 study by Edwards and Jones highlights the ways in which some men perform gender in the college environment. One student described a process of "putting [his] man face on." Men, in some cases, act out their gender as a conscious decision. Research indicates that men change the way in which they perform their masculinity as they grow (Kimmel & Messner 2007). As men grow, men also learn about the boundaries and expectations of being a man.

While learning the boundaries, men also experience how masculinity varies contextually. There can be exceptions to certain rules, times when men can violate the assumptions of being a man and still be considered a man. Kimmel (2008) writes about how a man, witnessing a moving tribute during a baseball event cries. This man is violating the assumption that real men do not cry, but is not persecuted for crying because in the context of sports it is okay for men to show emotions. Masculinity, over time and in certain contexts, allows for flexibility. For example, Davis (2010) suggests that college-aged men value self-expression and communication, which are typically looked down upon by men. Thus, cultural definitions of masculinity change over time and evolve just as much as the people who experience masculinity.

A 2010 study conducted by Harris looked at how college-age men thought about masculinity. Sixty-eight undergraduate students discussed what masculinity means to them and the performance of masculinity. Harris speculated that the performance of masculinity positively benefits those who embody hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity (Connell 1995). Kimmel (2010) argues that manhood equates to power. This power is then exerted over women and other men. In order to maintain power, men need to continually prove their

manhood. It is possible that the performance of masculinity changes as the benefits of that performance changes. In different stages of life, men are rewarded for different acts. As one progresses through those stages, their masculinity performance changes. College students, then, will experience various benefits, such as respect from peers and increased social maneuverability, more if they display certain masculine qualities.

While performing masculinity a certain way may be beneficial, Kimmel (2010) argues that men act out masculinities for other men. Men determine and validate the dominance of other men. The benefit of performing masculinity comes from the recognition of that masculinity by other men. In this regard, women do not have a position in determining the masculine status of men. Rather, women are seen as objects and, thus, subordinate to men. This homosocial context of masculinity undermines the integrity of men (Kimmel 2010). In one sense, men are supposed to be heterosexual. Conversely, men are supposed to notice and validate other men as men. These two very different expectations create dissonance within men. In order to reconcile the dissonance, men actively avoid behaviors and acts associated as non-heterosexual and non-masculine. A result of such tension is ostracizing homosexuality, and equally denigrating any act associated with feminine sensibilities.

Men who believe and follow the scripts of being a man sometimes do so at the expense of their health (Courtenay 2010). On average, men live less than women and have more chronic conditions. Men are less likely than women to practice healthy habits, because the expectations of men to be strong and sturdy deter men from adopting healthy practices and behaviors, such as annual physicals.

Guyland emerges as the destination for men who just want to be guys (Kimmel 2008). The inhabitants of Guyland often take advantage of their situation with the quintessential "bro" behavior. With a primary demographic of 18-26 year-old white males, these men work in low-paying positions, live crowded together with each other or with their parents, and celebrate their youth with drinking and hookups. Guyland's citizens do not question the social construction of masculinity and continue to demonstrate their understanding of what it is to be a man by actively performing masculinity.

Researchers have loosely identified a " bro code," or scripts, for men to follow (Pollack 1998; Thompson 2009). These codes are widely recognizable as scripts that men should follow (Mahalik, Good, & Englar-Carlson 2010). These scripts include sleeping around, ceompetitiveness, and never showing weakness. Mainstream media promotes this code. One instance of this comes from the television show "How I Met Your Mother." In this show, Barney Stinson, a man's man, coins several "bro code" rules that are to be followed by all "bros." While some rules are purely comical, others represent the current expectations of men. For example, a bro must always oblige to fulfill the actions of a double-dog dare (Stinson & Kuhn 2008). This example is seemingly comical, but it also touches on the belief that men are supposed to be courageous despite the challenge. The rules became so popular that a book, titled *The Bro Code (2008)*, was publisheddiscussing a list of these codes that bros should follow. Since moving into the public consciousness, the "bro code" allows outsiders and insiders alike to learn more about this world inhabited by men.

As boys grow and learn what it is to "be a man," the lessons taught often disregard much of what it means to be a person who thinks for oneself. The Bro Code (Keith 2011), a documentary separate from the book mentioned earlier, delves into the realities of treatment of men in society. The documentary reveals a harrowing tale of sexism towards boys not only from peers, but also from parents and media. In addition to gaining status from responsibility and honesty, men in our culture can achieve status from physical fitness, having sexual experiences with multiple partners, and competitions against other men. The documentary argues that society raises boys to become sexist men. The inundation of pornography with the rise of the Internet, the misleading images of "men" in popular culture and television, and masculinity police, who discourage non-masculine behaviors in men, contribute to this problem. This documentary highlights how society pushes men towards bro culture and, Kimmel might argue, into Guyland.

