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AN EMERGING MASCULINITY:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MAJORITY-STATUS MEN'S GENDER SOCIALIZATION

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Antioch University New England

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

by

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April 2022

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MAJORITY-STATUS MEN'S GENDER SOCIALIZATION

This dissertation, by Emily C. M. Sargent, has
been approved by the committee members signed below
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Antioch University New England
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

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Majority-status American men have been found to disproportionately experience suicide, homicide, perpetration of sexual assault and intimate partner violence, as well as, alcohol and drug-related concerns. Current research considers gender socialization of traditional constructs of masculinity to be “toxic” for men and others (i.e., Women, gender and sexual minorities). This study sought to explore young men’s current experience of masculinity identity development in America. Six participants who self-identified as White, straight, English speaking, educated, cisgender, and emerging adult men shared their lived experience of masculinity via virtual video interviews. To assess results of this qualitative study, interpretive phenomenological analysis was utilized. Results showed that learning of masculinity occurred in social contexts, the learned construct of masculinity aligned with traditional hegemonic norms, participants felt a socioemotional toll of masculine norms, and a future of diminished gender-based norms was imagined to be personally and societally beneficial. These results align with current literature, while further illuminating the current perspectives and experiences of young men within this sociocultural context. Despite supposedly held identity-based privileges, men may prefer a movement away from identity-based norms. Limitations and future directions for research are discussed. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (<https://aura.antioch.edu>) and OhioLINK ETD Center (<https://etd.ohiolink.edu>).

Keywords: masculinity, gender socialization, qualitative, emerging adult

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

As is true in most cultures, men in Western cultures such as the United States are expected to act in accordance with their gender roles (Reidy et al., 2018). Gender roles are society's rules and expectations of a person based on their biological sex. Men experience pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and norms affirmed by ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Deaux, 1984). Boys are taught to internalize these schemas, perpetuated in and by the patriarchal social context (Corey, 2013).

Patriarchal construction of masculinity is demonstrated to maintain phenomena such as intimate partner violence, sexual assault, homophobia, and violent dominance (Kupers, 2005; O'Connor et al., 2017; Posadas, 2017; Willie et al., 2018). According to traditional masculine gender norms, men are expected to be dominant over others. While the harm of "toxic masculinity" to society is generally understood, it is not often emphasized that the construct of masculinity is also detrimental to the men raised within a culture of hegemonic masculinity. Traditional masculine norms have been linked with negative mental health outcomes for men (Canetto, 2017; Genuchi, 2018; Gerdes & Levant, 2018). Adherence to traditional gender roles and beliefs has been shown to correlate with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and decreased relationship satisfaction (Kupers, 2005). Men who endorse traditional masculine norms tend to experience worsened physical health as well (Thompson & Bennett, 2015).

Key Terms

In the context of this dissertation, masculinity will refer to the dominant, traditional male gender norms within Western culture (Kupers, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers to masculine norms that seek to place males in a position of power over other social groups. The construct of hegemonic masculinity is often used to understand the maintenance of patriarchal

systems (Messerschmidt, 2012). Hegemonic masculinity is comprised of cultural norms which include emotional control, risk-taking behaviors, sexual conquests, self-reliance, dominance, heterosexuality, and pursuit of status (Gerdes & Levant, 2018; McDermott et al., 2018; Posadas, 2017). Although a complete achievement of hegemonic masculine norms may not be common, the presence of the norm shapes aspirations of young males (Kupers, 2005).

Precarious manhood beliefs are held when men perceive masculinity as something that must be earned and can be lost, through behavior that conforms to traditional male gender roles (O'Connor et al., 2017). When a man does not conform, he may experience gender role discrepancy strain (Kiselica et al., 2016). Gender role discrepancy strain describes men's distress and concern about the social impact of not adhering to masculine gender roles. Often this discomfort is resolved by exhibiting traditionally masculine behaviors, sometimes even eliciting aggressive or dominating behaviors (Berke et al., 2017).

Endorsement of hegemonic masculinity and precarious manhood increases susceptibility to gender role discrepancy distress and a negative impact of perceived masculinity threats (Berke et al., 2017; O'Connor et al., 2017). The result is constant social pressure to prove and earn masculinity, and dramatic behaviors to ensure any threats to masculinity or gender role strains do not tarnish one's emerging identity (Evans, 2016; Reidy et al., 2018). Young men who experience gender role discrepancy stress are more likely than their peers to "be depressed, attempt suicide, report less satisfaction with life, and endorse lower ratings of their overall psychological wellbeing" (Reidy et al., 2018, p. 560). Additionally, mood disorder symptoms and feelings of hopelessness were outcomes of gender role discrepancy stress.

Paradigm and Potential Bias

I am aware that my own perspectives on these topics impact the research, so here I intend to bracket my own assumptions and beliefs. Theories of feminism and social construction have informed my interest in the experience of masculinity. I currently understand patriarchal systems to be oppressive for all members of society. Men as victims of patriarchy may appear counterintuitive due to power dynamics and perpetration of violence by men. However, I understand the presence of a standard of hegemonic masculinity to perpetuate cycles of disempowerment and violence. Personal relationships, professional experiences, and societal movements have led to my ongoing interest of masculinity and mental health. As a researcher, I acknowledge bias of desiring a different construct of healthful masculinity for the benefit of men themselves, as well as others. I recognize my biases may impact how I approach, analyze, and discuss this research.

Note on Language

Due to the nature of this study, binary labels of “masculinity and femininity,” “male and female,” “boy and girl,” “men and women” will be regularly used to differentiate between the gendered socialization experiences of participants who identify as cisgender men and others. While this language is indicative of a gender binary and possibly a biological essentialist perspective that is unsupported by current scientific and psychological literature, it is used here to describe processes of American gender socialization and reflect participants' language of lived experience.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescence is a crucial stage of development for the exploration of identity and for peer social development (Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). A sense of interpersonal support and belonging is crucial during times of stress and growth, especially as adolescents tend to rely on peers and differentiate from parental figures (Arnett, 2000). The heightened need for social support from friends of a similar age group is often achieved by conforming to the social norms in place (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Becht et al., 2016; Templeton et al., 2017). In effort to fit in within the social norms, young men often practice hegemonic masculine behaviors and traits (Berke et al., 2017).

