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Gender Identity Development In Male Student Leaders At A Midwestern University

Kolin R. Straub

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Gender Identity Development in Male Student Leaders at a Midwestern University

BY

Kolin R. Straub

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY


CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2010

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE
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Gender Identity Development in Male Student Leaders at a Midwestern University

BY

Kolin R. Straub

May 2010

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS

Department of Counseling and Student Development in the Graduate School of
Eastern Illinois University

We recommend that this thesis be accepted as fulfilling part of the requirements for the Graduate
degree cited above.



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning that college male student leaders make of their gender development. Grounded theory methodology was used to gather information through in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed to form a working model of the data found. Participants were males in elected leadership positions. The study took place at a comprehensive mid-size Midwestern Public University.

Findings indicated participants felt an increased sense of responsibility from being in a leadership positions. They believed that respect, responsibility, and accountability were key factors in leadership. The participants constructed an ideal male that included breadwinning for a household, holding a high powered job, and demonstrating confidence. Participants explained the social pressures they experienced to conform to hegemonic standards. Pressures included peers, family, and organizations. The men explained their coping mechanisms for dealing with the notion that they do not fit the notion of an ideal male. Coping mechanisms included reframing themselves as separate from hegemonic standards and rejecting certain hegemonic standards altogether. Results also showed that the social construct of hegemonic masculinity was changing.

Recommendations for future research and implications for practice are included in the discussion of the study.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Historically, males have been disproportionately represented in the area of higher education in the United States. Early colleges and universities were established to educate males to become clergy and later teachers (Cohen, 1998). However, females began to increase their presence in higher education beginning in 1836 when Oberlin College admitted the first women into higher education (Wilson, 2007). This trend has continued unabated and woman now enter college in greater numbers than do men.

Men now make up only 42% of enrollment at colleges and universities across the nation (Wilson, 2007). While this statistic in itself is not alarming, research has shown that the lower number of males entering higher education also demonstrate lower overall performance than women on a number of factors.

Data show, however, that in college young women do outperform young men by many measures. College women earn better grades, hold more leadership posts, spend more time studying, and earn more honors and awards. They report being more involved than young men in student clubs and volunteer work (p. 2)

So women not only outnumber men on college campuses, but outperform them in areas deemed important in the university arena.

Sax (2008) found that, in comparison to women, men skip class more often and spend more time partying, drinking, and watching television. Edwards (2007) argued that men have been socialized to view college as a time to party free from authority figures. Men have been discouraged from viewing college as a

time to prepare for life after graduation, because it isn't "manly" (p. 200).

According to Kimmel (2008), the socialization process begins before men ever enter college. Specifically boys in high school are

...underachieving academically, acting out behaviorally, and disengaging psychologically. Many are failing to develop those honorable traits we often associate with masculinity – responsibility, thoughtfulness, discipline. Boys drop out of school, are diagnosed as emotionally disturbed and commit suicide four times more often as girls; they get into fights twice as often. Boys are six times more likely to be diagnosed with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. They score consistently below girls on tests of reading and verbal skills, and have lower class rank and fewer honors than girls (p. 71).

Researchers have investigated this phenomenon and concluded that males are socialized early in life to conform to certain male standards referred to as the hegemonic masculine ideal (Donaldson, 1993). O'Neil (1990) argued that a "Gender Role Conflict" among males occurs as they attempt and fail at mastering male hegemonic standards. Edwards (2007) added that as males enter higher education, they manage this conflict by a process referred to as "putting on a mask" (p. 175) This mask is created to project behavior deemed appropriate or how males think they should act in college. Unfortunately, wearing a mask often results in partying, excessive drinking, physical aggression, and the objectification of women.

Not all males are content to simply pursue hegemonic ideals. Davis (2002) found that for those men who wish to expand their identities, learning to

communicate about their construction of masculinity helps. Davis noted that men have learned to differentiate communication rules when interacting with men and women. Men in his study were able to find more meaningful connection with women in general compared to other men. Men also reported they connected with other men better using a one-on-one, side-by-side communication style. Other themes Davis included (1) men are cautious in communicating about their masculinity for fear of being perceived as feminine, (2) men experienced gender confusion and so distanced themselves from the concept of masculinity, and (3) males noted the presence of Women's Studies Centers and the absence of parallel men's centers as a perceived lack of support from the university.

Significance of the study

Researchers have identified that there are significant gaps in knowledge about college male gender identity development (Harris & Edwards, 2010). Laker (2005) found that most master's level, entry level student affairs professionals have little understanding of how males make meaning of their gender. Likewise, these front-line professionals also lack understanding of the challenges and pressures men face as they develop their identity.

Purpose

The focus of the present study was to better understand the gender identity development of college males. Through the use of qualitative research techniques, the researcher sought to add to the existing knowledge of male development by specifically investigating gender identity development among a selected set of undergraduate male leaders in the university setting. Five males were selected through convenience,

purposeful, and snowball sampling (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2006) to participate in in-depth interviews about their experiences as student leaders at a mid-size public university.

Research Questions

1. What is it like being in a leadership position at a mid-size public university?
2. What is the ideal male or a “man’s man”?
3. In what ways is the ideal male status possessed or not possessed?
4. What pressures are related to pursuing ideal male status?
5. What strategies or coping are utilized in pursuing ideal male status?
6. How are relationships impacted between men and women by the pursuit of ideal male status?

Limitations

While this study sought to understand the gender development experiences of men in college leadership positions, results are limited to only the experiences of the selected students at a mid-sized Midwestern Public University. No attempt should be made to generalize these results to the entire male college population. Results of this study are the interpretation of only one researcher and have not been triangulated, thus lessening the validity of the results.

Definition of Terms

The reader needs a clear understanding of the language used throughout this study. While participants may use some terms interchangeably, specific terms are used as defined in this section. *Sex* is the biological characteristics of a person. *Gender* is a culturally shaped expression of sexual differences, masculine and feminine or male and

female. *Gender identity* is one's sense of self as male or female (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

Summary

This chapter presented a brief overview of the significance for this study. Chapter II will provide an in depth review of existing research in areas related to this topic.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The review of literature for the present study explored prior research on areas pertaining to men's development. Specific areas included in this review are student development theory, gender and identity, gender role conflict, and male identity development.