Men live in a society that controls the very definition of what it is to be a man. Men must learn the "dos and do nots" of being a man, and society will let them know if they are doing it wrong. Guyland becomes a place where men know the rules and, therefore, can consciously stay within the bounds to avoid persecution.

Among the rules of the bro code, there are few rules as important as one guideline: a man must be able to act like one of the boys. Masculinity demands heterosexuality and marginalizes other sexualities (Kimmel 2010). By not following heteronormative standards, men are seen as deviating from mainstream expectations and violating core principles of masculinity. Men's struggle to be perceived as masculine leaves little room for behavior associated with women or non-heterosexual men (Kimmel 2010). The social consequences involve boys using gay-related name-calling towards

those boys who defy the masculine code (Slaatten, Anderssen, & Hetland 2014). Moreove, peer-groups that actively use homophobic name-calling are more likely to use homophobic name-calling themselves (Birkett & Espelage 2015). This system of name-calling works in two ways. First, it challenges the individual's masculine identity, and second, it reminds the individual of the bounds of masculinity.

MASCULINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

Women are going to college at a rate twice as fast as that of men. Women outnumber men in number of diplomas awarded, number of students in advanced or honors courses, and have a growing presence in educational fields once solely dominated by men (Garcia 2008). Men, specifically men of color, are stagnating in their education as well as their persistence to graduation. Men are no longer the clear front-runners in education (Harper & Harris 2010). In present culture, men are eclipsed by the success of women in education.

The efforts by higher education institutions to include women have seen some success. However, with policies and processes that bring attention to women's mistreatment in higher education, those who are aware of the policies may make assumptions about men. Harper and Harris (2010) highlight five assumptions held about college men: 1) all male students receive similar benefits because of their gender; 2) gender initiatives are not needed to focus on men unless preventing violence against women; 3) male students do not face adversity in academia because of their gender; 4) male students do not need support or resources related to their gender; and lastly, 5)

nearly all men will succeed in college. By being aware of these assumptions, researchers are better able to assist male students.

Capraro (2010) argues that college serves as a male developmental moment in every man's life. This particular period of time is often purely transitive, where individuals are expected to pass through and not stay for an extended amount. However, those who do make it through often spend four to six years in school. College may be characterized as the transition from home life to work life, and those new in the transition may face particular challenges. There is evidence to suggest that first-year male students experience anxiety and loss and can resort to harmful behaviors in their grieving process, which may include drinking and drug use (Gold, Neururer, & Miller 2000).

Men also view college as an adventure. Capraro (2010) describes this view: "College is not literally, or predominantly, a scene of eros and potestas. It is, however, a time and place of an imaginative assertion of manhood outside of civil society, away from home and family, where a kind of heroism is possible." College becomes a haven for men where masculinity can run rampant and their concern for others can be ignored. College is a time to have fun and avoid the knowing gaze of parents. Risky behaviors are known to increase for men in college, including unhealthy alcohol and drug consumption (Harris & Harper 2010).

Edwards and Jones (2009), Harris (2010), and Kimmel (2008) argue that college men act out masculinity. The performance of masculinity is not unique to the university context; however, social contexts vary within the university setting. Edwards and Jones (2009) discuss how men increasingly set rigid expectations of masculinity, which include freedom and partying. Drinking can even be considered a male domain (Capraro 2010).

While expectations of masculinity generally include being rough and tough, fun seems to be just as necessary to be a man. The expectation that men must have freedom is interesting. As American culture often professes, individuals have the constitutional right to freedom, yet as a college man, there is an expectation to be freer (Edwards & Jones 2009). Perhaps, freedom during this period of time instead means that men should have a lack of obligation and responsibility.

Harris (2010) develops a conceptual model of masculinity, which outlines five groups that influence the rigid definitions college men have of masculinity:

- Precollege gender socialization involving the notions of masculinity men have prior to entering college
- Campus culture including the physical space and location where college men "act out" masculinity
- Campus involvement in terms of general expectations of men to be involved with organizations around campus
- Academic interests and how men balance masculinity with their area of study
- Male peer group interactions which set expectations of masculinity

These five domains play into each other and influence how men perceive masculinity. Harris reveals subtle complexities of masculinity, such as the interplay of these five arenas, and indicates the intricacy of masculinity within college men.

