Taylor University
Pillars at Taylor University

2014

Boys to Men: A Phenomenological Study of Men's Construction of Masculinity at a Faith-Based University

Taylor Thomas Smythe
Taylor University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/mahe

Part of the Higher Education Commons

Recommended Citation

BOYS TO MEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF

MEN'S CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AT

A FAITH-BASED UNIVERSITY

_____

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

_____

by

Taylor Thomas Smythe

May 2014

Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL
_____

MASTER'S THESIS
_____

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Taylor Thomas Smythe

entitled

Boys to Men: A Phenomenological Study of Men's Construction of
Masculinity at a Faith-Based University

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree in Higher Education and Student Development

May 2014

_____   _____
Stephen S. Bedi, Ed.D.   Date   Tim W. Herrmann, Ph.D.   Date
Thesis Supervisor   Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

_____
Scott L. Moeschberger, Ph.D.   Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

_____
Tim Herrmann, Ph.D.   Date
Director, M.A. in Higher Education and Student Development

Abstract

In a time when increasing ambiguity in gender roles has become the norm, young men experience difficulty in knowing what masculinity truly means. For those men who hold to a specific religious or spiritual tradition, navigating this path to manhood can seem even more complex. The present study examines the interrelationship of masculinity and spirituality as it pertains to the experiences of males at a faith-based college. The research questions of the current study highlight two areas: 1) men's construction of masculinity and 2) men's experiences of masculinity in light of their spirituality. The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological method as the framework for semi-structured interviews with nine men at a faith-based institution of higher education. Interviews revealed a number of factors in the masculine identity construction process, including: 1) men learn by observation and conversation; 2) other men play a significant role in this process; 3) masculinity relates closely to spirituality; 4) this process usually occurs most prominently in adolescence; and 5) men need space to process their masculinity. Regarding the question of men's experiences of masculinity in light of their spirituality, participants identified: 1) masculinity and spirituality as tightly interrelated concepts; 2) a shift from a "worldly" to a "godly" form of masculinity; 3) men feeling masculine in more stereotypical settings; 4) an incongruence between beliefs of masculinity and expressions of masculinity; 5) an emphasis on the "roles" of men; 6) different expectations of masculinity based on context; and 7) a discomfort with expressing certain spiritual acts as

a man. The present study provides suggestions for further research, along with the

implications of these findings on the work of those within institutions of higher

education.

Acknowledgments

A number of people have made this thesis possible. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your investment in me, in my education, and the good work that I have prepared for.

I want to first thank my family for supporting me through graduate school. Thank you for encouraging and modeling for me how it looks to follow Christ, and for letting me go far away from home. I love you.

Next, I want to thank those back at my undergraduate institution who poured into me and encouraged me to pursue the path of higher education and student development—Jeff, Neil, Kevin, Comfort, Linda, Felix, Sara, Missi, Mandie, Abigail, Chien, and many others. I am even more excited and passionate about it now than I was when I began.

Cohort Six: You are all gems. Thank you for being such a wonderful community of learners who encourage me to treasure education, ideas, and people. I hope to get the opportunity to work together with you again someday. I wish you the best and hope that you find a community with which to gather around the "great things."

I want to thank Dr. Steven Zombory for being an APA stickler and for training me not to use the word "things" in a research paper. I could not have done this without you.

Thank you to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Bedi. I have appreciated your passion for this document, and I am truly grateful for your time and meticulous edits. Additionally, I would like to thank the other members of my thesis committee, Tim and Scott.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

If asked to describe a typical man, certain traits, images, and qualities likely would come to mind. *Strong*, *muscular*, *independent*, and *composed* emerge as words that express what one might call a "manly" man. On the other hand, men who ascribe to a religious faith tradition might exhibit behaviors and practices typically described as submissive, humble, sensitive, introspective, or even feminine (Fawcett, Francis, & Robbins, 2009). In a world where the role and understanding of masculinity remains in flux, many questions arise, including the following: what does it mean to be a man, what is masculinity, and what role does faith play in males' understanding of masculinity?

Relevance of the Research Topic

The topics of masculinity and spirituality hold great importance for higher education. The current study has come at a time in which the presence of males in churches, youth groups, Christian colleges, and the Christian community at large appears at a decline (Finley, 2007; Kahn, Brett, & Holmes, 2011; Mathewes-Green, 1999; Smith, Denton, Faris, & Regnerus, 2002). There also exists a trend of growing imbalance between male and female enrollment at faith-based higher education institutions, at liberal arts colleges in general, and in church attendance (Finley, 2007; Kahn et al., 2011).

Furthermore, this topic has become important and timely given the emergence of perspectives that differ from traditional views of masculinity. While the prevailing cultural ideal of masculinity in the United States once involved exhibiting traits such as superior physical prowess, independence, skill at sports, and toughness, this view no longer prevails as the exclusively accepted model (Connell, 2005; Murrie, 2000). For example, Connell (2005) made the case for an expansion of the understanding of masculinity, suggesting that people view masculinity no longer through the sole lens of what is stereotypical or hegemonic but instead through varied, alternative masculinities. Hunter and Whitten (1976) explained that, while every person exists classified by sex in terms of the biological differences between male and female, there remains a secondary classification formed around the cultural ideas of masculinity or femininity. Another perspective presents masculinity and femininity as elements potentially viewed on a scale or continuum (Raverty, 2006).