Student Development Theory

Chickering and Reisser (1993) identified seven vectors in their psycho-social theory that help to explain college student development. The first vector, called "developing competence" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 67) refers to students' inherent struggle to develop mastery in the areas of intellectual competence, physical and manual tasks, and interpersonal relationships. The second vector, "managing emotions," (p. 67) refers to the development of students' ability to express their emotions and manage them appropriately. The third vector, "moving through autonomy towards interdependence," (p. 68) deals with gaining interdependent skills and the emotional strength to differentiate students from their family and peer group. The fourth vector is "developing mature interpersonal relationships" (p. 68) This development includes tolerance and acceptance of differences and the capacity for intimacy. The fifth vector called "establishing identity" (p. 68) deals with the psychological constructs that are the focus of the present study. Among these constructs are the following:

- (1) comfort with body and appearance,
- (2) comfort with gender and sexual orientation,
- (3) sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context,
- (4) clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style,
- (5) sense of self in

response to feedback from valued others, (6) self-acceptance and self-esteem, and (7) personal stability and integration (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49).

The sixth vector is called “developing purpose” (p. 69). In this vector, students establish clear career plans, commit to specific personal interests and develop meaningful interpersonal and family commitments. The seventh and last vector is “developing integrity” (p. 69). Here students establish convictions about beliefs, values, and purposes as well as an appreciation for other’s beliefs and points of view.

Gender and Identity

Historically, Bem’s (1983) gender schema theory identified ways in which people develop their own concept of gender, beginning with childhood. First, a child learns to organize data and observations into gender-based categories. The concept of gender provides a cross-categorical way for children to sort information such as colors (pink for girls, blue for boys), personality traits (gentle for women, aggressive for men), career aspirations (teacher, nurse, football player, firefighter), and hobbies (dance, sports). Thus, the categorization reduces phenomena into girl/woman/female/feminine and boy/man/male/masculine. Bem claimed that the social construction of gender rests largely on the strength of masculine and feminine categories in the environment. She also argued that a person links these learned elements to themselves based on which category they feel they belong, leaving behind elements that do not fit into the appropriate gender category. A person then internally evaluate how they conform to the gender schemas they created.

More recently, Jones and McEwen (2000) expanded the notion of identity to include more complex phenomena than gender alone. They organized ten key categories of identity:

- (a) relative salience of identity dimensions in relation to difference;
- (b) the multiple ways in which race matters;
- (c) multiple layers of identity;
- (d) the braiding of gender with other dimensions;
- (e) the importance of cultural identifications and cultural values;
- (f) the influence of family and background experiences;
- (g) current experiences and situational factors;
- (h) relational, inclusive values and guiding personal beliefs;
- (i) career decisions and future planning; and
- (j) the search for identity (p. 408).

From these categories Jones and McEwen developed a Conceptual Model for Multiple Dimensions of Identity. The model illustrates how one's core identity is comprised of dimensions referred to as personal attributes, characteristics, and identity (Figure 1).

These different dimensions (race, culture, class, religion, gender, and sexual orientation) become salient depending on context (family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, and career decisions and life planning).

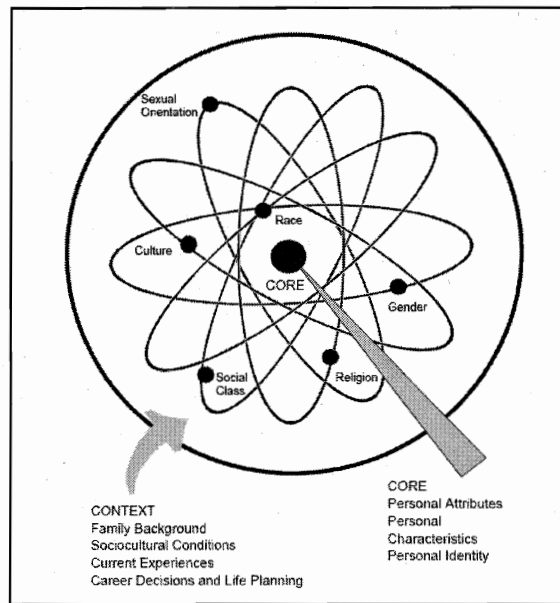


Figure 1. Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Whereas previous theories focused on one aspect of development, Jones and McEwen argued that a more complex model of identity was needed emphasizing the holistic nature of this developmental process.

Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2004) added the “Meaning-Making Filter” to the Jones and McEwen (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Figure 2). This filter seeks to better explain how students’ make meaning of their experiences.

Meaning making capacity is drawn as a filter. How contextual influences move through the filter depends on the depth and permeability of the filter. The depth (thickness) and permeability (size of openings) of the filter depend on the complexity of the person’s meaning-making capacity. To illustrate complex meaning making, the filter would be drawn with increased depth and smaller grid openings; less complex meaning-making

capacity would be illustrated through a narrower filter with wider grid openings (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, p. 7).

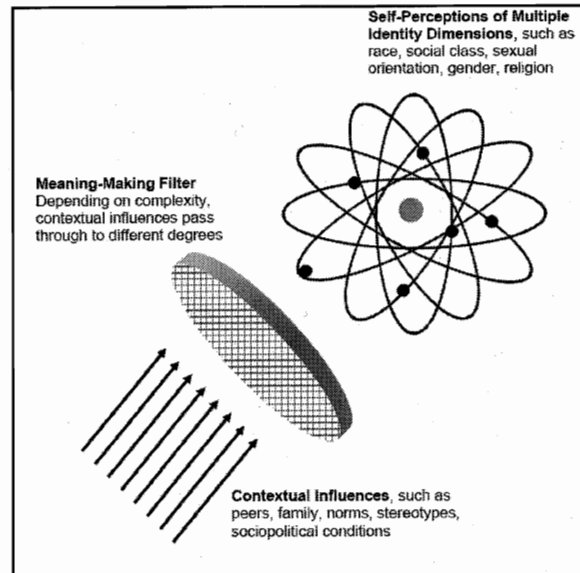


Figure 2. Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Thus, the dimensions of race, culture, class, religion, gender, and sexual orientation are screened or filtered through cognitive schemas that help individuals make sense of what is happening and add to the process of developing an identity.