Men's various understandings of masculinity indicate that expecations of masculine behavior influences experiences in college (Edwards & Jones 2009, Harris 2008). Research has documented men's college experiences and some of these experiences have been the result of the pressures to "be a man" and understanding of

what it is to be masculine. In some cases, male students act from internalized messages that they received about men's behavior. For example, Frank—a participant in Edwards and Jones' 2009 study, expressed regret with his decisions and acts of drinking too much and blacking out. While he is aware of these actions and even identifies them as actions to avoid, Frank still engages in drinking too much and blacking out.

Some college men struggle with gender role conflict, which is a state of mind experienced when an individual restricts or inhibits oneself based on the learned expectation of one's gender (O'Neil 1990). A qualitative study conducted by Davis (2010) enhanced our understanding of what men experience. Men in this study identified self-expression as important, feared being perceived or labeled as feminine, and felt a particular lack of support while being challenged. This study sheds light on the complexity of being a man in college and the mental harm certain expectations can cause. The findings of this research indicate that while men may be perceived as tough and put together, mental health may be affected. Mahalik, Good, and Englar-Carlson (2010) posit that the scripts men assign to masculinity prevent them from seeking help when it is needed. Men believe that masculine men should not ask for help, particularly if it relates to perceived emotional and mental weaknesses.

When considering the men of Guyland, masculinity during the college years, becomes more important for men (Kimmel 2008). Perhaps for the first time since leaving home, men face the expectations to behave like "men," and this often means sacrificing schoolwork and healthy relationships. On college campuses across the nation, "hooking up," which is a vague term used to indicate some sort of physical act with another person, has become standard. In his book, Kimmel (2008) uses stories from men he has

interviewed to weave a similar argument. Students are increasingly engaging in very short-term physical relationships as opposed to longer, emotionally-demanding relationships. Men are also expected to forego studying for classes and exams in order to engage in more activities with their bros.

With the surplus time on their hand, men engage in less productive activities. On average, the majority of college campus violations are committed by men, but women make up the majority of the student population (Harper & Harris 2010). In college, officials reprimand men for violating school policies and codes of conduct at a disproportionate rate to women (Harper & Harris 2010). Additionally, men are more likely than women to engage in dangerous activities that threaten personal safety while in college. A clear overrepresentation of male offenders in college has produced research that attributes masculinity and gender socialization as major influences for these violations (Harris, Harper, & Mmeje 2010).

These narratives for masculine behavior accompany men's interest in women (Kimmel 2008). This interest, often in the forms of posters, locker room talk, and gazing, emphasizes heterosexuality in homosocial environments. Women are conquests—proof to one's status as a man, however women do not belong in this land. Without the presence of women, men feel the need to flaunt their heterosexuality in order to avoid their sexuality being questioned. In the world of men, straight men are the real men. Most (straight) men look down on other sexualities-- bisexuality, homosexuality, and asexuality, as homophobia is still a major part of being masculine and a real man.

Non-heterosexual men in college are well aware of their immediate disadvantage in the world of men. While some non-heterosexual men disregard the rules of masculinity

and manhood, others simply want to be considered "normal" (Dilley 2010). Some non-heterosexual men just want to be considered one of the guys and not considered different or an outsider. This aspiration towards normal has caused some men to hide their true sexuality in lieu of being perceived differently. Non-heterosexual men who strive for "normal" behavior must manage their identity in a way that both conceals and distorts their authentic identity.

While there are resources for students at nearly every university, one thing is abundantly clear about the men in college: they need help (Harper & Harris 2010). The inhabitants of Guyland have a lot at stake for their future. Receiving a well-rounded education with appropriate value is important, and so is having a healthy understanding of being a man. Universities are in a position to positively affect men in a profound way, and higher education institutions must know about their students in order to help them.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The literature describes masculine culture and attempts to create a general theoretical model that encompasses masculinity throughout the entirety of the university experience. There is a lack of literature to address how first-year college males think about "bro culture" and masculinity. Thus, this thesis poses the following questions: 1) How do first-year university males think about masculinity and 2) How do first-year university males think about being a man?

III. METHODOLOGY

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

Similar to other forms of culture, values, beliefs, and norms, the concept and enactment of masculinity is a social construction (Connell 1995; Kimmel & Messner 2007). As socially constructed ideas change over time, the definition of masculinity changes. Hence, research requires a different approach in order to more accurately capture the fluidity of masculinity. Social constructivism, introduced by Berger and Luckmann in their 1966 book *The Social Construction of Reality*, contends that people repeating actions and seeing others repeat those actions create meanings for those actions that then become institutionalized. Using this theory to explore the experiences discussed by the interviewees allows for exploration and discovery within the stories shared by the men. Social constructivism focuses on how one learns from their interactions with others. Applied to the current research project, social constructivism will allow me to explore how men think about masculinity during their first year at a university.