Often, adolescent boys are shaped into conformity with gender norms through social contingencies including verbal and physical policing and bullying. Policing, akin to gatekeeping, is often performed through name calling or aggression when boys act outside of the gender norm (Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). The words used to label behaviors that are unacceptable by adolescent masculine standards often imply femininity or homosexuality. In these moments of gender socialization via peers, boys are taught that any behavior that is not fully in line with hegemonic masculine norms is negative and grounds for social exclusion (Farkas & Leaper, 2016). Effects of policing of masculinity have been identified in adolescent males as short-term feelings of shame and stress and long-term fear of peer rejection (Addis et al., 2010).

Close relationships with peers that provide emotional support and social development have been shown to be a key factor in resiliency and adaptive socioemotional processing (Adams et al., 2011; Chu et al., 2005). Yet, masculine norms of emotional restriction and self-reliance are a barrier for adolescent males to seek socioemotional support (Addis et al., 2010). In one study, adolescent boys who exhibited flexibility with emotional expression reported elevated social

adjustment compared to peers (Pollastri et al., 2018). However, vulnerable self-disclosure is less common among male adolescents than female adolescents (Farkas & Leaper, 2016). Through a longitudinal qualitative study, boys' friendships were examined in early adolescence and again in late adolescence. At a younger age, boys reported valuing close friendships and self-disclosure. However, when interviewed in high school, these boys reported less intimacy and connection with their friends. The decline in relationship was in part due to fears of being labeled as "homosexual." The perception of relational and emotional intimacy as exclusively feminine behaviors thwarts males' socioemotional development and resilience (Pollastri et al., 2018).

Even hegemonic masculine norms that appear to be adaptive, such as self-reliance and providing support, can be harmful within the norms expected of adolescent boys (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Self-reliance, while increasing externalized perceptions of strength and emotional health, is highly correlated with an absence of help seeking behavior (McDermott et al., 2018). In a study of boys in grades 7–12, results showed that adolescent males who are emotionally supportive of others, often practice self-silencing of their own socioemotional needs and vulnerability (Obeid et al., 2018). The relationships that young men do have often involve low levels of emotional reciprocity that are required for adaptive processing and relational resilience. Self-reliance and an absence of socioemotional support through relationships may lead to isolation and use of maladaptive coping strategies (Wilkinson et al., 2018). To protect their own sense of masculine identity and mitigate gender role discrepancy stress, adolescent males exhibit hegemonic masculine norms, reinforcing the cycle of peer socialization. Young men may engage in externalizing behaviors such as verbal, physical, and sexual aggression to decrease the strain of precarious masculinity and ensure social status. The performance of

patriarchal norms through these behaviors often perpetuates interpersonal disconnection, in turn perpetuating feelings of isolation (Addis et al., 2010).

Recent cultural movements in the United States have brought critiques of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal systems to the forefront of conversations on White supremacy, sexism, and gun violence. Toxic masculinity, a construct that has recently received increased attention, is considered a factor in current political and social issues, refers to culturally sanctioned masculine traits that lead to harmful outcomes to society (Haider, 2016; Johnson, 2017; Posadas, 2017). Beginning in 1990, psychologists began to explore the construct of toxic masculinity, the harmful outcomes of broader masculine traits. Discussions on gaps in current literature call for new research on men's' experience and beliefs of masculinity, especially focusing on healthful constructs of masculinity (Addis et al., 2010; Gerdes & Levant, 2018; O'Neil, 2010). Emerging adult males progressed through gender socialization during cultural pushback on patriarchal systems, such as in the #MeToo movement (Lee, 2018). Anti-feminist messages spread through media, such as Involuntary Celibates ("Incel"), men's rights movement, and from national leaders may create confusing messages for men growing up during this time (Ging, 2017; Johnson, 2017). With changing sociocultural environments, studies examining the current experience of young men in America are needed to better understand and serve the male population.

In conclusion, vast research on men and masculinities continues to connect adherence to and presence of hegemonic gender norms with poor mental health outcomes for men (Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). Boys conform to be accepted by the patriarchal social system. As a result, young men forgo emotional intimacy with peers and adaptive processing of distress (Addis et al., 2010). Adolescent and emerging adulthood males paradoxically adhere to hegemonic gender

roles to pursue a sense of belonging, but these same norms discourage known traits of healthful relationships. The developmental work of identity and social functioning in adolescence is continued through the next stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Gorrese, 2016). Given the evolving sociocultural context, an updated understanding of the influences on young men's concept of masculinity is needed. The purpose of this study was to gather information regarding straight, White, young adult men's perspectives and experience of their development of masculine identity. I hoped to learn about how majority-status young adult men have come to understand and develop their masculine identity.

CHAPTER III: METHOD

In this qualitative study, a purposive sample of relatively homogenous participants was recruited. Six participants were recruited via social media (Appendix D), and emailed the study account (██████████) to express interest. The participants filled out the demographic screening questionnaire (Appendix C), meeting the inclusion criteria of identifying as an American, White, heterosexual, and cisgender male between the ages of 18–25.

I chose these inclusion criteria to collect a homogenous sample of men with privileged identities. Heterosexual and cisgender criteria controlled for variability among participant experience, as gender socialization and identity development differ with increased minority stress and nonconformity (Sánchez et al., 2009; Thoma et al., 2021). Whiteness, while not a component of gender or sexuality, was controlled for due to the difference of majority experience in America (Hsieh & Ruther, 2016). The emphasis on majority identities was intentional, as the concept of “straight, White men” is prevalent in current political and social discourse (Pinar, 2001). The young adult age range was intended to reflect a post-adolescent stage of identity development while maintaining a homogenous sample.

After meeting these criteria, the men signed an informed consent document (Appendix B), alerting them to the study information, purpose, and consent to record, as well as the benefits and minimal potential risks of their participation. After the forms were completed, emails were exchanged to schedule the virtual interview via Zoom videoconferencing.

Participant Demographics

Participants ($N = 6$) self-identified as American, English-speaking, White, heterosexual, cisgender men. Their ages ranged from 20–23 years ($M = 21.67$; $Mdn = 22$). All participants had accessed higher education, including three who were in graduate school, one college graduate,

and two current undergraduate students. To maintain the anonymity of participants, throughout this dissertation, their names were changed to pseudonyms of popular male names for boys born in the year 2000. No identifying information of the participants is included beyond basic demographic data. Any names or narratives matching a lived experience of someone outside of this study is coincidental.