Baxter-Magolda (2001) examined identity development through terms of self authorship and argued that three major questions surface as students determine their path: 1) How do I know, 2) Who am I, and 3) How do I Want to construct relationships with others? Baxter-Magolda identified four phases in a student's journey toward self-authorship. In the first phase, *Following Formulas*, students act in ways that have been already laid out for them. They seek to gain approval and direction from external sources such as societal expectations, adults with whom they interact, and peers. In the second phase, *Crossroads*, students discover that the paths they are on do not necessarily work well and they must establish new plans that better fit their needs and interests. Here they

will begin to establish their own beliefs rather than the previous habit of adopting those of others. In the third phase, *Become the Author of One's Life*, students choose and stand up for their own beliefs even when facing external viewpoints. They feel they are compelled to live out their beliefs, even though this may sometimes be difficult. Lastly, in the fourth phase, *Internal Foundation*, students are grounded in their own self-determined belief system. Their life decisions are based on their own philosophy.

Baxter Magolda (2008) also identified three primary elements or “building blocks of self authorship” (p. 271). One element, *Trusting the Internal Voice*, refers to when people recognize that they do not have control over external events, but they do have control of their reaction to these events. Another element, *Building an Internal Foundation*, refers to when people develop their own personal philosophy or guiding framework for their actions, identified as “the core of one’s being” (p. 280). The final element, *Securing Internal Commitments*, indicates when people feel that living by their own philosophy and belief system is a natural and necessary part of life. They have integrated their external foundations with the realities of the external world.

Gender Role Conflict

Gender Role Conflict (GRC) is defined as a psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others. GRC occurs when rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles result in restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or self (O’Neil, 1990). Men who experience GRC may exhibit the following symptoms: (a) restrictive emotionality; (b) health care problems; (c) obsession with achievement and success; (d) restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior; (e) socialized control, power, and competition issues; and (f) homophobia (O’Neil). The ultimate

outcome is the restriction of a person's human potential or the restriction of another person's potential (O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995).

Davis (2002) identified five patterns in college men experiencing gender role conflict. The patterns emerge as men work to make meaning of their identity. Pattern one refers to the need for men to express themselves in ways that do not align with hegemonic masculinity. Pattern two refers to codes developed for communication with men. In order to make meaningful connection with another male, men identified one-on-one, side-by-side communication as the most effective. Additionally, men identified that being engaged in some sort of activity, such as driving or video games, made connecting easier. The third pattern refers to the fear men experience of being perceived as feminine. Being perceived as feminine might cause others to question a male's sexual orientation identity. Therefore, men have found the need to restrict behaviors that could be perceived as feminine. The fourth pattern refers to the process of men experiencing confusion or distancing from the concept of masculinity. In this pattern men find themselves unsure what it means to be a man and did not want to identify with masculinity. The final pattern refers to men experiencing a lack of overall support because of their gender. Participants pointed out that universities have Women's Studies Centers, but do not have corresponding men's centers. Also, participants believed faculty, especially male faculty, were more open to helping females as opposed to male students.

Male Identity Development

Kimmel (2008) noted that men experience little developmental growth during their college years and instead perpetuate male hegemonic traits.

...In college, they party hard but are soft on studying. They slip through the academic cracks, another face in a large lecture hall, getting by with little effort and less commitment. ...they drift aimlessly from one dead-end job to another, spend more time online playing video games and gambling than they do on dates (and probably spend more money too), “hook up” occasionally with a “friend with benefits,” go out with their buddies, drink too much, and save too little. After college, they perpetuate that experience... They have grandiose visions for their futures and not a clue how to get from here to there. When they do try and articulate this amorphous uncertainty, they’re likely to paper over it with a simple “it’s all good” (p. 3).

Kimmel recommended that understanding the process and environment which men experience in order to support their development into productive and upstanding individuals.

Markow and Fein (2005) surveyed 3,450 middle and high-school students, and found that two out of three students had been verbally or physically assaulted during the past year because of their perceived or actual appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, or religion. This aggressive behavior further socializes young men to conform to hegemonic standards and provide pressure to those that do not conform. Some of this pressure leads to boys acting out in various ways. Close to 85% of teen suicides are boys (Kimmel, 2008). In the case of highly-publicized school shootings,

...the boys who committed these acts have stories of being constantly bullied, beaten up, and gay-baited. They have been mercilessly and

constantly teased, picked on, and threatened. Not because they were gay, but because they were *different* from the other boys (p. 87).

The pressure to conform to hegemonic standards apparently causes both boys and men to act in ways that are detrimental to themselves and others around them.

Edwards (2007) argued that college men are expected to prove their manhood by partying, including drinking to excess, having sex with many different women, doing drugs, not caring about school, and breaking rules. He also stated that college men have been discouraged to view college as a time to prepare for life after graduation, but rather to frame college life as a time to party because it is their four years of freedom from authority of parents, teachers, and coaches while they do not have the responsibility of a job and family.

Based on these observations, Edwards' (2007) developed a model about college men's identity development. He explored how men wear a mask in order to manage the expectations they perceive society places on them. In other words, men cover up those aspects of their personality that do not conform to society's expectations. Men will act in ways that they know are deviant, but in order to reinforce their hegemonic mask they will still engage in the behavior in order to "prop up their manhood" (p134). However, there are consequences to wearing this mask such as demeaning and degrading relationships and attitudes toward women, limited relationships with other men including friends and fathers and loss of authenticity and humanity. These consequences, according to the model, may eventually serve as a catalyst for men to transcend societal expectations and forgo the mask.

Harris (2006) examined the meanings undergraduate men make of their gender and how these meanings influence college men's behaviors and outcomes. He found that the men in his study defined masculinity based on the notions of respect, responsibility and leadership, physical prowess, and appeal to women. Their construction of gender was complex and developed even in pre-college socialization; punishment and reinforcement by parents and peers was a big factor in this socialization. Harris (2006) also identified four dynamic conditions that were significant during the undergraduate experience: 1) engaging in male subgroups ranging from racial/ethnic communities to residential programs or fraternities; 2) undergraduate male peer influences; 3) campus involvement in programs, organizations, or activities; and 4) academic interests and motivation. Some men chose to enroll in academic programs that would lead to a high paying career, a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. Also, students' motivation for academic interests could be fueled by the desire to obtain a high paying career or drained because studying was not perceived as an activity that would elevate one's status in a peer group. Additionally, Harris (2006) identified unspoken norms of masculinity among the participants in his study: sexist attitudes towards women, homophobia, excessive alcohol consumption, and having a "work hard/play hard" mentality.