Social constructionism posits that lived experiences and realities construct knowledge. Consequently, researchers focus on the interactions the participants have with others, and the meaning those participants create for themselves. Previous studies (Edwards & Jones 2009; Harris 2010) used the same technique when approaching their respective research about university male students.

PARTICIPANTS & DATA COLLECTION

In this study, I examine the perceptions university male students have about masculinity. I conducted 15 in-depth interviews with students enrolled at Texas State University to understand their ideas of masculinity, how they form those ideas, and how they experience masculinity. Participants for this study include English-speaking students over the age of 18 who are male and have earned less than 60 hours of undergraduate coursework. Because this research project intended to examine masculinity during the first year of college, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences during their first two semesters on a university or college campus. At the time of the interview, some participants were still in their first year, so they were asked to think of their time since enrolling. Other participants were in their second year of college, and they were asked to reflect on the entirety of their first year when providing answers. Most of the students were aged 18-20 with most also identifying as white. Three students identified themselves as a race/ethnicity other than white.

The recruitment process involved visiting introductory sociology, business, and geography courses, as well as an introductory college course required for all freshmen. In each of these classes, I gave a brief description of the research project and provided an opportunity for students to ask questions. The students who were interested in participating collected a flyer with contact information and reached out to me. I scheduled interviews with each person that expressed interest. After completing 15 interviews, I refrained from scheduling more interviews. The later interviews were less unique and, thus, indicated saturation in the area being studied.

When I met each participant for the interview, we discussed the consent form, and I asked for permission to audio record the interview. After going through the consent form and talking about the project more in depth, the participants and I signed copies of the consent form. One stayed with the participant, and one stayed with me for my records. As part of the consent form, students were guaranteed anonymity and pseudonyms are used to refer to the individuals. Each participant had multiple opportunities to ask questions and get clarification on any part of the project before we began the interview. Some professors whose classes I used for recruitment purposes offered extra credit to their students for participating in the study. As additional incentives, $10 gift cards were offered to students for participating. The gift cards were not offered or advertised in recruiting the first half of the students, so those who had already completed the interview were not compensated with a gift card.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following guide served as a basis for the one-on-one in-depth interviews. The semi-structured interview allowed flexibility in order to explore relevant topics brought up during conversation.

1.   Tell me about your background. What made you decide to come to this university?

2.   Describe your involvement with school, work, organizations, etc. during your first year.

3.   Describe what masculinity is. What comes to your mind when you think about the word "masculinity"?

4.   As you were growing up, who were your male role models and why?

5.   When you were growing up, where did you get ideas about masculinity? How did you learn what was masculine?

6.   Tell me about a significant high school experience that played a role in shaping how you thought about [masculinity]. (Harris and Harper 2014)

7.   Since enrolling in college, how have your thoughts on [masculinity] changed? (Harris and Harper 2014)

8.   Describe your masculinity. Which parts of yourself make you masculine? How has this changed since enrolling in college?

9.   In which situations, do you feel most masculine? Tell me about a situation in which you felt the most masculine.

10.   In which situations, do you feel least masculine? Tell me about a situation in which you felt the least masculine.

11.   During your first year, where have you gotten ideas about masculinity? How were these sources different from when you were growing up?

12.   Do you feel that you have to be more masculine in certain situations or groups? How has this change since you started attending college?

13.   When do you feel most comfortable being yourself? How has this changed since you started attending college?

14.   How much does being perceived as masculine matter to you?

15.   When do you feel most masculine/like a man?

16.   When do you feel least masculine/like a man?

Other Questions to Consider:

17.   How do you act when around men who are less masculine than you are?

18.   How do you act when around men who are more masculine than you are?

19.   Why is it important to you that people see you as masculine/a man?

DATA ANALYSIS

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by a third party who agreed to honor the confidentiality of the project. I analyzed the transcribed interviews as the source of data using a social constructivist approach. The process involved three coding phases. During the initial phase, I assigned words or phrases to significant concepts or incidents. The assigned words or phrases reflected my interpretation of the data. During the second phase, I categorized the words and phrases according to their shared properties. In the third phase, I sought to understand how these categories relate to the masculine experiences males have in their first year and compare the categories to the interviews. These three steps resulted in a grounded theory model.

IV. FINDINGS

This research project set out to answer two questions. First, how do first-year college men think about masculinity? Those interviewed indicated that masculinity was often thought about in two categories: behavior and appearance. The second research question addressed how first-year college men thought about being a man. Four categories emerged when discussing manhood: responsibility, independence, leadership, and the ability to provide. While these finding are not particularly new or surprising, they can serve as a starting point for exploring and discussing men's experiences their first year of college.