This research on multiple masculinities may relate to the increased cultural acceptance of homosexuality. Because the nature of a homosexual relationship can often conflict with socially constructed gender-roles, the popular perceptions of masculinity have been forced to adapt to the demands of the culture (Schipper, 2007).

Though a plethora of expanded views have explored masculinity, research points to the idea that males who value the "dominant masculinity" often reject behaviors that they view as feminine (Kehler & Greig, 2005). Consequently, many males who value this hegemonic version of masculinity tend to classify both academic and spiritual endeavors as feminine. The present study has proven relevant because of its exploration of that specific population of males who pursue both academic and spiritual endeavors, which

runs contrary to a stereotypical understanding of masculinity. In order to understand masculinity in a more holistic sense, one must understand the various divergent understandings of masculinity and how those views fit into the larger picture of masculinity.

Research Topics: Masculinity and Spirituality

The topic of the following research addressed the constructs of masculinity and spirituality. The present study aimed to discover how masculinity and spirituality interrelate—specifically, how male college students at a faith-based institution construct their masculine identity and how these males live out their masculinity in light of their spirituality.

The construct of masculinity held primary significance in this study. Research and protocol questions focused on understanding how masculinity develops and integrates into men's identities and how these men externalize or live out masculinity.

Spirituality served as the second construct in the present study, referring to faith as well as religious and spiritual practices. This construct acted as a lens by which many of the study's participants—students at a faith-based institution—view their masculinity.

Justification for the Current Study

A significant amount of research (Connell, 2005; Cunningham & Egan, 1996; Erikson, 2000; Schipper, 2007) has addressed the separate topics of masculinity (Burke, 2006; Roussel & Downs, 2007) and spirituality (Engebretson, 2006; Longwood, Schipper, & Culbertson, 2012). Also, earlier research explored masculinities, ideas of gender identity formation, and on spiritual formation of college students (Connell, 2005; Fowler, 1978; Hunter & Whitten, 1976; Kahn, 2009; Parks, 2000; Raverty, 2006).

However, only a very small portion of the literature has attempted to bridge the gap

between these two concepts of masculinity and spirituality (Engebretson, 2006;

Longwood, Muesse, & Schipper, 2004). The relevance of this topic became reinforced by

the prevalence of such male-oriented forms of Christianity as presented by pastors Mark

Driscoll (n.d.) and John Eldredge (2001). These men endeavored to broaden the

understanding and appeal of spirituality to other men by reframing it in terms of

stereotypically male settings, such as the great outdoors or the world of sports (Eldredge,

2001). Whether they intended to or not, these interpretations of Christianity created

narrow gender roles and excluded non-stereotypical males.

Much research exists that has delved into various aspects of the relationship

between masculinity and spirituality and the different niches in the interrelationship of

these topics. Some of the topics covered in this body of research include the following:

the differences in religious commitment between males and females (Fawcett et al.,

2009), conformity to gender norms and stereotypes in college males (Warin & Dempster,

2005), and observations regarding masculinity and monastic life (Raverty, 2006). Other

topics regarding the interrelationship of masculinity and spirituality in literature include a

study of masculine gender-role conflict and spiritual well being (Jurkovic & Walker,

2006); the connection between spiritual beliefs, behaviors, and commitments for college

students (Garber, 2007); and the decline in male religious involvement (Finley, 2007).

The majority of the literature on this relationship, however, has indicated a need for

greater and more holistic knowledge and understanding.

Several gaps exist in the literature regarding the interrelationships between

masculinity and spirituality. For example, little to no research addresses how one's

perception of his masculine identity relates to his spiritual formation. Literature also appears relatively silent about the development of a masculine identity in light of one's religious background and, similarly, to what degree spiritually committed males adhere to cultural ideals of masculinity. The present study focused on deepening the understanding of the interrelationships that may exist between spirituality and masculinity formation in college males enrolled at a faith-based higher education institution.

Benefits to Higher Education

The value of the current study to the realm of higher education appears extensive. Having a greater understanding of the relationship between masculinity and spirituality allows for clarity in addressing many student issues and needs. Such issues might include gender identity concerns, residential living or roommate conflicts, academic motivation, or conversations on vocation. Another value of the study comes with simply filling a gap in the literature. Having research on the relationship of these constructs proves of value in substantiating religion, faith, and spirituality in the research world.

Recent literature cites a decline or—at best—a plateau in male involvement and engagement in higher education and religious contexts (Adebayo, 2008; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Ehrmann, & Massey, 2007; Finley, 2007; Harris III & Harper, 2008; Hughes, Karp, Fermin, & Bailey, 2005; Kahn et al., 2011; Mathewes-Green, 1999; Sax, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In order to understand how to better engage male students in such settings, one should first understand how these students interpret the idea of what being male means. With such information gathered, professionals and laypeople in the fields of education and theology, among others, may have a clearer

foundation on which to build programs, curriculum, environments, and strategies that engage males in a more meaningful way and help foster their holistic development.