Harris and Edwards (2010) identified three themes that describe male identity development among participants in their qualitative investigations of male identity development. First among the themes were external pressures to conform to hegemonic masculinity. Men arrived at college already socialized to conform to traditional hegemonic masculinity.

The men embraced limited and narrow concepts of what it meant to be a man, which included being competitive, respected, in control, self-assured, aggressive, tough, and in positions of authority. The participants also defined masculinity in terms of what they thought a man should not be, specifically not gay, effeminate, or vulnerable.

Second, participants acknowledged the consequences of conforming to hegemonic masculinity. These consequences included loss of authenticity resulting from sexist attitudes towards women and limited connectedness with other men because of social expectations regarding emotional expression. Third, Harris and Edwards found their participants ultimately attempted to transcend societal expectations in order to express their gender in more authentic and less stereotypical ways. This pursuit of authenticity was aided by relationships with positive male role models that allowed for critical dialogue about hegemonic masculinity and its impact on men. In order to transcend learned societal expectations, it was important for men to engage with other men who had different concepts of masculinities than themselves.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of current research in areas related to the present study. Chapter III will discuss the qualitative method used in the present study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This present study was concerned with assessing the gender identity development of male student leaders. In order to better understand this phenomenon, the researcher examined perceptions of gender identity development among a group of five male students in elected leadership positions using grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a qualitative methodology used to develop theory grounded in the experience of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). "Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273). Grounded theory is well suited for broadening rather than narrowing inquiry and exploring individual identity as a socially constructed phenomenon in the context of hierarchical social structures such as patriarchy. More specifically grounded theory approaches provide a set of analytic guidelines for building theories through successive levels for data analysis and conceptual development (Charmaz, 2005).

The outcome of a grounded theory study is a theory or explanatory framework that relates closely to the examined phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Patton (2002) explained, "...grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical content" (p. 125). This understanding is grounded in the experience of the participants.

Grounded theory is distinguished by specific systematic techniques for coding data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding determines the initial concepts and categories that relate to the phenomenon. Axial coding further develops categories that emerged during the open coding phase. The researcher identifies subcategories that correspond with each category. In selective coding the categories are further developed as relationships are discovered among them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Lastly, grounded theory utilizes constant comparative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Constant comparative methods require analysis to occur during the data collection process. The researcher collects data, conducts preliminary analysis, identifies emerging categories, and returns to the field to collect additional data until the emerging categories are theoretically saturated (Creswell, 1998). Theoretical saturation is achieved when no new or relevant data emerge relating to the category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Interview Protocol

The following questions were used to guide inquiry (Appendix B). All questions were open ended and specifically designed to facilitate follow-up probes to encourage detailed description of personal experiences for purposes of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

1. What is it like being in a leadership position at a mid-size Midwestern comprehensive university?
2. What do you perceive as the ideal male or a “man’s man”?
3. In what ways do you perceive yourself as possessing or not possessing the characteristics you described?
4. What pressures do you experience to live up to this ideal standard?

5. What strategies or coping skills do you utilize in dealing with or meeting the notion of an ideal male?
6. Tell me about your relationships with women and men.

Participants

The target population of this study was male student leaders. Utilizing convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2006) the researcher interviewed five college aged elected male leaders. The sample included male student leaders of various functional areas in student affairs (residence life, student life, fraternity life, etc.). A short description of each participant follows.

- Participant 1 is a sophomore and a white male that holds executive positions in a fraternity and a GLBT student group.
- Participant 2 is a freshman and a black male. He holds executive positions in a residence hall leadership group. He identifies strongly with his theatre background.
- Participant 3 is a junior and a white male. He holds executive positions with a campus wide residence hall leadership group as well as a senior level undergraduate staff position in housing.
- Participant 4 is a junior and a white male. He holds an executive position in a residence hall leadership group.
- Participant 5 is a non-traditional junior and a white male. He holds an executive position within his fraternity as well as a position in the campus wide governing body for fraternities. He also has held a Resident Assistant position in housing.

Prior to coming to college, he served in the military, as a volunteer firefighter, and a police officer.

Site

The study was conducted at a comprehensive mid-size Midwestern Public University with an enrollment of approximately 12,000 students. The institution has 44 undergraduate majors, 55 minors, 25 graduate degree programs, and five post-baccalaureate certificate programs.

Data Collection

Individual interviews were conducted in a private setting within the PI's residence hall office. Each participant was informed about the purposes of the study, asked to read and sign an Informed Consent document prior to participation (Appendix A), and the PI indicated that a respondent was free to withdraw his participation and data from the study at any time prior to the conclusion of the study. All interviews were audio and video digitally recorded. The audio device was placed between the investigator and the research participant, and the video recorder focused on the participant only. The interview protocol as described above was used to initiate conversations, with follow-up probes based on initial responses to achieve an in-depth response for each topic area.

Data Analysis

Digital audio recordings were transcribed for purposes of qualitative analysis, with video recordings used only as a backup when the audio recording was indistinct. Names and identifying information in all transcriptions were changed to protect the identity of participants and the research site. Electronic records of data were kept in a password protected computer, and paper copies of transcribed data were kept in a secure

location in the PI's office. All data collected for purposes of the study will be destroyed after a period of three years.

Each transcription was read individually and codes assigned to transcripts, then codes were checked across all transcriptions. Codes were then arranged in categories, data again reviewed, and emerging themes identified (Corbin & Strauss, 1967).

Summary

This chapter explained the grounded theory methodology that was used to conduct this study. Interview questions, data protocol, and data analysis were described in order to better understand the results in the following chapter. Chapter IV will present the findings based on the data collected and analyzed.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter presents the various themes discovered through analysis of elected male student leader interviews focused on perceptions of their gender development as men. First, each interview protocol item is presented with the patterns that emerged from the topical areas. Next, an additional theme is discussed that was not anticipated in the original research questions. Finally, a working model of how these male leaders made meaning of their gender identity will be presented. What follows is a discussion of themes emerging from the interview protocol items using the items as side headings.