While this study mostly supports previous research, men spoke about something not generally discussed in previous research. Men have their own idea about what makes a man. Men also have their own idea about what society thinks makes a man. These two ideas are often different. This research project will preliminarily explore this idea later in this section.

FIRST RESEARCH QUESTION: MASCULINITY

Two major categories emerged when students discussed masculinity: behavior and appearance. Often, behaving masculine and looking masculine intersect. They play into each other and aid in boosting perceived masculinity. In addition to these two categories, students appeared hyper-aware of the masculinity around them. These ideas are discussed further in the sections that follow.

Behaving Masculine

　　Students identify masculinity as the driving force behind how men act. Henry summarized this when asked to describe masculinity: "Testosterone...You know, guys strive to be manly…I just feel like that's our drive to be manly." Henry ties testosterone and masculinity together. While masculinity may be a force for men, testosterone acts as fuel for men to achieve an appropriate level of masculine behavior.

　　Other students did not necessarily associate masculinity as a force but rather as other behaviors expected of men. As Michael put it, "I can beat you up, and I can kick your ass. Just kind of do whatever you want [with] no regards to anything else." In this example, aggression is highlighted as a typical behavior associated with masculinity. Some students used similar phrases such as "being tough," "being a jerk," or "over assert themselves." In these examples, students perceived masculinity to be nonchalant and violent.

　　Some students approached the question more broadly, like Daniel, "I guess it means what males do…just instinct. Like how they walk," and Jack, "I guess it's just the general idea of what a man is supposed to do for the most part." Jack elaborated, "I feel like society probably expects masculinity to be kind of a male or a guy who's going to take care of a family and support everybody…Masculinity is expecting you to be the stronger side of the relationship." While Jack describes masculinity from the point of view of society, he does not elaborate on how he views masculinity personally.

　　While some men shared more negative views, a majority of the men interviewed maintained relatively positive outlooks on masculinity. Blake said, "I guess like not showing weakness, but also not being afraid to show emotion…Showing

strength…Being strong, not just physically, but like mentally. And not being weak-minded." In his view, Blake discussed showing strength in different ways and allowing oneself to have emotions. While some people may disagree with Blake, his own view of masculinity can be described as positive.

A few men referenced the heteronormativity, which is the assumption of heterosexuality, of masculinity. Trevor, for example, began his description of masculinity, "Some guys think it's going out and hooking up with girls." Oscar outright stated, "Liking women…It's just masculine, men liking women." Men, then, expect those who are masculine to behave like a straight man.

Looking Masculine

In some instances, students also included physical prowess when describing masculinity. Henry explained,

> I feel like masculinity has to do with appearance…masculinity is more like you
> see a buffed-up dude walking down the street looking like a rough, tough guy.
> He's got a beard. He's got, you know, like a lumber-jack look.

In this instance, Henry describes the physical stature and facial hair of someone he believes to be masculine. Chase goes on, "facial hair, muscular, tall - which is hard for most guys." The ability to look masculine, according to some people, stems from factors outside of one's control. Despite the physical inability for some men to meet the standards, some expectations still hold true.

One common physical trait that men referred to was the presence of muscles. Michael said, "I guess, nowadays, it's kind of seen as having the biggest muscles. It kind

of seems more like a 'bad boy' image. Tattoos, that whole thing." In Michael's example, muscles play into the ability to have a "bad boy" image and thus aid in the perception of masculinity. The presence of muscles physically demonstrates strength, and strength is linked to behaving masculine. Muscles also physically demonstrate the absence of weakness. Michael continued, "As a male, if you're not seen as masculine, you're seen as weak…You don't want to be seen as weak and so you have to show [masculinity]." This example demonstrates a pressure to fulfill expectations from others. While men may perceive being a man to include independence and strength, those same men still consider what others may think of them.

SECOND RESEARCH QUESTION: BEING A MAN

To address the second research question, students identified four criteria that they thought made a man masculine: responsibility, independence, leadership, and ability to provide. These four themes describe how the students think about manhood.

Responsibility

Nearly every single participant I interviewed indicated that being a man relates to responsibility. Lewis summed up the idea,

I would say being a man comes with a lot more responsibility than just being masculine. Being very responsible, never going back on you word, never lie, your word is your bond. Just taking care of yourself, being respectful to others. Just acting like a very functioning, respectful adult.

Lewis' idea is what he considers the ideal man. Michael has similar ideas,

To me, being a man is taking care of your responsibilities. Always putting the

things that you love-- say, it either be a person or something else, first. And taking

care of yourself. Taking care of your family, that whole thing.