The present research proves beneficial to higher education professionals at almost any institution, specifically those who serve male student populations. The research holds special significance to those in faith-based higher education institutions because of the religious and spiritual nature of the study and the curricular and co-curricular goals of such institutions. However, the value of the current study does not remain exclusive to the faith-based environment, as students in any institution deal with issues of spirituality and gender identity. As acceptance of a continuum-based model of masculinity has widened along with changing cultural views of masculinity, the present research has come at a critical time.

Students, both male and female, also benefit from and find value in the current research. Males can gain insight into and heightened awareness of the value of spirituality and religious involvement, while females might benefit by finding ways to encourage and understand the spiritual and masculine development of their male peers. As mentioned above, the present research proves valuable not only to students at Christian or faith-based schools but also to secular institutions and higher education in general.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to examine college students' construction of masculinity in a faith-based institution and the impact spirituality has on expression of masculinity. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do men at a faith-based college construct their masculine identity?

2. How do these men experience masculinity in light of their spirituality?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Overview

In order to provide a framework for understanding the current study, the following section offers a review of the literature surrounding the constructs of masculinity and spirituality. The section examines each construct individually, followed by a synthesis of literature that incorporates both masculinity and spirituality as they relate to college students.

Masculinity

A considerable amount of research has addressed the nature and characteristics of masculinity, with many varying understandings and perspectives of its role. The following section examines this body of research and highlights the developments in the masculine gender literature over the past few decades.

One's sense of masculinity or identity as a male forms throughout one's lifetime, often related to family upbringing or life conflict (Engebretson, 2006; Lewes, 1988). Masculinity should be understood on a continuum, rather than as a fixed status, with an individual fluctuating in position throughout his lifespan (Engebretson, 2006; Raverty, 2006). Not only does masculinity remain flux, but it also takes many different forms, which Connell (2005), a prominent scholar of masculinity and gender roles, referred to as *masculinities*. In the 2005 perspective presented by Connell, no single type of masculinity

exists that fully encompasses every aspect of every male. This lack of singularity allows for greater flexibility in including other constructions of the gender, leaving greater focus on understanding of the whole person (Engebretson, 2006; Forbes, 2003).

Prevailing views of masculinity—often referred to as *hegemonic masculinity* in recent literature—appear as social constructs (Connell, 2005; Erikson, 2000). Hegemonic masculinity stands as the type of masculinity most valued or demonstrated in a culture (Connell, 2000). In other words, hegemonic masculinity develops according to what the culture demands and expects of men in a specific time and place (Craig, 1992; Hoover & Coats, 2011). The understanding of hegemonic masculinity constantly shifts as culture redefines it through media, academia, and personal beliefs (Butler, 1990). However, most males tend to align their lives with the values of hegemonic masculinity due to its general acceptance as normal (Connell, 1995; Dempster, 2009). Institutions, such as governments, media, and education, sustain this dominant form of masculinity, perpetuating what is valued in a man (Connell, 2005; Engebretson, 2006). According to Connell (1996), schools can provide venues for such formation or exploration of gender and masculinity. Notably, resistance to hegemonic masculinity can often result in what Renold (2004) described as "high social and emotional costs" (p. 249) for males who resist.

Because hegemonic masculinity privileges certain attributes and ways of experiencing masculinity (such as toughness, athletic prowess, and superiority), tension can sometimes arise in the relationships between men and between men and women (Engebretson, 2006). This stress presumably can create pressure for men to act in ways that lack control, emotion, or any other characteristics potentially seen as feminine

(Engebretson, 2006). Research done by Engebretson in 2006 referenced an essentialist model of masculinity, which states that there exists one biologically determined version of masculinity universal to all males. In general, this model does not fully receive full acceptance in prominent literature on masculinity (Connell, 2005; Engebretson, 2006), though these perspectives may agree that certain attributes of masculinity appear common to all men.

Kimmel (1996) observed that the construct of masculinity appears invisible to men who embody the hegemonic ideal until confronted with an alternative viewpoint regarding masculinity. However, for men outside of the social majority—such as men of color, gay men, men of low education, or any other men who do not fit the hegemonic standard—there remains a clear and distinct understanding of the valued, hegemonic masculinity (Schipper, 2007).

While some men seems aware of the hegemonic ideal in their specific context, they do not always look on it favorably or desire to embody that form of masculinity (Dempster, 2009). Dempster (2009) found, however, that even in men's expression of their disapproval of the conformity to a specific hyper-masculinity, they exhibited hegemonic characteristics—namely independence, self-confidence, and superiority.

Other characteristics generally associated with dominant, hegemonic masculinity include physical prowess, self-reliance, and hatred of authority (Murrie, 2000); strength, power, competition, and bravery (Engebretson, 2006); participation and skill in sporting activities (Connell, 2005; Dempster, 2009); violence, toughness, and consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol (Benyon, 2002; Gough & Edwards, 1998; Whitehead, 2002). In Schipper's (2007) dissertation, he cited words commonly used by men to

describe what they view as masculine: "strong," "in control," "a winner," and "muscular" (p. 23). Many college-age men in America greatly desire bodies with larger amounts of muscle than they currently possess, viewing that as the standard of masculinity (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000).