What is it like being in a leadership position at a mid-size Midwest comprehensive university?

Participants briefly discussed their feelings towards student leadership. Three main themes were discussed relative to leadership. The first theme was a perception that personal responsibility is a major factor of what it means to be a leader. As Participant 2 discussed, "...you have to present yourself in a certain way so everyone else knows that you're leader...responsible so that people put their trust in you..." The participants had a positive attitude in expressing this sentiment and appeared to take pride in having others view them as responsible and trustworthy. Although the participants shared some anxiety about being responsible, it was not a barrier to their desire to lead.

A second theme expressed by the participants was the issue of accountability. Participant 1 stated, "As a leader in those groups there is a higher... there is a lot more personal work in terms of holding yourself accountable." They defined accountability not in terms of some ideal that they pursued, but rather attempting to be different than

those they perceived were not accountable as leaders. They expressed frustration with the lack of accountability demonstrated by their peers. This motivated them to become very accountable in order to demonstrate or model a perceived leadership quality.

The last theme expressed by the participants was a perceived point of pride in being respected by those they led. As Participant 2 stated: "I volunteer for things so that people would respect why I am there and they would respect me as a leader." Participant 2 was motivated to get involved as a way of being respected by his peers. Leadership is something these participants take seriously and want the admiration that comes from holding a position of significance. Likewise, the participants shared that they want this admiration to extend to the group they represented (e.g., Hall Council, Fraternity).

What is the ideal male or "man's man"?

Several themes describing characteristics of the ideal male emerged in participant responses. The first theme was being the "breadwinner" for a household. Participant 1 said it involved getting "...up every day and going to work and running the family and bringing home the money." Participant 2 stated the ideal male is someone who is, "...able to support a family and who is able to do those things on his own without much guidance." Participant 4 stated his idea in very concrete terms: "...making six figures a year." Overall, responses focused on the ideal male being someone who is an autonomous, capable and successful leader who demonstrates his worth by the amount of income he receives. This income is shared proudly with his family who adore him for all the afore-mentioned attributes.

In describing phase one of their perceptions of the ideal male, the participants recognized that the process of "breadwinning" or providing for the family, although

foundational as a construct, may not initially include a substantial income or position in the hierarchy of career opportunities. Therefore, their version of an ideal male may begin his career in the lower rungs of a corporation, but the expectation is that eventually he will succeed in rising to greater heights.

Phase two of the process of breadwinning was the expectation that the ideal male will eventually secure a position which results in substantial financial provision for the family. With that position the participants acknowledged more typical hegemonic themes such as power and achievement related to their maleness. For example, the participants noted these careers included "...a high powered job..." (Participant 1), "...getting high up in a company..." and "I don't think there's a lot of female CEO's" (Participant 4).

Another theme that surfaced was the process of moving from initial breadwinner to CEO. The process included typical hegemonic ideas that indicated these participants to achieve their success through non feminine leadership qualities such as demonstrating confidence, not admitting you don't know something, restricting emotions, being independent, being strong and being non-reflective. This process is demonstrated by the following comments: Participant 2 stated, "Men feel more confident ... they feel more confident when they go into something and they ... even if they don't know exactly what they're doing they do what they want." Participant 1 stated, "...be an independent thinker, be able to hold your own..." Participant 5, "...men I think you jump into something like as fast as possible..." Participant 4 was particularly detailed.

I think they should be passionate, but not let the emotions get the best of them, at the same time they need to still be strong. If something goes bad they should stay

optimistic, but I mean, put a lot of pride, and put a lot of emotion into things in everything you do.

Thus the model that emerges is one that indicates the ideal male is foundationally a breadwinner who pursues the ultimate career prize through typical male hegemonic characteristics. How participants cope with this ideal is explored in a later question.

In what ways is ideal male status possessed or not possessed?

Having described the ideal male, participants were quick to acknowledge they fell short of this imagined individual. As Participant 4 put it simply, “Uhh, I’m not quite there.” There were subsequent reasons given by the participants for this conclusion. First, one participant thought it simply a lack of life experience. Participant 1, “I think I have some things still to learn just in terms of, I need more life experience I guess.” He currently sees himself in an extended high school experience with some rules and some freedom but that this experience is not enough to prepare for him for gaining ideal male status. Post graduation will in his mind provide the opportunities that facilitate breadwinning and career advancement.

However, most of the participants transparently acknowledged that the ideal male status may be unattainable. One way they reflected this sentiment is by cognitively reframing themselves in non-hegemonic terms. Participant 3, “I don't think I've ever been considered one of the guys.” Participant 5, “I'm not really one of those guys that goes out and portrays that rough, tough image.” Another way they disqualify themselves from ideal male status is by owning behavior that culture labels as feminine. Once such feminine behavioral trait the participants acknowledge is the showing of emotions. Participant 3 stated, “... I do show my emotions on the outside...” Participant 2, “I

sometimes feel like I don't fit in a lot just because I show a lot more emotion than other guys..." Participant 5, "I think I am more emotional than most guys, I mean sometimes I cry and stuff and a man's man doesn't do that."

What pressures are related to pursuing ideal male status?

In answering this question, the participants were unanimous in noting only one primary pressure. They thought social pressure from family, peers and formal organizations was the driving force in striving for or maintaining the ideal male persona. Some participants acknowledged their parents' role in that pressure. Participant 1 noted that in "coming out" as a gay man to his mother she replied, "Just fix it." Likewise peers also provide social pressure toward ideal male norms. Participant 2 explained, "...I don't like my friends to make fun of me..." Participant 1 explains his male peer group response to some of his comments,

The worst thing I've experienced is I'll get weird looks from the guys, like there was one incident where someone was talking about what they did last night with their girlfriend so I'm going to chime in and tell them what I did with whomever and they were like, I don't want to hear that. Stop ...the guys in the fraternity just doesn't understand. They don't have the same... mentality... they aren't gay.

They don't understand as much.

Lastly, some organizations perpetuate their own social norms. Participant 5 reflects on an experience in his fraternity, "I was being very, I guess girly in the way I was behaving and walking and stuff like that and they were saying, 'Hey, man it up,' and stuff like that."

What strategies or coping skills are utilized in pursuing ideal male status?