 These two individuals focus on the way in which men are supposed to take

responsibility.

Chase first associated being a man as biological, but he then expanded his idea to

include responsibility. "Being a man, if you want the literal definition, I think it's having

a penis. I don't know. You grow up and take responsibility for your actions. That's how I

was brought up." While Lewis, Michael, and every other student did not mention

genitalia when describing manhood, Chase jumped to the idea.

Independence, Leadership, and the Ability to Provide

While students were quick to identify independence, other aspects of being a man

were not as crystal clear. When speaking on independence, Andrew said, "I have always

tried to make the fact that just because someone has an expectation, I don't necessarily

have to meet it." In this example, Andrew highlights being his own person and being true

to what he decides. Ryan, on the other hand, framed independence in a more genrational

context, "It's changing now. More women are more independent. Like guys were looked

at, you know, the independent one." Ryan described being a man as being one,

independent part in a relationship.

Men also discussed leadership. Peter spoke, "I think part of being a man is just

being a leader at times...being a certain leader at times. I think I am a like natural leader;

it's a role I take up really easily." In his description, Peter never talked about merit-based

or earned leadership, which is interesting to note. Blake had a similar story in which he describes people looking to him for answers, "That showed me that I'm naturally a leader as a man. And the way I carry myself and in everything, in all situations I never lose my head." In Blake's example, people looked to him in part because he was a man and accepting his leadership was easy.

Men also recognized the ability to provide as a way to be a man. While fewer students spoke of providing, many spoke about the men they looked up to and how those men demonstrated this characteristic. When speaking of his grandfather, Oscar said,

> They were actions, some things he would do, like the things he would do
> for my grandmother, things he would do for me. When he would go to
> work for-- he was a salesman for a Fortune 500 company, a trucking
> company, and I'd see how devoted he was to work so he could provide to
> us. He would be gone two or three weeks at a time, and I just saw how
> much effort he put in just to provide for us.

Oscar described providing as a prominent memory he has of his grandfather. Henry, on the other hand, described providing further as a means of protection,

> As far as manly actions would be he provides for his family for one. Um,
> he loves and takes care of his wife. Too many times nowadays guys are
> abusing girlfriend or wives or whatever and it's just not good. You know,
> the current state of the way the guys treat women is messed up. So to me,
> a guy, a real guy, will do everything he can to protect and love his wife.

OWN THOUGHTS VERSUS SOCIETY'S THOUGHTS

The men in this study briefly characterized two distinctions when discussing their thoughts on masculinity: the expectations one has himself and the expectations one believes society has of men. Peter described, "In my sense, I say men should be really caring and loving and just respecting to others, but, I mean, society is kind of twisting that image to where they are supposed to be jerks." Peter claims to have one view of masculinity but thinks others perceive masculinity differently. The difference, to Peter, is much more negative but also what is expected from society. Peter is not alone in expressing a more negative view he perceives society to have of men. Andrew noted that the ideal in society was the typical "meathead" masculinity, which he described as the "buff dude who's kind of a jerk to everyone, but he is still fun to hang around with if you go to a party." The difference between what one thinks and what one perceives society to think indicates a misconception of masculinity--that masculinity is aggressive, unintelligent, and exclusively heterosexual. This misconception may be widely accepted by most people and challenged very little by those who disagree, such as Peter and Andrew. While the two men indicated thinking differently about masculinity, neither expressed actual disagreement or declared society's view as wrong.

If we consider how these men think society views men, the previous research discussed in an earlier section indicate that men may actually act more closely in line with how they think society view men. With a lack of responsibility, aggression, complacency for education, and a heterosexual nature, men see these institutionalized actions and may mimic them without much scrutiny or thought. This would align with social constructivism, which argues that what people see over and over becomes normal for society and, thus, for them. If men recognize how society views men, then those men

may be more likely to follow that script rather than the script for how he as an individual views men.

CHALLENGES

The students who participated identified certain challenges they face relating specifically to their identities as men. The participants spoke openly of the times they felt least masculine or least like a man. Three broad themes emerged from the interviews: associating with femininity, not living up to expectations, and losing control or temper.

Associating with femininity

Men discussed actions or behaviors associated with femininity as moments when they feel least masculine. Oscar talked about something he does regularly, "I guess [I feel least masculine] when I shave my legs…Because most masculine men think that's being feminine, and I get that…Mainly women shave their legs." In his example, Oscar connects shaving legs as a feminine action and something looked down upon by men. While Oscar shaves as a way to improve his athletic performance, he believes the action to be out of sync with masculinity.