A measure known as the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS) tested men on four domains based on a traditional understanding of masculinity (O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, Wrightsman, 1986). The GRCS assessed the following four domains: Success, Power, and Competition/Control (SPC); Restrictive Emotionality (RE); Restrictive Affectionate Behavior between Men (RABBM); and Conflict Between Work and Family Relations (CBWFR; O'Neil et al., 1986). Though these areas correspond to hegemonic masculinity, high scores in each of these domains notably correlated with higher occurrences of psychological problems for men, such as depression, shame, helplessness, attachment problems, hostile attitudes toward women, and low capacities for intimacy (O'Neil et al., 1986).

The past few decades have seen attempts to hearken back to traditional understandings of masculinity, including the movement known as the *mytho-poetic movement*, popularized by Robert Bly (1990). This movement focused on helping men reclaim a primitive, warrior type of manhood by creating a mysterious and mythical version of masculinity, portrayed through stories, drumming, and nature (Schipper, 2007). A similar movement that surfaced a decade later involved such books as *Wild at Heart* (Eldredge, 2001), in which the author argued that every man has a need to tap into the wild warrior within himself.

The Christian tradition has offered an understanding of masculinity in which men reflect characteristics of God (Eberly, 1999). Eberly (1999) purported that masculinity, in this definition, exhibits life-generating attributes that provide, protect, mentor, and lead with a moral example, in contrast to many of the traits present in hegemonic masculinity.

Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman (2002) present five points of interest when considering issues of masculinity in adolescent males: (a) boys do not have spaces to experiment with different types of masculinity, so if they do not fit the hegemonic ideal, their peers consider them feminine; (b) boys usually have deeper relationships with their mothers, while relationships with their fathers consist of mostly joking, leaving a deficit in emotional contact with males; (c) aggressive attitudes seem partially in response to the social and educational problems attributed to males; (d) boys who do not fit in the box of typical masculinity struggle to share and articulate experiences with their male peers; (e) boys can demonstrate thoughtfulness, emotions, and intellectual aptitude, but many have social contexts that stigmatize such behaviors as feminine (Engebretson, 2006).

Masculinity seems a construct that carries different meanings depending on the context in which it exists. While historically understood from the essentialist perspective as a biologically fixed characteristic, more recent literature posits masculinity as more fluid and less constricted to a single, traditional ideal or understanding. Only in the past few decades has specific language appeared regarding masculinity, even to describe traditional masculinity. So many interpretations of masculinity create difficulty in pinpointing one model as definitive. In the setting of a college or university, male students enter a melting pot of various subcultures, each holding a unique ideal of

masculinity. The impact this dispersion of ideas may have on the context of faith and spirituality warrants continued research.

Spirituality

Now with literature presented on the construct of masculinity, the present study offers an overview of the literature regarding spirituality. It is essential to define *spirituality*, as a number of varying definitions of this construct make it difficult to pinpoint and operationalize. Therefore, for the purposes of the present study, the researcher has defined spirituality within the context of the presuppositions and perspective of the orthodox Christian faith.

One definition postulates spirituality as one's "connectedness with the self" (Engebretson, 2006, p. 91). Engebretson (2006) elaborated on this definition, adding that spirituality encompasses four main elements: "experience of sacred other" and its accompanying feelings (Harris & Moran, 1998; James, 1958; McBrien, 1994; Shanasy & Bates, 2002); "connectedness and responsibility for the self," others and environment (Harris & Moran, 1998; James, 1958); "the illumination of lived experience with meaning and value" (Harris & Moran, 1998); and "the need for naming and expression in either traditional or non-traditional ways" (Harris & Moran, 1998; Tacey, 2003).

Parks (2000) offered another definition of spirituality: "meaning making." Parks (2000) equated the idea of making meaning with the concept of faith, presenting faith as the process of seeking and developing meaning in one's life. Faith receives validity through the lived experiences of the individual, as they see hopes become realities (Parks, 2000). Parks (2000) also suggested that individuals take responsibility for their faith during their college years.

A research project conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI, 2003) examined the spiritual lives and practices of college students. Questions developed in this research project sought to discover how students view themselves in relation to spirituality, how spiritual practices affect academics, how students understand religious practices, and how the undergraduate experience affects spiritual seeking (Astin et al., 2004). The results revealed college students' extreme interest in finding a deeper meaning in life and allowing their beliefs to inform the way they react to issues in society (HERI, 2003).

Schipper (2007) defined Christian spirituality as "a way of life following the teaching of Jesus Christ, as a disciple in a community that finds its highest expression in the Eucharist, enlivened through the spirit, and open to all human persons without exclusion" (p. 9). While this definition may cater to a specific denominational perspective, its essence captures what spirituality looks like in the life of a Christian—a living out of Christ's biblical teachings. This actuation varies from person to person, as the sum of each man's life experiences creates a unique lens through which he interprets these teachings.

Rolheiser (1999) explained spirituality as the manner in which a person lives out his desires. This definition refers to how a person lives out their life on a daily basis, with spirituality as an essential part of the human experience. Spirituality also involves an awareness of a reality beyond the easily perceived and a journey toward personal integration with the spiritual realm (Schipper, 2007).