Participants indicated two forms of coping strategies to deal with their perceived dissonance with hegemonic masculinity. The men reframed themselves as non-hegemonic males and acknowledged their expression of feminine qualities such as emotions as a second sign they identified as non-hegemonic. However, these coping strategies were sometimes masked as the participants struggled with the pressures of conforming to hegemonic expectations. Note the following comments: 1) “I feel like if I try to act in a different way that doesn't feel natural to me like in the fraternity setting if they tell me to man up...” (Participant 1), 2) “...certain times like when I am feeling really emotional I sometimes try to hide it a lot...” (Participant 2), and 3) “I don't always show my emotions...” (Participant 3).

Reframing as a coping skill was again acknowledged. Participant 3 explained, “I've finally come to at least a partial understanding of the fact that I'm not that type of guy. I will never be that type of guy.” Participant 4 responded, “...a lot different so I'm fine with that. It's just who I am.” Additionally, Participant 3 explained,

I try to live up to be as best as I can be to fit those types of standards and or criteria but I'm not afraid to let my emotions out and stuff like that. I basically try to fit in, I guess you could say, but I've spent my whole life trying to fit in, so I've taken it to heart that I should just be my own person- discover what it means to me to be a good person instead of trying to develop those qualities.

Lastly, participants coped by rejecting what they perceived as the dominant American Culture's expectation of the career aspirations implicit in the American dream. As participant 5 said, “Well, corporate America [defines] successful [by] how much

money someone's got and [how we] can we beat out the competition. Mine is I just want to be happy. I just want to be comfortable with life." So some participants note that the path towards the ideal male may be like a ladder leaning against the wrong wall. Climb the ladder, and one still does not reach their destination.

How are relationships impacted between men and women by the pursuit of ideal male status?

Responses in this area yielded a major theme that the participants were more comfortable conversing with women about sensitive or emotional topics. They acknowledged the importance of their "guy friends" but when it came to handling sensitive topics they were able to better relate to women. Participant 2 stated,

My best friend is a girl and... we've been friends all through high school ... we tell each other everything and ... she gets when I feel certain ways like certain emotions ... even with that shield up she can tell there's something wrong, she knows that's that shield like when I say something's fine she can see that. Like guys they don't see that...

Likewise, participant 4 explained,

Actually, I'd probably go to girls more. I have a few different female friends that I would talk to. ...with the females, I don't have too many, I have a few, but they seem to be a lot stronger bonds. I mean I talk to them as much, but they seem to be a lot stronger bonds with them than with my guy friends.

Lastly, participant 3 stated,

I connect a lot of time with women because they also like to express their emotions more than men do so I'm not judging them. I have more of a connection with them in fact so that's why I'm able to communicate more with them.

Unanticipated Theme: A changing standard

One major theme emerged that was not expected from the original research questions. Many participants acknowledged that what they view as the social construction of the ideal male is changing. Participant 2 explained,

I see it sometimes like men think that women shouldn't go out into the workforce but it's getting better and you see it as ... men and women go out into the workforce and both bring home money and then they both like split everything because they're both treated as equal and such , but I see that a lot now but before it was like women they stay at home with the kids or they like cooked and cleaned and men did all the going out and the working like for the money for the family...we're more towards ... moving towards the equalness.

Participant 1 reflected on changing perceptions in response to his definition of the ideal standard. "I think they're trying to steer us away from that idea that I just mentioned.

They're teaching everyone both male and female to be able to think for themselves and be able to act independently." Participant 4 explained how the male standard is changing in the context of attitudes towards women,

Give [women] equal rights, give them a chance. A lot more deciding, I mean I see all the time where they get a lot more rights. I think there's a lot more, there's a

lot bigger push. In some places I could see it being a reality. Like the actual where they get all the equal rights.

Participant 3 provided an in-depth insight to the changing construct of societal expectations for men and women.

Definitely in the past and in the recent past a lot of men saw themselves as superior to women authority, physically and all that. But now I think it's definitely changed. A lot of men see women as their equals. In most aspects women can be just as smart, just as intelligent as a man. They can make good decisions, even hard decisions just as much as a man can. They can be strong willed as a man can so I think it has definitely changed socially over the past few decades and even as you separate it down into different subgroups talking about schools or businesses there's definitely starting to be a more equal balance between the two whether it be traditional male authority roles or even a switch to being in the traditional women authority roles there's definitely not that separation of [gender] stereotype like there used to be.

Summary

The student leaders in this study described leadership as a role in which they felt an additional amount of responsibility on top of what a "normal" student would feel. When discussing their ideas about ideal male status, many described characteristics of men as a breadwinner, someone who is in a high powered position in their career and a person who carries themselves with confidence. Participants also acknowledged that they did not feel that they met the standards they described. They believed that they were more emotional than what they perceived the ideal male to be. In response to these

inadequacies, participants learned to restrict their expression of their emotions in response to social pressure from a peer group. Additionally, participants acknowledged that they knew they did not meet ideal standards and had come to accept it. Participants found that they were able to connect better with women especially when discussing serious or emotional issues. They acknowledged their male peers, but continually reinforced that they were more comfortable discussing sensitive issues with women. One unpredicted theme that emerged from the interviews was that participants believed the cultural conception of an ideal male was changing. They believed men were beginning to accept women as an equal partner in both their personal and professional lives.

This chapter presented the various themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews with five college male student leaders. The next chapter will present a discussion of findings in relation to previous research, make recommendations for future research, and present implications for practice.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Recommendations

In this chapter the results of the present study are compared to previous research on gender identity. Based on the qualitative analysis of interviews collected from five undergraduate male leaders, a grounded theory based model of gender identity development will be presented. Lastly, recommendations for further research and implications for practice in the field of Student Affairs will be presented.

This study as it relates to previous research

The participants in this qualitative inquiry of gender identity development among five undergraduate male leaders identified three main themes pertaining to their student leadership status. The themes were respect, responsibility, and accountability. All were important aspects of their personal idea of leadership. The participants wanted to be seen as responsible both as a reflection of themselves as well as the organizations they represented. They were not afraid of accountability, and appreciated the respect they gained from peers for their efforts. Harris (2006) also identified themes of respect and responsibility as characteristics of college men's perception of masculinity. While Harris' exploration more broadly explored gender, this present study found that students in leadership positions were learning similar characteristics. Holding leadership positions may be a way that the participants in this study gained and displayed traits of a hegemonic male, similar to those described by Harris.