Procedure

The interviews occurred via Zoom and lasted between 30–60 minutes depending on the depth and breadth of the participant's reflections. These interviews were audio recorded to allow for precise transcription. During the session, I asked participants the predetermined interview questions (Appendix A) and followed up with statements and questions to provide clarification and depth as needed. The semi structured interview questions focused on participant's lived experience and understanding of their masculinity development over time.

Data Analysis

I utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative, phenomenological approach to make meaning and describe the essence of the participants' experiences with masculinity. IPA is a qualitative approach used to study of in-depth lived experiences (Alase, 2017, Larkin et al., 2006). Based on Husserl and Heidegger's philosophical model of phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA is often used as a methodology for examining complex and personal topics (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003). Using this method of data analysis allowed me to describe the participants' subjective perspectives on their experiences through a reflexive, collaborative process.

To make meaning through analysis and interpretation of in-depth interviews, I first transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA specifies

procedures of data analysis within three steps or cycles (Bevan, 2014). After listening and reading over the transcriptions, I engaged in the first cycle, gradually coding the lengthy responses into meaningful statements. As is suggested in IPA, at this stage I also became mentally aware of key words or phrases that were repeated that might express the core essence of the response. Next, I continued the condensation process, reducing the first cycle's statements into fewer words, moving closer to the gist of the expressions of the participants about their lived experiences. Although the coding process breaks down the participants' responses in IPA, the condensed coding through this process is an accurate representation of the thoughts and lived experiences of the participants. In the final cycle, the category phase, I narrowed down the responses to one or two words to capture the core essence of the participant's lived experiences. The data gathered through this process was further validated by a second reader and oversight by my dissertation advisor.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The results from the interpretive phenomenological analysis of the interviews are described below, illuminated by the men's quotes. The superordinate themes were (a) masculinity learned through social contexts, (b) learned norms aligned with traditional masculinity, (c) socioemotional toll of gendered expectations, and (d) preference for decrease of gendered expectations. A table of superordinate and subordinate themes can be found in Appendix E. These themes were consistent throughout participant interviews as they reflected on their development.

To describe the findings of this study, the results are organized to best capture the participants' sharing of their lived experiences of development over time. Participants began by speaking about their early experiences, typically occurring during childhood through adolescence. Then, the participants reflected on their current understanding of masculinity, including social influences and felt impact. Finally, participants discussed their hopes for the future relating to gender socialization and masculinity. Participant names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Early Development of Masculinity

The initial interview question inquired about how the participants came to understand masculinity. All participants responded by reflecting on their experience of gendered learning in childhood and adolescence. The results showed that early social learning of masculinity through family tended to emphasize hegemonic norms that adversely impacted participants' sense of self and connection to others.

Early Social Learning Within the Family

Participants' current understanding of masculinity was greatly influenced by early social learning. While I did not specifically inquire about childhood experiences, all participants responded to the initial question of how they came to understand masculinity by speaking about early social learning. Each participant recalled learning about masculinity from fathers, family, peers, teachers, or media representations.

Fathers were described as the most significant and earliest influence on these men's understanding of masculinity. Each participant began discussing their experience by speaking about their family of origin, specifically acknowledging their father's role in modeling masculinity. All six interviewees cited their fathers as a primary influence on their early understanding of masculinity. Statements about their fathers and fatherhood emerged across and throughout interviews. For example, Christopher described, "I think I was looking to my dad," and David reflected, "I think my dad played probably the most significant role." Benjamin expressed this major theme as he shared:

I think about my dad especially. Growing up I would expect would've been the biggest influence on me in terms of gender roles and masculinity, that kind of thing. I think I would say that was the biggest influence, the father figure ... As kids, we would often emulate our parents. So as a young boy, I think I did a lot of emulating my dad and taking on his attitudes and worldview. That's the way that gender roles and expectations got passed down to me.

Participants noted that learning from their fathers primarily occurred through modeling or indirect messaging. However, two participants discussed how direct messages from their fathers about masculinity had a significant impact on their developmental experience. Christopher

described a situation in which his father initiated a conversation to promote self-reflection following the participant's expression of misogynistic ideas as an adolescent. His father reportedly encouraged Christopher to explore his underlying feelings and consider how his ideas could be hurtful to his mother and sister. This participant discussed how this sort of direct communication from his father about masculinity was rare, but had a continuous impact; "I thank my dad for that. He showed me." Similarly, Andrew described experiences of explicit teaching on masculinity from his father as, "Some expectations were even from like, my dad, because he had a very rigid like, 'This is how men are, this is how women are' ... 'You have to be like this.'" While participants expressed differing learning experiences and quality of relationships with their fathers, all noted that their fathers had a large impact on their development of masculinity at a young age.

Other sources of early socialization were discussed, including learning from mothers, mentors, and the media. While other early influences were not as significant or consistent among participant accounts, the overarching theme of social learning is clear. Young men understand their learning of masculinity to be relational and imparted by primary adult figures.

Early Learning Aligned With Traditional Masculinity

Across participant responses, messages from early gender socialization promoted a rigid understanding of masculinity that aligned with traditional hegemonic norms. As presented previously, hegemonic masculine norms facilitate social dominance of men through competitive performance and devaluing of femininity. Emergent subordinate themes across participants aligning with hegemonic masculinity included emotional stoicism, competitive dominance, self-reliance, engagement in exclusively "masculine" activities, separation from femininity, and

pursuit of power. David spoke about many of these aspects as he summarized his early understanding of masculinity:

The expectations were like as a guy you were supposed to be interested in masculine things. You need to be good at sports, you need to like sports. The general, like, girls have cooties, and you don't interact with them.

Content from interviews relating to themes of developmental hegemonic masculinity was plentiful. All participants described their fathers modeling stoicism, self-reliance, and power, the most direct communication of which was experienced by Andrew. He remembered how his father impressed upon him that "You have to be aggressive" and "You have to be able to take power over something and be dominant." He expressed how his father would use feminine name-calling (i.e., P***y and F****t) to discourage behaviors that were out of alignment with these norms. Christopher reflected on this expectation of emotional stoicism with sarcasm, saying "No emotions, we're men! [Laughs] Men only think in cold hard facts, unlike those emotional women! [Laughs] ... The whole idea that you have to be stoic, repress your emotions kind of thing."