Longwood et al. (2012) made a distinction between being religious and being spiritual. Spirituality refers to what occurs internally while religiosity refers to the

external practices (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). The concept of being religious invokes a relationship to a specific religion or way of belief, whereas being spiritual does not necessitate a religious affiliation and refers more to an inward search for understanding and improvement (Longwood et al., 2012). In this definition, one does not have to be religious to be spiritual. However, for the purposes of the present study, college students' spirituality and religious beliefs function in a closely interconnected relationship.

Spiritual identity forms from a number of factors in the lives of young men. Some of these influences include relationships, crisis, mentors, meaningful work, service, and sports (Anderson, Hill, & Martinson, 2006). The wide range of categories alludes to the complexity of spiritual identity in the lives of males. Fowler (2000) added that the process of developing faith or spiritual identity begins when a person experiences dissonance that they cannot make sense of in their existing way of thinking. When all of the relationships in a person's life align—between God, others, and self—that person supposedly has greater spiritual well being (Dyson, Cobb, & Foreman, 1997).

Some research on spirituality focuses on its additional benefits to the individual. For example, students who claim to possess a personal spirituality more typically avoid risky or harmful behavior, suicide, and depression (Abbot-Chapman & Denholm, 2001; Engebretson, 2006; Withers & Russell, 2001). Other research focuses on the outward expressions of spirituality, such as attending a church service, prayer, or community service (Schipper, 2007). Spirituality might manifest itself in other ways, such as meditation, participation in the reading of the Biblical scripture, or worship through the arts, like dance or song.

The construct of spirituality proves a complex one, with multiple definitions that attempt to highlight valid aspects that lead to a holistic understanding. The present study aims to find commonalities between the spiritual experiences of men. The literature presented hitherto identifies that a connection exists between the constructs of spirituality and masculinity. The forthcoming section of the literature review covers this topic and relationship to provide a fuller backdrop for the present study.

Relationship between Masculinity and Spirituality

The following literature regarding the relationship between masculinity and spirituality holds high importance, as it most closely relates to the present study.

As mentioned earlier, research from HERI (2003) uncovered the finding that college students have great interest in spiritual pursuits. The HERI research study found a disparity in the spiritual pursuits between genders (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). This research found that college women expressed more interest in spirituality than men. However, of all the college students involved in this project, over 70 percent reported an interest in spirituality, regardless of gender (Astin et al., 2011).

Traditionally, males have steered away from anything that might make them seem feminine (Fawcett et al., 2009). Religion's association with feelings and emotions typically appears categorized as feminine and thus can create a rift between males and religious or spiritual practice or involvement (Fawcett et al., 2009). The notion that a man has to "have it all figured out" (Longwood et al., 2012, p. 37) seems to reflect the values of independence and self-reliance and thereby prevent males from engaging with spirituality. The religious life often demands interdependence on and submission to a higher authority or deity.

Many churches report considerably higher numbers of females in attendance than males (Engebretson, 2006; Mathewes-Green, 1999). Besides the general association of emotions with religious practice, Mathewes-Green (1999) also attributed a disappearance of male presence in churches to an emphasis on churchgoers as the "Bride of Christ" (p. 70). Heterosexual men feel uncomfortable with the idea of assuming the feminine role of a bride, even if in a spiritual context.

In an effort to engage the male college student population, some colleges have facilitated spirituality groups to provide safe spaces for men to engage with spirituality. The creation of one such initiative received highly positive response (Longwood et al., 2012). The focus of the groups varied from year to year, spanning topics such as understanding men's personal stories, relationships, authenticity, beauty, and the transition to post-college life (Longwood et al., 2012).

Previous studies have examined the relationship between masculinity and spirituality at varying levels. These studies reveal a gender gap in college students' pursuit of spirituality but do not offer a complete understanding as to the reason for this gap. While some attempts to engage males with spirituality in religious institutions have met with success, many of the prevailing traditions and methods used by these institutions to target men have come up short. These findings suggest there remains much to learn and understand about how spirituality and masculinity interact and how to engage male students well. The present study has contributed a voice to the conversation on the relationship between these two constructs of masculinity and spirituality, specifically as relates to men in higher education and the ways in which they construct and express their masculinity.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Approach

The current study employed a phenomenological qualitative design to determine how male students at a faith-based institution construct and express their own masculinity in light of their spiritual backgrounds. The study utilized individual interviews with open-ended protocol questions designed to obtain substantial responses from young men that revealed the language they use to describe their experiences of masculinity and spirituality. As mentioned previously, the current research study adhered to a phenomenological design (Creswell, 2008; Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994), in which responses from the men in the interviews formed the basis for understanding the elements of their lived experiences. The researcher selected the phenomenological approach because it lent itself to the unraveling of robust data and experiential information, essential to answering the research questions. After studying these elements, the researcher searched for themes in the interview responses that allowed for understanding and interpretation of the meaning of these experiences of masculinity and spirituality (Creswell, 2008).