In describing their ideal male, the participants put forth interesting characteristics that reflected previous research. The themes of providing for one's family, achieving high status, and doing so in typical male hegemonic fashion indicated the participants were

well aware of prescribed cultural expectations of men. Baxter-Magolda (2001) described *Following Formulas* as a way in which one follows paths laid out for them. These paths can be found through societal expectations, adults with whom they interact, and peers. In the present study, men have looked externally to define what they see as the ideal male. While participants did not indicate they were entirely striving for these prescribed paths, they learned them in ways as described by Baxter-Magolda.

Baxter-Magolda (2001) explored the concept of self- authorship and how people learn to authentically define themselves. Baxter-Magolda explained in phase two (Crossroads) of her research that individuals begin to recognize that the prescribed path of how to think and act may not fit their personal life goals. Likewise, participants in the present study also recognized how the idolized version of what it means to be a man sometimes conflicted with their own way of living. Similar to the development of self-authorship, the participants in this study recognized their need to own personal beliefs and become self-authored in ways contrary to the prescriptions about manhood defined in the wider of society.

Edwards (2007) described how men learned to cover up aspects of themselves in order to fit into societal expectations by “putting on a mask” (p. 175) Similar to Edwards’ findings, in this study, participants acknowledged how they will never be, “one of those guys.” Men eventually recognize there are negative consequences for wearing this mask and attempt other coping mechanisms. The participants in the present study reframed themselves, accepting their unique identity, and shedding the mask.

Harris (2006) argued that college men’s construction of their gender in fact happens well before college. Punishment and reinforcement by parental and peer

influences shape the way men make meaning of being male. This study reinforced the importance of these influences and found that these external pressures continued into the college level. Participants cited family, friends, and organizations as pressures to conform to an external social construction of an ideal male.

Edwards (2007) stated that men come to accept ways in which they do not meet hegemonic standards, or they begin to accept how the mask does not fit. Similarly, in this study, participants coped with the idea that they did not fit into their construction of the ideal male by reframing how they viewed themselves. Participants explained how they have recognized that they do not meet hegemonic standards, and have learned to accept it. However, unlike strategies described by Edwards, some participants in this study rejected certain aspects of their hegemonic masculinity. Participants acknowledged a standard and simply explained, "That's not me."

O'Neil (1990) explained how men experiencing gender role conflict exhibited certain symptoms such as restrictive emotionality and homophobia. This study similarly found that men in college attempted to cover up their true emotions in certain contexts – often when interacting with other men, especially in groups. Participants stated they cannot be transparent and authentic and sometimes keep their emotions within themselves in order to conform to social pressures. "...certain times like when I am feeling really emotional I sometimes try to hide it a lot..." (Participant 2). Similar to the O'Neil, Good, and Holmes (1995) definition of gender role conflict, one participant felt that because of his sexual orientation identity, his ability to act authentically was restricted by social pressures due to his non-conformity to hegemonic masculinity.

The worst thing I've experienced it I'll get weird looks from the guys, like there was one incident where someone was talking about what they did last night with their girlfriend so I'm going to chime in and tell them what I did with whomever and they were like, I don't want to hear that. Stop.

Jones and McEwen (2000) developed the idea that people develop multiple dimensions of identity. However, in this study the participants failed to own a multiple identity concept but did acknowledge that certain contextual pressures shaped their identity toward more male hegemonic behavior. Jones and McEwen (2000) explained how different dimensions of one's identity are more or less salient depending on experience and context. One participant's sexual orientation identity was far more salient than his gender identity. He was more willing to recognize his sexual orientation as an identifier than he was his gender. "...the guys in the fraternity just don't understand. They don't have the same... mentality... they aren't gay. They don't understand as much." (Participant 1).

Davis (2002) explored the characteristics of college men experiencing gender role conflict. He found that men in the process of making meaning of their gender feared being perceived as feminine. Similarly in this study, participants cited the expression of emotions as a feminine characteristic that they often restricted in peer groups. "I feel like if I try to act in a different way that doesn't feel natural to me like in the fraternity setting if they tell me to man up..." (Participant 1). However, participants were able to utilize close relationships with females to express some of their otherwise restricted emotions.

A Representative Model

Based on the findings of this study, a representative model based on grounded theory was constructed that represents the way in which participants framed their gender identity development. On one end of the continuum, men identify their construction of the ideal male. This study found that college men's construction of the ideal male included being the breadwinner of a household, holding a high career status, and displaying hegemonic male behavior such as self-assured confidence. The opposite end of the continuum indicated the participants' ability to authentically express their identity independent of their construction of the ideal male. The forces moving these participants along this continuum are social pressures and changing societal norms. This study identified family, friends, and organizations as pressures to conform to an external definition of masculinity experienced by student leaders. This pressure to conform is represented in the model by an arrow that symbolizes the movement of an individual away from authentic identity expression toward conformity to the perceived ideal male standard. However, participants also identified a shift in cultural and social norms away from what was previously perceived to be the ideal male. This force is represented in the model by an arrow furthering an individual toward an authentic self-authored identity expression. Men in the present study explained how they used restricting emotions, reframing themselves separately from the ideal standard, and rejecting the standard as ways they dealt with the idea of not being ideal. In the model, this is represented as internal processes that take place when an individual is not at either extreme of the continuum.

Based on the limited findings of this study, it is possible that few, if any, college men are on either extreme of this proposed continuum. Participants explained how they have experienced differences in conformity depending on the social and individual context. It was clear that participants distanced themselves from social expectations; however there were times in which they felt they were attempting to conform in varying degrees based on perceived social pressures. Additionally, depending on the context, some participants explained they tried to “act male.” Some explained that in situations with females, they felt they did not have to “act male” as they did in groups of men. For example, one participant explained if he were seeking help at a business establishment, he would be more likely to approach a female associate because he felt less pressure to act in hegemonic ways, whereas if he needed to approach a male for assistance he would feel the need to prove his competency or find ways in which he projected more of an ideal male image to the second man.