The hegemonic norms relating to diminishing femininity and dominance over women was discussed by each participant. Participants discussed family roles differing from sisters, friendships with girls being frowned upon by peers, and gendered behaviors and interests. Andrew, Christopher, David, and Ethan expressed learning that sexual experience with women was indicative of masculinity. Christopher expressed gratitude for his father's approach to masculinity, as he regarded it as less rigid and hegemonic than peers received from fathers. Even still, sex with women was emphasized as an indicator of masculine performance. As he

reflected on his journey with not fitting certain masculine standards, he remembered his father's advice:

He was like, "girls like me anyway for reasons completely separate from all of this nonsense that I do and if I'm not getting more sex from it, then what the f**k is the point?" so that was his perspective.

Additionally, every participant discussed expectations for their involvement in "masculine" activities, most commonly athletics. All participants considered sports to be significant in their masculine development, including the expectation of involvement and interest. Benjamin recalled, "There's also the traditional gendered stuff like I played sports and was taught that 'guys should play sports!'" Participants expressed further gendered learning within sport contexts, regardless of their level of conformity to athletic interests. Ethan shared about messaging in this context, in which his father was usually his coach:

So at least in sports it was always about being tough, not being emotional, running, from a young age you get the physicality of it and the expectation that you're there to be the best. And also, that sports aren't really a venue or setting that you would get emotional. You'd never cry in baseball or whatever, you know, probably a lot of people have heard throughout the years.

Overall, messages of hegemonic masculinity in early gender socialization were consistent across respondents. As may be apparent within the above quotes, participants described messaging that regularly emphasized multiple traditionally masculine norms and stereotypes.

Adverse Impact on Socioemotional Development

Participants' reflections on their experience of hegemonic norms in early masculinity development often indicated adverse impacts on their sense of self and relationships. When

reflecting on their experience of masculine identity development, participants expressed a lack of social connectedness and a diminished self-image. Christopher discussed feelings about self and relationships:

I was weird and no one really bullied me or anything or pretty much gave me any attention. I had my circle of two friends and that was kind of good for me. It was not—I did not have contact with a lot of kids, let's put it that way; I wasn't super close with them.

Andrew described similar difficulties expressing masculinity and described the impact on his self-image, "I was still seen as a lesser guy like I wasn't as assertive or dominant as other guys, but I was fine with... I guess I shouldn't say I was fine with myself. I didn't like myself." Later, Andrew described how his experience of social rejection, paired with his hegemonic understanding of masculinity, nearly led to violence:

Masculinity took the form of "defend yourself, everyone will pay, and you need to assert dominance over other people," and that wasn't the masculinity that I wanted to ascribe myself to when I learned that, "Hey, you're still valid as a person and not be a school shooter"... it was like, "Oh great!" like I didn't want to do that but I didn't want to spend the rest of my life hating myself.

Other participants expressed similar sentiments of pressure and conflict of attempts to conform to norms, describing anxiety and loneliness. The majority of participants reflected on the rarity of emotional intimacy in relationships during childhood and adolescence. Relationships and moments of connection through reflective conversations stood out as helpful, but were especially uncommon with other males.

Ongoing Socialization and Shifting Masculinity

Participants reflected on how their understanding of masculinity had developed over time. They were in unanimous agreement that there had been social changes around masculinity since their childhood. Additionally, they noticed intrapersonal shifts in their conceptualization of masculinity, concurrent to the societal shifts. As such, participants expressed difficulty differentiating between their individual development and broader societal shifts. Benjamin identified this dilemma succinctly, “I don’t know if it changed so much since I was a kid or if I’ve just gotten older and I’ve been deciding more actively what messages to take in.”

Participants reflected that their views of masculinity became less traditional over time. In recent years, they reportedly acted on personal interests and values less based in expression of masculinity. Andrew spoke about this movement for himself:

I’m trying to take comfort in being the best person I can be. And being a good person, so, expectations that come with that are expectations of being a good person—caring, nurturing, loving, understanding, and general things to like, be nice to other people in general. Expectations nowadays that I have for myself are those in terms of masculinity with that—I figure, me being a good person makes me a good man.

As Christopher shared:

I like the changes that are happening within my echo-chamber and I would like more people to have access to that. I can do that if I want! This is cool! This is an art form that appeals to me! I’m going to do it! Even if it’s makeup. This interests me, I’m going to pursue it! No question over if this makes me less of a man, I just want to remove that barrier.

Overall, participants' experience of masculinity expectations shifted in recent years due to individual, interpersonal, and cultural factors.

Current Social Contexts of Learning

Participants often identified attending college as a precursor to noticing an increase in exposure to conversations about gender, including nonconformity and toxic masculinity. The men considered their friendships with women and others with diverse gender identities to be impactful in considering masculinity. Christopher shared, “[Gender] wasn’t a thing I was conscious of until I went to college and met trans people, basically. I was like, ‘Oh I should probably think about gender for a second.’” Andrew, Benjamin, Christopher, and Ethan noticed that they became more aware of gender as a construct when attending college, either through exposure to transgender and gender nonconforming individuals or through philosophical courses.

While the family had been the primary factor of early socialization, peers became the primary source of socialization reported in the present. Participants reflected on their current social circles, reporting increased flexibility around gender norms. Chosen peer groups were often reported to be heterogeneous in terms of gender and sexuality. Benjamin reflected on his chosen friend group and how expectations differ:

For my friends and stuff, I think of it as I don’t want to be hyper masculine, I try to avoid that kind of thing. I feel like I’m one of the few straight men in my friend group, so I feel like they kind of made fun of me and stuff which is fine. I try not to be like a typical “bro.” But in my family it’s a little different, like I do feel more pressure.

Other participants expressed a similar appreciation of their chosen peer cohorts, as they often allowed for increased authenticity and depth of relationship compared to what they had previously experienced. The gender socialization within these peer groups and social circles at

present tended to discourage traits aligned with hegemonic masculinity. Andrew reflected on how his social network has expanded his understanding of gender:

The friend circles that I'm in now, what I hear about masculinity is "it doesn't exist."

Where masculinity and femininity are social constructs passed on, that people can aesthetically look like one in order to feel masculine or feminine but internally you can be whoever you want and there's no shame in that, which is very, very different from growing up.

Participants also addressed social media contexts as impactful to their developing identity. While the platform varied from Facebook, to Instagram, to Reddit, Andrew, Benjamin, Christopher, Ethan, and Matthew all spoke about content relating to masculinity online. These participants reflected on messages online often aligning with their current, less traditional views and aspirations around masculinity. Christopher reflected,

I have a lot of queer friends [on Facebook] who have cool comics about gender and gender theory and all of that. A lot of comments I'll see are about like "the hardest thing a man can do is open up about his problems" kind of thing. So that is very nice and pleasant to me 'cause I like that a lot.