Participants and Context

The research study involved male undergraduate students at a small, residential faith-based liberal arts institution located in the mid-west region of the United States

(approximately 2,000 students). Participants represented a variety of college class levels (freshman, n=1; sophomore, n=3; junior, n=1; senior, n=4), religious affiliations, ages, and residence halls. Participant ages ranged between 19 and 21 years old, with all participants enrolled as full-time undergraduate students.

Procedures

The current study utilized individual interviews to gather data on the personal experiences of male students' construction of masculinity and practice of spirituality. These interviews provided a venue for participants to respond to protocol questions designed by the researcher. To conduct the study, the researcher first received approval from the Institutional Review Board. The researcher then conducted a pilot interview to test and refine the protocol questions. Next, using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008), the researcher sought a sample of two to ten participants, as Boyd (2001) recommended (as cited in Groenewald, 2004), via campus email and word of mouth. Out of those who expressed interest in the study, the researcher selected twelve participants and contacted them by email to schedule interview times. A few participants had scheduling conflicts and dropped out of the study, leaving a sample size of nine participants.

During each session, the researcher utilized a digital audio recorder, as well as hand-written notes, to assist in accurate transcription of the responses. Each student provided informed consent to participate in the study and for the recording of the interviews. In concurrence with the consent forms, the researcher also collected basic demographic information about the participants. Participants had the opportunity to select a pseudonym for personal reference in the discussion of the research findings. Six participants chose their own pseudonyms, while the researcher chose the other three

during the transcription of interviews. The researcher expected this anonymity to increase

truthfulness, openness, and authenticity in responses. Interviews lasted between twenty-

three and fifty-four minutes and took place during the fall semester of the 2013-2014

academic year.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews and collection of data, the researcher transcribed the

conversations from the recordings and coded using an open coding method (Creswell,

2008). The researcher isolated phrases and units of meaning, clustered key words and

recurring elements into meaningful groups, looked for themes and trends that emerged in

the responses, summarized the themes and interviews, and checked summaries' validity

and agreement with participants' experiences (Creswell, 2008; Groenewald, 2004). The

researcher used the responses of the interview participants to help unravel the "elements

of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 4)—the key to phenomenological research. The

current phenomenological analysis aimed to understand the meaning of the experience of

masculinity for this particular group of men (Moustakas, 1994).

Chapter 4

Results

The following chapter presents the prominent themes and findings from the nine individual interviews. The researcher organized the themes into two categories based on the two primary research questions of the study: 1) How do men at a faith-based college *construct* their masculine identity? and 2) How do these men *experience* masculinity in light of their spirituality? Themes appear below in order of prevalence.

Construction of Masculinity

The first research question focused on understanding the ways in which men construct their ideas of masculinity. Interviews revealed a number of factors in the masculine identity construction process, including the following: 1) men learn by observation and conversation; 2) other men play a significant role in this process; 3) masculinity is tied closely to spirituality; 4) this process usually occurs most prominently in adolescence; and 5) men need space to process their masculinity.

Men learn from other men through observation and conversation. One of the over-arching themes throughout the responses of all nine participants came as the belief that men learn about masculinity from other men. The presence and influence of other men acted as instruments for shaping the participants' personal ideas and concepts of masculinity in a few specific ways: observation, conversation, and a combination of the two.

Observation of masculinity. All participants mentioned that they learn about masculinity by observing other men and the ways in which those men live out their masculinity. Participants mentioned witnessing both desirable and undesirable traits of masculinity. Alex explained, "I have role models or examples that I don't talk to about [masculinity] and I kind of, like, just look up to." Similarly, ST said, "As I look at my dad it's like, dad does these things and I wanna be like dad so I'm gonna do these things, too."

Talking about masculinity. Additionally, five participants mentioned the value of talking explicitly with another man about what masculinity looks like. John reflected on his experience with his father:

> …my dad took me on, like, a weekend, kinda like, retreat […] and then we just, kinda like, sat down, and we just, like, talked about, it was, like, 'the talk' weekend. […] He brought in, like, the idea of masculinity and, like, how we should act, […] how we're different from women, […] physically how we're different obviously, and then how, um, we're called, like, to different things […].

Combination of observation and conversation. Each participant who mentioned the value of conversations also spoke about the presence of both conversation and living examples of masculinity as catalysts for thinking about masculinity. One participant remarked that he learned about masculinity from "what [his father], like, has directly told [him] about, but then also how he's modeled it."

Role of other men. As a second over-arching theme, participants described the vital role of other men in shaping participants' ideas of masculinity. Throughout the

interviews, participants reported specific types of men that played significant roles in their construction of masculine identity.

Role of the father. All nine participants identified the role of their fathers as catalysts for contemplation or formation of masculinity. While some participants mentioned engaging in specific conversations about masculinity with their fathers, the more common responses revolved around the father as a model of masculinity and, often, spirituality. "We never really had in-depth conversations but him just bringing it (masculinity) up out of nowhere was defining," said Alex. While this theme appeared in all nine interviews, one of the nine participants mentioned the *lack* of a father played a role in his exploring and learning masculinity for himself:

> In a lot of ways I've had to figure it out, based on things I've come across, whether they're good or bad. […] On one hand you could argue that it's made me more masculine, because I've had to grow up a lot sooner, to be the man of the house. On the other hand, it's left me to figure out a lot of that on my own.