Another student, Daniel, mentions the way in which men are perceived when buying feminine products, "Just thinking of something that I was reading the other day about men buying their girlfriends tampons and stuff. I feel like that would be pretty emasculating." Daniel associated actual feminine products as items to avoid for men. A different instance that a student mentions relates to emotion. Blake recalls,

I remember my aunt comes down, she was asking me, 'How's my heart? How am I doing?' She just tries to get me on that feeling where you want to be emotional, and you want to talk about how you feel whenever. It's not good to always hold all those things in, but, in a sense, you don't want to open up, just because you don't want people to see it as weakness.

In this example, Blake attributes discussing emotions to weakness, and he tries to avoid situations where he talks about his emotions.

Not living up to expectations

Another challenge men face centers around living up to expectations. Some men discussed failing to live up to their own expectations. For example, Lewis talked about his grades, "Whenever I get poor grades, I feel like I should have done much better…I'm definitely thinking of my economics quiz that I had the other week in which I got a C in. I was so frustrated. I wasn't as responsible as I could have been." For Lewis, he failed to meet the standard he set for himself with school and responsibility.

Other students discussed failing to meet the expectations others have of them. For example, Michael said,

When my parents or someone gives me a task, and I say I'm going to do it. And then I fail, or I don't do it, or I just forget about it, or I choose not to do it. And after that you feel just - not really guilty- but just feels like, what am I doing? That's not me.

In his example, Michael speaks broadly on failing to meet the expectations of his parents. Michael extends his story to include a moment of self-reflection.

A different example comes from Andrew, "I guess it would be, you know, when I am doing homework and staying in on the weekend, instead of going out partying with the bros. You know, I guess that would be it because that's what a guy is supposed to do." Andrew noticed pressure to act a certain way because he is a man, and he felt less masculine when he resisted that pressure.

Losing control or temper

The men who spoke of losing control or temper saw this as inappropriate for masculinity or being a man. For example, Lewis said, "I'm not very good in the petty arguments with my girlfriend, and I realize it was all my fault. I was just angry that day. It was misdirected anger." When he further discussed temper, he referenced a situation in which he was losing a game of basketball and saw the others violate a rule, "I got way too hot-headed, and I had to take a step back be like, 'Whoa, I need to chill out.' I guess that's one specific aspect that I'm thinking of not being very masculine." In Lewis' situations, he reflected on the moments and tried to be more reasonable.

Ryan had a different example, "Anytime I really want control over what is happening. I am not like a control freak but if I feel vulnerable, I don't think that's a quality that men like to have." Ryan equates lack of control to vulnerability. Michael had a similar story,

> I guess I don't deal well with dictatorship situations. I feel like I'm very open to group work and stuff like that…I'm fine if I'm not the leader of a group and stuff like that. But when someone is saying like if you need to do this and they're talking down to you, or they're not respecting you.

In Michael's story, the lack of control coupled with a "dictator" leader made him feel less like a man. In Ryan's and Michael's situations, lack of control forced an uneasy feeling upon them.

MASCULINITY VS BEING A MAN

During the interviews, men began making distinctions between masculinity and being a man, as previously noted. In these distinctions, men also put varying levels of importance on being perceived as masculine and being perceived as a man.

Importance of being perceived as masculine

Collectively, being perceived as masculine was less important than being perceived as a man to those I interviewed. Students showed more disinterest with masculinity but thought being perceived as masculine was important. Michael said,

I'd be lying if I didn't say [it matters] a little bit. It does. It matters. Growing up

and being an adolescent, in those kind of years, it mattered more. But now that

I'm still-- I mean I'm growing, I'm learning. It doesn't matter to me as much. But it

does matter. I expect it to matter a little bit for the rest of my life. And I think as

you get older, it'll matter less and less and less. But it does matter.

Michael notes that perception of masculinity matters less as one ages, and he seems to accept the reality that he does need to be perceived as masculine. He continued,

Especially in college, you're training for the rest of your life. And especially such

a highly competitive job market in the work out there. You don't want to be seen

as weak…You want to be the best of the best. And nowadays, masculinity is

something that you have to have.

To Michael, being perceived as masculine is vital during the college and early

professional years.

For Jack, weakness is also something to avoid, and masculinity aids in preventing

that image,

[Being perceived as masculine is] probably not the most important thing for me,

but it's definitely up there. I wouldn't want people perceiving me as unmasculine.

A lot of the words that come up with unmasculine would be 'weak' or kind of

'feminine.' I wouldn't personally like that.