Additionally, celebrities acting outside of traditional masculine expectations were cited as impactful in broadening understanding. For example, Matthew pointed to his poster on his wall of a contemporary musician and shared his thoughts:

One thing I've noticed men have been doing to break the barrier, I guess, or attempt to, is that they've started painting their nails. I've noticed a lot of celebrities doing that, too... not everybody does it but one that kind of sticks in my head is Post Malone. Yeah, he's

painted his nails like black ... I don't know if it's a part of what ever aesthetic he was going for but I thought that was a cool little thing.

Social media provided participants opportunities to curate the presence of community that aligns with their current, less traditional masculine ideals. As the interviews occurred in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the participants emphasized online spaces as especially relevant and impactful due to quarantine and social isolation.

Decreased Rigidity Around Gender Experienced as Connecting and Liberating

As participants shared reflections about the movement away from rigid masculine socialization in American culture, most described how this had been helpful for their personal development and experience of relationships. Benjamin reflected,

For me personally I think recent years have been good for the circles I'm in, who are my friends and my family. People have done a good job of challenging typical conceptions of masculinity and gender roles so I think there's been a lot of progress with that.

Christopher reflected on increased emotional comfort "I'm not 'stoic' anymore. I used to be stoic, not from a desire to be cool but more from an inability to express myself. But, I'm no longer that, 'cause I can express myself, which is good." Participants reflected on elevated self-concept and social connectedness as a result of decreased rigidity of norms. All participants expressed relief and gratitude for ways in which their ongoing socialization became flexible or less "hyper masculine."

Ongoing Socioemotional Disconnection as Result of Norms

All participants expressed a relationship between their experiences of masculinity and social relationships. A lack of social support, comfort, and depth, especially with other men, was consistent throughout most accounts. For example, Benjamin discussed his experience of social

anxiety and discomfort when in majority male spaces due to the pressure behave in a way that was consistent with traditional masculine expectations. Other participants described experiences of trauma that were unable to be shared with peers based on gendered assumptions and inability to engage emotionally. Most participants shared that their closest relationships were with women, whether that be partners, mentors, family, or friends.

However, depth of relationships with women was also reflected to be thwarted due to identity status. David experienced his identity as a straight, White, cisgender male in a fraternity as “vilified” and he expressed feeling judgment from others based on stereotypes of sexual aggression and devaluation of women. Other participants, Andrew, Benjamin, and Ethan, reflected on not being brought into many conversations about gender or sexuality. In discussing friends who were gay, transgender, or nonbinary, Andrew shared how, “These friends don’t go into detail with it with me and that’s largely because they talk to each other with that like I’m as a cis, straight guy, they don’t really come to me for talking things out.” While participants expressed support for friends with differing identities, stereotyped expectations and a lack of experience engaging with these conversations contributed to continued disconnection and disengagement.

Future Hopes

Perhaps the most notable result across participants was the unanimous agreement in response to the future-oriented question. Participants considered a future ideal of masculinity in America based on their lived experiences.

No Ideal Masculinity

Although the interview question elicited a proposal for gender norms, every participant clarified their disagreement with the concept of an “ideal” masculinity. All participants

envisioned that an ideal future would include a full reduction in sex-based and gender-based norms. They imagined a future of increased freedom of expression without consequence or judgment. For example, Benjamin hoped for overarching changes beginning in early socialization:

Definitely, ideally we would think about gender in a much more fluid sense and there wouldn't be so much such rigid expectations of the sexes. Obviously, toning down expectations of men, especially young boys is really important. I think ultimately having gender be conceptualized really differently especially from a young age would be the ultimate goal.

Considering this prompt, David reflected, "There's no standard of masculinity that is not damaging or excludes somebody in some way, right?" Consideration of impact on self and others varied by participant. Matthew shared, "It would be cool if they just didn't exist, 'cause then you could literally just do whatever you want." Andrew shared similar sentiments as he reflected, "I think the ideal one would be one that offers forgiveness." All participants appeared to be energized and hopeful about the consideration of a future with fewer gender identity-based expectations and consequences.

Imagined Positive Impact of Diminished Expectations

When asked about the impact if their ideal were realized, participants reflected on large scale and individual possibilities of growth and connection. They imagined that a reduction in gendered norms would allow for societal progress, deeper relationships, and increased flexibility of identity and expression. Also, a decrease in judgment, misunderstanding, hierarchical power, and violence was imagined to result. These men also imagined that their relationships could deepen, as they might be able to engage in new levels of conversation and authenticity.

For example, Andrew thought, “We would function better as a society” while reflecting on how norms have impacted his experience of higher education. David shared, “I feel like it would create a lot less arguments” if people were more open minded. Christopher, who expressed a current felt a sense of freedom from norms stated, “I want that liberation to happen to everybody else too.” Benjamin imagined personal growth through freedom from hegemonic norms, “A lot of the ways that masculinity hurts me is thinking about success and being image oriented in some ways wanting to be seen as well-respected or successful.” Matthew shared how this may benefit everyone, “I would appreciate that a lot ’cause I feel like it would be easier to talk about complicated issues with people... Having more open-mindedness helps solve problems everywhere.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, themes captured that for this group of participants, (a) masculinity was learned through social contexts, (b) early learned norms aligned to traditional masculinity, (c) masculinity expectations had socioemotional toll, and (d) a decrease in gender-based expectations was viewed as preferable. These were prevalent throughout participant’s narratives of their experience with masculinity development. In childhood and adolescence, social learning occurred within the family, especially modeled by the father. As boys, their beliefs about masculinity aligned with a hegemonic standard. They recalled having little practice with socioemotional reflection and connection to others. Moments of relational connection and flexibility around gender norms were salient, further evidencing appreciation for lessened gender-based pressure. While shifts in socioemotional contexts broadened participant understandings of masculinity, hegemonic standards remained a source of disconnection and distress. Considering the future, these men hoped for further sociocultural shift away from

hegemonic norms. They imagined that this would increase personal and societal authenticity, connection, and creativity.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The results of this study construct a narrative of majority-status young men's experience of masculinity socialization in current American culture. In many ways, these results align with other literature and constructs of masculinity, while further illuminating the qualitative experience and perspectives of a nonclinical population of emerging adult men. The current results and recent literature on masculinity lead to wide-ranging implications for intervention and future research.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gather information of young males' experience of their development of masculine identity. I hoped to learn about the lived experience of masculinity for straight, White, cisgender young men in America. I believe the results of this study provided answers to the research question. In sum, the findings indicated how masculine expectations are learned primarily through social relationships. The participants reflected on changes over time, expressing preferences for diminished gender-based norms due to adverse impacts of masculinity on their socioemotional health.