Role of other and/or older males. Seven participants reported the importance of other males in their lives (besides fathers)—usually males around the same age or older than the participants themselves. Often other family members—such as grandfathers, cousins, or brothers—these individuals held conversations about masculinity with the participants or modeled traits of masculinity that the participants could observe.

Role of pastors and other religious or spiritual leaders. Six participants highlighted the important influence that a pastor or spiritual leader had on their masculine identity. These included church pastors, youth leaders, and parachurch ministry leaders. The men cited the personal characteristics of transparency, vulnerability, and personal

behavior as influential in shaping their masculinity. A few participants mentioned wanting to be like those men. John said:

> My youth pastor growing up, um, just seeing his faith displayed in, like, how he acted […] definitely made me, like, made me want to act like [him] and to be like [him] and um, like, take on roles of leadership like [he does].

Role of student affairs professionals. Three participants identified the role of various male student affairs (or student development) professionals in shaping their masculine identities. All three mentioned the influence of a residence hall director, and one participant also mentioned the mentoring role of the campus pastor. The participants indicated that their hall directors provided space to process questions without judgment, provided a relatable example of a man who understands his role, and invited participants to ask bold, hard questions. Alex shared the following about his hall director: "I think he's been a major role model, […] not to say he brings himself down to our level, but he's relatable and he makes it known that he's, he's like us." All three participants who mentioned the influence of the hall directors serve as student leaders supervised directly by those individuals.

Role of male peers as spiritual examples of masculinity. Three participants identified groups of male peers who provided a spiritual context or model of masculinity. One participant identified his high school Bible study group (which comprised seventeen students), describing it as "accepting," "knowing," "caring," "intimate," and "honest." John mentioned his high school religious small group:

> We, like, named ourselves, and it was 'the brotherhood,' so like, we like, that idea of, like, being brothers and, like, it's kinda, like, manly, and my senior year they

took us on a retreat, […]. Just definitely helped me shape what it meant to be a man. And a lot of because my small group leaders just again, like, modeling that.

Definitions highly informed or influenced by Biblical or Christian principles. The strong influence of Biblical or Christian principles on participants' definitions or ideas of masculinity emerged as the third theme in the interviews. Participants expressed the value of such spiritually-informed traits of masculinity as: respect for "women as sisters in Christ," "courage," "vulnerability," "leader of the household," "humility," "shepherding," "compassion," "gentleness," "selflessness," and "being comfortable in the person God's created you to be." Several other terms also appeared, such as "servant leader," "purity," and "gentle."

Jesus as an example of masculinity. Six of the participants also specifically cited the person of Jesus as an example or ideal of masculinity. Brent talked about Jesus as "the perfect image of a man." Other men talked about striving to exemplify the values that Jesus embodied. One participant said, "I mean, you can't really argue about Jesus being probably the most manly man there's ever been."

Men begin thinking about masculinity in adolescence. The majority of the participants identified the fourth theme: the age at which they first began thinking about masculinity. Though some seemed uncertain about the specific age at which they began thinking about "what it means to be a man" or "to be masculine," the majority of participants believed this process began during their middle or high school years. Additionally, one participant mentioned that he did not consider his masculinity until twenty years of age.

Necessity of space for men to process masculinity and ask questions. Six participants mentioned the fifth theme, that is, the need to provide opportunities for men to ask questions. Some preferred to do this inquiry alone or process the topic internally, while others mentioned the value of processing with others. Alex said some of the influential men in his life did not prescribe a specific definition of masculinity but instead asked him questions, such as, "What kind of a man do you want to be?" ST said:

> My church and especially my youth group would have […] a week during youth group once a year where the guys and the girls would split up and, like, they'd talk about issues […]. And a lot of times that was sexuality and things like that, and it was like, we were sort of told the ways that guys think, not really invited to examine the way that we think, if that makes sense. Which, though it was well meaning, um, just provides a lot of boxes for, like, 'this is the way people are. This is the way a man is. This is the way a man thinks. This is what a man struggles with. All these things.' As opposed to, like, inviting us to sort of explore, like, what do I think, how do I think, what do I struggle with, what do I desire, […] Letting my definition of man be influenced by who I am as opposed to letting who I am be molded by the definition of what a man is.

The responses of others indicated that very few participants questioned their own existing ideas of masculinity.

Living in a residence hall with other men. Three participants mentioned that the residence hall (specifically, living on a floor with other men) provided a space to learn about masculinity with other men. Don described it as a safe environment to ask, "What does masculinity look like?" John said the following of the residence hall floor: "It's an

environment where I can, like, learn and just figure out what, like, the reality is, like, what, how other people express masculinity."

Other catalysts. In addition to the five aforementioned themes, participants mentioned other catalysts for masculine identity formation that did not fit into any one of the five themes.

Experiences that brought about significant spiritual growth as catalysts for contemplation or achievement of masculinity. Four participants cited moments of significant spiritual growth as catalysts for thinking about their masculinity. For example, two participants identified that they first started thinking about what it means to be a man when they became a Christian (or renewed a commitment to God). Another mentioned a church function—which encouraged fathers and sons to share vulnerably with one another—as a catalyst for considering masculinity from a more spiritually informed perspective. Another participant said that his first job provided a context and catalyst for contemplation of both his faith and his masculinity.