Jack believes that being perceived as masculine will help portray him as stronger. Blake

discussed the benefit of being perceived as masculine,

Being masculine, I just feel like you get more respect right off the jump. You

know, in all situations. Showing masculinity, it just kind of sets a good precedent

for the rest of anything else you do. The standard I guess.

In his view, masculinity provides privilege to those who wield it, and it is in men's best

interests to not pass up privilege.

Importance of being perceived as a man

While being perceived as masculine meant privilege, being perceived as a

manprovides status. Lewis explains,

I always want to be perceived as a man. It's comforting to think that someone

would look at men and go, 'Okay, well he's got all these responsibilities in check.

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He does well,' especially down the road, like 'He's holding down a good job. He's

got a relationship with his girlfriend for a very long time. It's stable. Great

relationship with his family.' I'd like to be perceived as a man.

For Lewis, being perceived as a man means that others know that he has done well and

that he is responsible. Jack has a similar sentiment, "I think that's kind of a big respect for

me. If people were saying, 'You're a good man,' that's kind of rally-- that's a high

compliment, in my eyes. Yeah, I guess being a man. Yeah, I would say it matters more."

Some other students had slightly different ideas. For example, Ryan said, "To me

[being perceived as a man] matters a lot. I like girls attracted to me…I would hopefully

be perceived as masculine and a man at all times." Ryan sees being perceived as a man to

be beneficial for his own image of himself.

V. DISCUSSION

For men experiencing their first year of college, thoughts of masculinity and experiences relating to their identities as men contribute to the way in which they act. While some men in this study expressed a need for independence and individuality, a majority of the men, even some of those who discussed independence, were influenced by their need to be seen as masculine or as a man. This not only indicates a subtle resistance to masculinity, but also an opportunity for men to separate from the traditional values of masculinity.

This research finds that college men in their first year consider masculinity to consist of two categories: behaving the part and looking the part. This finding remains consistent with the literature developed on masculinity (Edwards & Jones 2009; Harris 2010; Kimmel 2005; Kimmel 2008; Kimmel 2010; Kimmel & Messner 2007; Mahalik, Good, & Englar-Carlson 2010). While men perform masculinity, the motivation that drives their performance consists of maintaining the privilege associated with masculinity, which is consistent with Kimmel's (2010) idea that manhood equates to power. If one can demonstrate his masculinity well enough, then that masculinity will be rewarded with automatic preferential treatment.

The college men in this study also identified four criteria for being a man: responsibility, independence, leadership, and the ability to provide. These criteria remain consistent with previous research on being a man; however, these criteria are few when looking at previous research (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2010; Menzies 1976). Previous research includes these four criteria, but also includes more negative expectations of men,

such as promiscuity, selfishness, and disregard for others (Harris 2010; Kimmel 2008; Kimmel 2010). The men in this study focused on much more positive expectations than research has indicated in the past.

The challenges that college men perceived to face were associating with femininity, not living up to expectations, and losing control or temper. Past research has extensively discussed femininity in the context of masculinity and the sense of control and aggressiveness of men (Harper & Harris 2010; Keith 2011; Kimmel 2005; Kimmel 2010; Kimmel & Messner 1998; Kimmel & Messner 2007; Mahalik, Good, & Englar-Carlson 2010; Pollack 1998; Thompson 2009). However, much less research has indicated that college students fear failing to live up to the expectations from themselves or others. This indicates that the men who attend college feel pressure to live up to the expectations they perceive themselves to have rather than the pressure to perform well in school. In some cases, this may mean that students forego their studies in order to maintain their ability to be called "man."

Men considered being perceived as masculine as less important than being perceived as a man. However, being perceived as masculine was still important. The perception of masculinity provided students with privilege and opportunity that would not be granted to them if they were not seen as masculine. The perception of being a man was considered complimentary and provided the men with status and respect. These findings were also consistent with previous research on the power and privilege of masculinity and being a man (Harris & Harper 2010; Kimmel 2005; Kimmel 2010).

This study provides a narrative of the experiences and thoughts of male college students in their first year of college. This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring

this particular demographic, which has not been done before. The generalizability of this study is limited because of the data collection methods. Future research might implore methods that improve generalizability, explore these topics deeper, and compare the ways in which men at different levels of college experience and think about masculinity.

This research has a general implication for practice in higher education: men are focused on being men. This may very well mean that men will sacrifice their performance in school, healthy relationships, and other beneficial behaviors in order to be perceived as men. In order to combat this, we need to challenge men to critically think about what they want and their future. This study shows that men tend to view masculinity and being a man more positively than previous research indicates. It is possible that men want to be better but fear the repercussions of violating the expectations they perceive others to have of them.

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