Social Learning

The results indicate that interactions with other people were the primary means of learning expectations of masculine identity. Participants learned within social contexts of family, friends, social media, school, and sports. Primary attachment tended to occur within the family of origin in childhood, later shifting to peer relationships in adolescence and into adulthood (Umemura et al., 2021). Consistent with this progression, the movement with age from learning about masculinity within the family to learning through interactions with peers followed a typical developmental progression. Participants described experiencing exposure to diverse identities

and increased power of choice of social contexts with age, which they regarded to be a positive factor in their current identity development.

Change Over Time

Results indicated that participants changed in their approach to their masculine identity over time. Many factors were considered to contribute to these shifts in perspective, including social context, individual identity development, and larger cultural changes. As the participants were of similar ages, born between 1998 and 2001, their perspectives on early socialization aligned with the time range of the early 2000s to the mid-2010s. As participants spoke about current perception and experience in late adolescence to current early adulthood, the timing aligned with the mid-2010s to the present. As such, the participants' development may be contextualized within the sociocultural and political zeitgeist and movement relating to masculinity in America in the first two decades of the 21st century. Results indicate that the sociopolitical context was experienced to be shifting. National attention to political and social movements for gender and sexual minorities are likely to have increased since the introduction of social media, corroborating the participants' felt sense of cultural change (Anderson, 2018). The results of this study indicated movement away from rigid hegemonic norms and towards increased flexibility and variety of gender expression among majority-status men in young adulthood.

Preference for Decrease of Gender Expectations

The participants' experiences of norms exemplify the current literature on traditional, hegemonic, and toxic masculinity constructs. The conformity to these perspectives has been found to be correlated with diminished social support, mental and physical health concerns, and increased externalizing behaviors such as alcohol use and engagement with violence (Pollastri et

al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2018). In alignment with current literature, the participants believed there was a connection between rigid norms and adverse outcomes for their sense of self and their relationships. The participants hoped that perspectives on masculinity would continue to change over time to be more flexible and empowering.

Implication

The implications of this research may be relevant to many contexts and roles. The results implied that men would benefit from (a) increased discussions of gender, (b) increased representation of gender diversity, and (c) decreased gender-based expectations.

Talking About Gender

One major implication from this research was that sharing reflections on gender socialization is an intervention in and of itself. As the results and existing literature evidence, men tend to have few opportunities to engage in conversations about gender. Participating in open, nonjudgmental conversations around gender and gendered role expectations with boys and young men is recommended to empower identity development, facilitate self-acceptance, and increase competence in relational connection (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). These results indicated that more conversations on gender socialization, pressures of norms, impact on others, and emotional expression would be beneficial.

Exposure to Difference as Impactful

Increased visibility and humanization of others who do not conform to a rigid standard of masculinity was perceived to have a positive impact on men's development of identity. Increased representation of people with more expansive gender identities appears to facilitate the process of considering gender norms and reflecting on authentic living. The presence of gender diversity has potential to broaden views of masculinity, especially when normalized and humanized.

Familiarity with varied gender expressions in childhood is likely to decrease the rigidity of early socialization. Not only could this promote acceptance of men's own identity, but may also have power to decrease violence against these populations (R. M. Smith et al., 2015). Similarly, the humanization of women appears to counteract the innate devaluation of femininity within traditional socialization. I noticed that all participants mentioned having sisters. Having female siblings might increase conformity to rigid norms through separation of masculine and feminine gender roles within the family. Yet, this might also be a protective factor as it might increase empathy and offer an opportunity to experience women and girls as full people beyond stereotyped othering (Smits et al., 2011).

Recommendations

Overall, these recommendations aim to facilitate socioemotional development and reduce expectations based on gender. Adults may improve boys' experience of masculinity development by modeling and providing opportunities for boys to (a) engage with preferred interests, (b) express emotions, (c) share self-reflection, (d) ask for help, and (e) talk about gender. As the results and existing literature show, social relationships are the primary source of teaching gender expectations. As such, adults are powerful in gender socialization through modeling and explicit teaching (Englar-Carlson et al., 2014). In addition, school and other social settings were discussed to be impactful, which may provide opportunities for larger scale social shaping and intervention.

Family

As parents are likely to have received more rigid gender socialization than is common currently, ongoing education and reflection are recommended. Parents may promote a healthy learning environment by facilitating reflection and modeling flexibility and empathy (Blakemore

& Hill, 2008). Boys would likely benefit from increased relational and emotional engagement to promote socioemotional wellbeing. As emotionality is rendered a feminine trait within hegemonic masculinity, boys are often thwarted from developing competence in this area. Ultimately, this may limit the experience of depth in relationships overall, and diminish opportunity for connection with other men. The results indicate that fathers may have additional valence through their role as a model of masculinity (Ide et al., 2018). As such, fathers are encouraged to deeply consider their own masculine development and how it has impacted them, to increase self-awareness and intentionality in promoting norms. After reflection, I recommend that fathers engage their sons in conversations about gender, masculinity, and social pressures.

School

Facilitating self-reflection, education, and conversation about gender socialization within school settings is likely to promote a healthier, broader understanding of masculinity and decrease conformity stress among peers. One suggestion is to develop a training series for teachers at all levels about the impacts of gender socialization and socioemotional development; this may decrease gendered stereotyping and the promotion of unhelpful norms in schools for all genders. The impact of initiatives within schools may be wide reaching (Messerschmidt, 2012). Rigid masculinity is understood to contribute to behavioral and emotional concerns that may manifest at school (Reidy et al., 2018). As such decreasing rigidity of gender-based expectations may decrease bullying, sexual assault, suicidality, and drug and alcohol concerns (Seabrook et al., 2018; Whitley et al., 2018). However, it is notable that discussing gender has become prohibited recently in some states.