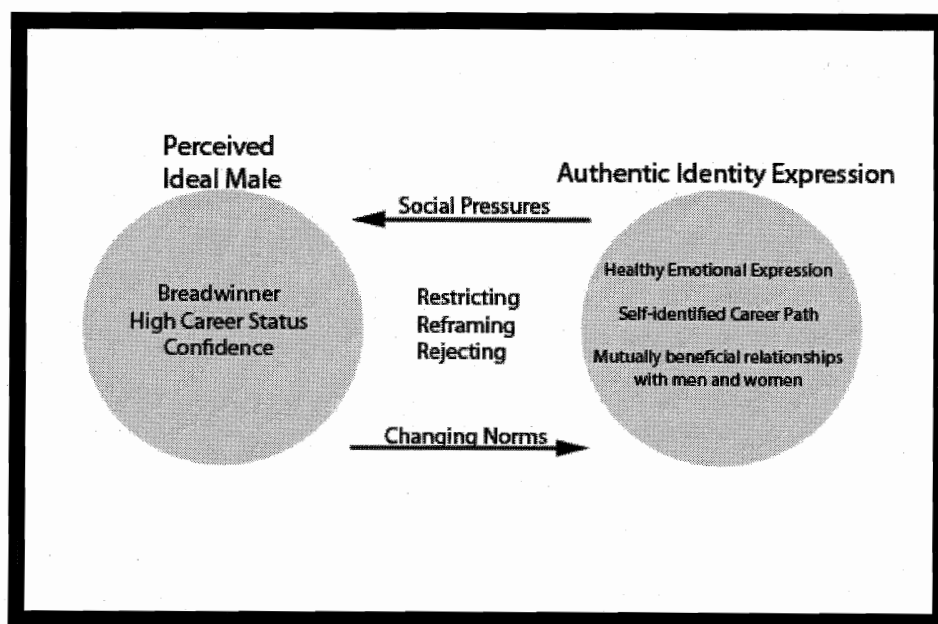


Figure 3: Male Gender Identity Model

Recommendations for future research

This study focused on gender identity development among five selected male student leaders. Future research could explore identity development of larger and more diverse samples of college and non-college males as well different dimensions of identity. For example, in what manner does male gender identity development occur within various racial or socioeconomic sub-groups, as Harris (2006) suggested. Additionally, some participants recognized the importance of role models in their construction of an ideal male. Additional research regarding role models in higher education for male students would be useful for implementation in student affairs practice, which Kimmel (2008) supported as one of three ways to facilitate development among college men.

Finally, participants perceived the societal construction of the ideal male is changing among young men. Studying men qualitatively across generations to identify the social construction of what being a man means in their own voices could result in creating a more complex construction of gender.

Implications for practice

While results of this study cannot infer any relation between student leadership and gender development, it appears that participants made significant meaning of gender for themselves. Many of them explained how they felt they had transcended external socially constructed expectations of masculinity and how they presently did not fit into the hegemonic standard. Authentic identity expression being an ideal position in the representative model above, the present findings may indicate some amount of success in the development opportunities being afforded to college student leaders.

Davis (2002) and Kimmel (2008) both maintain it is important to continually provide male students positive adult male role models that practice healthy emotional expression. Current practicing professionals in student affairs are primarily female, so the male students would benefit from additional male role models entering the field as professionals. Nevertheless, participants in this study identified that they were able to better connect with females about the expression of sensitive and emotional issues. While the statements above may seem in conflict with each other, they emphasize the importance of having gender diversity among student affairs professionals to support healthy male development in college.

Summary of recommendations for research and practice:

- 1.) Qualitative research exploring additional intersections of gender and other dimensions of identity.
- 2.) Longitudinal qualitative research examining the changing construction of the hegemonic male.
- 3.) Qualitative understanding of the influence of male role models in higher education.
- 4.) Diversification of university student affairs staff to include a proportionate amount of positive male role models for male students.
- 5.) Create additional development opportunities for males in college to engage in meaningful dialogue about their gender identity development.
- 6.) Creation of Men's Center's that promote education about men's issues. Also, create mentoring/role model relationships among men to promote authentic identity expression.

- 7.) Training for male and female student affairs professionals on male gender identity development and strategies for fostering personal development.

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Appendix A
Participation Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate

Title: *Gender Role Conflict in Male Student Leaders*

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to understand the meanings that male student leaders make of their gender development.

Participant Involvement: Your involvement in this research study may involve approximately one to two hours of your time. This includes: 1) reading and signing the consent to participate form 2) an interview with the researcher 3) a possible follow up interview. Should the participation in the study be an inconvenience, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Procedures: Interviews will take in a private setting. I will be audio recording your responses to various questions and transcribing the interview for analysis.

Potential Benefits and Risks: There are no direct benefits or compensation for participating in this research study. You may feel some emotional strain during the interview while talking about experiences. The interview may help you have a better understanding of yourself.

Assurance of Confidentiality: Your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected throughout the study. The audio recording and the researcher's notes will be only accessible to the researcher. During transcription, any identifiable information will be changed to protect your identity. The audio recording and transcriptions will be destroyed after three years. All data will be kept in secure digital locations only accessible by the researcher.

Rights of Participants/Voluntary Withdrawal: If at any time you feel you no longer wish to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw. Any data collected from you will be destroyed and not considered in this study. Refusal or withdrawal from this study will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write: Institutional Review Board, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920; Telephone: 217.581.8576; Email: eiuirb@eiu.edu.

I understand the above information and hereby give my permission to participate in the study mentioned above.

Research Participant (Print)

Research Participant Signature

Date

I have explained this study to the above participant and have sought her/his understanding and informed consent.

Researcher Signature

Date

Student Researcher:

Kolin Straub
Graduate Student of Eastern Illinois University
Office Phone: 217.581.7678

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Rick Roberts, Ph.D
Eastern Illinois University
Department Chair, Counseling and
Student Development
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Appendix B
Interview Protocol Questions

Interview Protocols

Interview Questions

1. What is it like being in a leadership position at a comprehensive midsize Midwestern Public University?
2. What do you perceive as the ideal male or a “man’s man”?
3. In what ways do you perceive yourself as possessing or not possessing the characteristics you described?
4. What pressures do you experience to live up to this ideal standard?
5. What strategies or coping skills do you utilize in dealing with or meeting the notion of an ideal male?
6. Tell me about your relationships with women and men.