Sports

Coaches and athletic communities may hold a unique role in fostering masculinity development (Kreager, 2007; Parker & Curtner-Smith, 2012). As all participants reflected on the expectation as a boy to participate in sports, this experience appears to hold power in shaping masculine norms. The messaging of “No crying in baseball” or messages to “Be the best” rather than “Try your best” encourage standards of masculine performance that align with emotional suppression and striving for dominance (Berke et al., 2017). Recommended training for coaches includes teaching about impacts of traditional masculine norms and recognizing the presences of these norms in sport culture. Coaches may benefit their athletes by increasing messages of interdependence with teammates, sharing in the inherent range of emotions brought about by wins and losses without judgment, and promoting self-reflection. As coaches model flexibility of masculine norms within a traditionally masculine activity, boys will likely learn to do so for themselves and in relationships with one another (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Peers

While many of these recommendations are oriented towards adults, participants also expressed that peer relationships were impactful in navigating their identity (Van Doorn et al., 2021). As humans, we seek belonging and acceptance within social contexts, leading to social comparison and pressure for conformity (McGhee & Teevan, 1967). Boys and young men seek connection while navigating social norms around masculinity (Cutbush et al., 2016). Hegemonic constructs may thwart engagement with peers, which may lead to chronic patterns of disconnection. The participants emphasized the impact of peer groups in their development of identity and relationships.

Peer relationships have potential for a positive or negative impact on self-perception and relationship connection (Adams et al., 2011). Participants recalled disconnecting from peer relationships that reinforced hegemonic stereotypes and norms. Instead, positive relationships with peers were described as allowing for flexibility of gender expression. Participants chose peer groups that facilitated a sense of connection and were described to include women, sexual minority identities, and sometimes gender minority identities. The presence of diverse gender and sexual presentation within peer groups seemed to facilitate an expanded perspective on gender and decrease pressure to conform to traditional standards. Peers of majority-identified men may have positive influence by inviting them to witness and join conversations about gender. As with other recommendations, peer self-reflection and openness to alternative constructs of masculinity is likely to lead to beneficial outcomes.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As I followed the delineated steps of the interpretive phenomenological method, the results of this study are understood to be a valid representation of the participants' interviews. Despite efforts to limit bias, I acknowledge that the nature and size of the study impacts generalizability and validity. Interviewer identity, self-selection bias, and participant demographics are likely to have impacted results. Future research may mitigate some of these limiting factors to expand upon and deepen our understanding of the present findings (Cuthbert, 2015).

Impact of Interviewer Identity

Social desirability is a regular factor in research interviews, especially as words are recorded verbatim and known to be analyzed and shared. Because the interviews occurred on video, my visible identities were on full display. I, a White, young adult, educated, woman, had

the honor of interviewing all of the participants for this study. As a visibly majority-status woman who was not dissimilar in age to participants, I do wonder how responses may have been impacted by my presence. Did respondents feel able to be open and honest about their experiences? What assumptions were made about my perspectives on masculinity? What was brought up by my power status as a doctoral-level researcher? As a female researcher exploring masculinity, I imagine that my presence impacted participants' answers. The direction of this influence remains unclear, as the research indicates that my role may have resulted in reduced or increased communication of hegemonic masculine ideals. On one hand, participants may have been less likely to express sexist beliefs in the presence of a woman. On the contrary, my role as a woman in power may have increased the experience of gender discrepancy strain, leading to increased expression of hegemonic norms.

While my identity as a ciswoman differed from that of the participants, I visibly shared their identity as a White person. I am curious how results were impacted by my shared identities to participants. While no interview questions specifically prompted a discussion of race or ethnicity, I find it notable that participants' themes did not emerge about intersection of privileged identities. My presence as a White, educated, English-speaking person may have diminished the visibility of these factors, allowing for an avoidance, intentional or not, of reflection in regard to these privileged identities. Had I included race in interview questions, I imagine my presence as a White person would have been facilitative to reflection on race. Additionally, the participants' racial identity may have impacted results as the value of individualism is apparent in the interviews, and may be related to a Eurocentric, White culture.

While the intersubjective nature of interviewing is inherent and cannot be fully controlled, I do wonder how results may have differed if participants were interviewed by men of

varying identities. Future replication of this study with interviewers of differing identities may illuminate some of these variables.

Self-Selection Bias

The self-selected nature of this participant sample likely impacted results. Men who would volunteer to discuss their experience with their masculinity are likely reflective and believed in the importance of discussing gender socialization (Silver et al., 2019). It is perhaps unsurprising that this sample indicated a desire for more conversation and reflection about masculinity. While sampling was purposive to limit participation to majority-status men, the men that were interviewed may conform less to masculine norms and may be less representative of other men with the same identities. A mixed-methods approach that included a masculinity assessment scale may have further illuminated this possibility. Future research might use a method more accessible to potential participants who are not inclined to invest in a video interview. For example, a brief online survey may reach a larger sample and wider participant base and could allow for more variability among respondents' interest in and reflection on gender.

Political Ideology

The participants' political orientations were not a part of demographic screening or inquired about in interviews. However, comments were made that indicated that these participants constituted a politically liberal sample. The one participant that self-identified as conservative spoke about how he grew up in a socially liberal and diverse area, which may have impacted his gender socialization to align with the experience of other participants. Future research might include inquiry into the experience of masculinity among politically conservative men.

Education Status

Participants in this sample were in higher education or pursuing graduate degrees. This study sought to better understand the experience of majority status men, which is consistent with a privileged and highly educated sample. The homogeneity of educational level allowed for deeper interpretive analysis than a heterogeneous sample. However, this limits the generalizability of these findings to a highly educated male population. Additional research on the experience of men who did not pursue higher education is recommended. Increased representation in research across academic levels may also intersect with other identity diversities, such as socioeconomic standing, political leaning, and geographic differences.

Conclusion

Masculinity in America has been a prevalent theme within psychology, media, and sociopolitical events within the last two decades. Considering the increased cultural attention to “toxic” masculinity, I wondered about how young men were understanding and experiencing their identity. Initial article reviews on masculine gender socialization furthered my interest, as I better understood the process of adverse outcomes for men. I believe this issue is relevant to many current social justice and psychological concerns that impact people of all genders. I approached this research with openness about the construct of masculinity, careful not to infuse my personal biases around toxic masculinity. Given the literature and findings, the harmful impact of hegemonic masculine traits is evident.

The process of conducting this research has been incredibly rich. The participants’ stories illustrated many aspects of masculinity that connected with previous research while illuminating it through narrative. Their accounts furthered my interest and empathy for concerns around men’s mental health and relational wellbeing. While participant responses seemed to range in

depth, I was pleased and impressed with all levels of reflection and sharing. I was surprised by their opinion that gender-based expectations ought to be diminished. While I had hoped there would be reflection on alternative constructs of masculinity, I had not anticipated the clarity and certainty that participants felt about deconstructing gender. This research has given me hope for men's wellbeing and the impact of gender education at a polarized time in the United States.

In many ways, the data aligned with and further validated current masculinity literature. Overall, the presence of socialized rigid gender norms based on sex assigned at birth appears to have an impact on men's socioemotional development and is perceived to be limiting and disempowering. A shift in expectations about gender was found to increase comfort and flexibility of expression. This study advances the field of masculinity research within psychology by adding perspectives from men about their experiences and ideas about current masculine gender socialization. The results indicate that at least some young men of privileged identities consider reduced social expectations around gender to be ideal, holding relevant implications for psychology, parenting, education, and future masculinity research.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Contextualizing Question (Descriptive, Narrative)

- What messages do you think there are around masculine norms today?
- Tell me about your experience with masculine norms.
 - Do you feel like this standard/ expectations are changing or confusing? How?

Apprehending the Phenomenon Question (Descriptive and Structural)

- What is expected of you by those around you in regards to being a man?
 - How do these expectations around masculinity impact you?
 - In what ways do you fit these expectations? How might you not?
- Tell me about how you came to understand what was expected of you as a man.
 - Who impacted your learning of masculine expectations?
 - In what ways were these expectations expressed to you?

Clarify the Phenomenon Question (Imaginative Variation)

- Describe how you would like societal expectations of masculinity to be different.
 - What is your “ideal” concept for masculinity?
 - How would this impact you?

Thank the individual for participating in the interview. Assure them of their confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to be interviewed to help me gain information about young adult males' experience of their masculinity. If you are a straight White man between the ages of 18-25, you can participate in this study. The principal investigator for the study is Emily Sargent, a doctoral student in the Department of Clinical Psychology at Antioch University New England, Keene, NH. Emily is doing this study for her dissertation under the supervision of her advisor, Dr. Borden.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT: This study seeks to hear about the experience of identity of young straight, White, men in America.

PROCEDURES: As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions about your experiences, both in the past and in the present. I will also collect information about things like your age and race. The interview will take about 1 hour and will be audio-video recorded.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: Although your involvement may not be directly beneficial to you, the study is designed to help professionals (teachers, therapists, etc.) understand how young men develop gender roles and concepts of masculinity. You may opt-in to receive the results of the study and/or a \$20 Amazon Gift Card with a preferred email given below.

RISKS: The risks to participation in this study are expected to be small. The questions in the interview are not expected to cause more discomfort than a person might feel within daily life. If you feel you would like more support after the interview, you can call a crisis support/help line [SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357)] or reach out to your counseling center or a local mental health provider.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Records of this study will be kept private. Only the primary researcher will know your identity, although a secondary reader, Quynh Tran, M.S., and my dissertation

advisor, Kathi Borden, Ph.D., will have access to the interview data after all identifying information is removed. Any report of the study will not include data that could identify you or others. You are not asked to write your name or any other information that may identify you. Your responses will be kept confidential and stored with a code number instead of your name on a password protected computer owned by the primary researcher.

WITHDRAWAL: Taking part in this study is your choice. If you choose to be in the study, you may choose to stop the interview at any time, and do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer.

DEBRIEFING: As the study does not predict harmful effects from participation, there will be no check-in after the study has ended. However, if you have any questions, please contact the primary researcher at [REDACTED]. Should you have any questions about the research procedures or your rights as a participant, contact [REDACTED], Chair of the Antioch University New England Human Research Committee, [REDACTED], at [REDACTED] or the provost of Antioch University New England, [REDACTED] at [REDACTED].

If you consent to participate in the current study, and to have your interview recorded, please sign your name below.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Amazon Gift Card: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Results of Study: ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes to either, preferred email: _____

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE/SCREEN

Please complete the following. This information will remain confidential, and is only for use in screening participants for eligibility to participate.

Age:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Gender:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Race:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Ethnicity:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Sexual Orientation:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Language:	Click or tap here to enter text.

APPENDIX D: SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT FLYER AND MESSAGE

I am a fourth-year student in the clinical psychology doctoral program at Antioch University New England. For my dissertation, I am talking with young adult men about their thoughts and experiences of masculinity in America. If you are 18–25 years-old, White, cisgender, straight, and male, then I would like to speak with you for my research! It will involve answering a few questions in a virtual interview and will take up to 1 hour. Participants will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card. If you'd like to participate or have any questions, please email me, Emily, at [REDACTED]. Thank you so much!

The flyer has a dark blue background. At the top, a large orange-bordered box contains the text 'Interview Participants Needed for Psych Dissertation Research' in white serif font. To the right of this box is an orange ribbon banner with white text that reads '\$20 AMAZON GIFT CARD FOR PARTICIPANTS'. Below the top box is a light blue-bordered box containing the text 'Answer a few questions in a virtual interview' in white serif font, with a thin white underline. At the bottom, an orange-bordered box contains the text 'Email Emily at' followed by an orange rectangular redaction bar, and then 'to ask questions and learn more.' in white serif font.

Interview Participants
Needed for Psych
Dissertation
Research

\$20 AMAZON GIFT CARD
FOR PARTICIPANTS

Answer a few questions in a virtual interview

Email Emily at
[REDACTED]
to ask questions and learn more.

APPENDIX E: RESULTS TABLE

Table 1

Final Themes of all Participants

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes
Masculinity was learned through social contexts	father as primary model of masculinity gender roles learned through family chosen peer groups impact concept of gender social media as influential in understanding gender sociocultural shifts impacted personal masculinity
Learned gender norms aligned with traditional masculinity	self-sufficiency encouraged emotional expression discouraged hierarchical competition (academic and career success) physical dominance (sport, body building) heterosexual expression (sex with women, appearance)
Gender-based expectations led to socioemotional toll	relational disconnection with men thwarted emotional expression conflict with self-image negative emotional impact (anxiety, defensiveness, frustration) felt judgement due to gendered assumptions lacking opportunity to discuss gender
A decrease of gender-based social expectations is preferable	chosen social groups less rigid experienced improved social connection freedom of individual expression imagined betterment of society improved relationship to self gratitude for relative decreases in norms

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