Miscellaneous influences. Finally, participants mentioned a variety of other influences for considering their masculinity. Two participants identified "pressure to get married early" as a catalyst for their contemplation of masculinity. Other influences included the following: a Christian rap music album called "Man Up" (focused on the theme of Christian masculinity), use of drugs to create mental space for self-actualization or reflection about one's masculinity, one participant's first dating relationship and corresponding conversation with his father, growing up in a rural area, getting a job, taking part in a coming of age bonfire celebration, and conversations about the Bible.

Experience of Masculinity

The following section focuses on the second research question, which investigates participants' experiences of masculinity in relationship to their spirituality.

Masculinity and spirituality as tightly interrelated. In discussing their experiences of masculinity, seven participants described their masculinity in terms of faith or spirituality. At times, the researcher had difficulty discerning whether the participants spoke about masculinity or spirituality. In other words, their ideas of masculinity seemed "sort of wrapped in spiritual or religious language," as one participant put it. James said,

…my identity as a man, I mean, it's who God's created me to be. And […] when I think of myself as a man, I think of myself as a man of God. Which that just brings me back to my faith.

In regards to his ideas of masculinity, another participant stated, "I know the expectations that God has for me."

Shift from "worldly" form of masculinity to "Godly" form of masculinity. A second theme emerged as the identification of a shift in participants' minds from a "worldly" or more culture-informed ideal of masculinity to a "more godly" or spiritual concept of masculinity. For some participants, this process came as a gradual, slow change; others experienced a more abrupt realization, as men reconciled differences between the spiritual and cultural expectations of masculinity. John said that his masculinity "slowly changed from, like, a worldly form of masculinity to a more godly form of masculinity." While this shift occurred for him, ST noted the similarities between

some Christian stereotypes of masculinity and the stereotypes of secular culture, as well

as the different names Christians have for these traits:

> Christian stereotypes in my experience of what a man should be are very similar
>
> to the stereotypes of secular culture of what a man should be, in terms of you
>
> know, like, confident and very capable, to the point where he never really needs
>
> help, um, sort of the rescuer as opposed to ever being a rescued person. Um. And
>
> therefore, like, kind of 'good' emotionally, you know, like, not having problems,
>
> not needing help with those things. Um. I feel like that, a lot transfers over to the
>
> way Christianity looks at it, but we call it things like, you know, like, the man
>
> should be the leader of the, uh, marriage relationship or romantic relationship or
>
> the family or, you know.

When men feel more masculine. A third theme presented itself in participants'

responses to the question, "Are there certain situations in which you feel more masculine

than in others?" Most participants explained that they feel more masculine in more

"stereotypical" or culturally informed ways, although several also mentioned more

spiritually informed situations. The responses appear below, grouped in order of the

prevalence with which they occurred. Each participant mentioned at least two examples

or situations in his response to this question.

Sports/active/athletics. Six responses indicated feeling more masculine when

involved in physical or athletic activity. Responses included such ideas as playing

football and its accompanying "fighting spirit," being active and moving around, going to

the gym, watching a football game with other young men, and a residence hall tradition

involving boxing.

Wilderness/camping/outdoors. Four responses involved camping and the outdoors. Responses included being out in the wilderness, hunting, and camping around a fire. Brent said, "My testosterone gets pumping the most when I'm out doing something that would be, you know, typically referred to as a manly thing. If I'm out in the woods hunting or, you know, fishing or skiing or whatever."

Helping/caring/sacrificing for people. Four responses focused on helping or caring for others. This idea included items such as teaching the Bible to others, using "what God's given you to help those around you," being in a leadership role and caring for people, and "being willing to sacrifice your time for people you care about."

With women/dating. A few responses focused on interactions with women. Several mentioned spending time with women (or "girls"), while another mentioned a close dating relationship.

With guys/"doing guy things." Two participants mentioned that they felt more masculine when with a large group of other "guys." One mentioned the ability to feel confident when with other men, while the other mentioned "doing guy things."

Working with hands. Two participants mentioned that they felt masculine when doing work with their hands. Specific examples included "getting my hands dirty" and baling hay on a farm in the summer.

Vulnerability/intimacy with other males. Finally, two participants mentioned that they felt more masculine when they could experience intimacy with other males. One participant cited a specific example of his ability to feel vulnerable and cry with a male friend, while the other participant explained that engaging in one-on-one conversations with other men makes him feel more masculine.

Identification of incongruence between stated definitions of masculinity and situations in which men feel most masculine. As a fourth theme revealed during the interviews, five participants identified the incongruence between their stated definitions of masculinity and their responses about the situations in which they feel masculine. For example, one participant emphasized the value of "shepherding" or benevolently guiding or teaching others as central to his concept of masculinity; however, he then went on to share that he felt more masculine when he could win the boxing match on his residence hall retreat. One participant, when asked when he feels more masculine, said, "I would say it's when I'm doing what most would perceive as a masculine thing."

Focus on the "roles" of men. A fifth theme emerged from the interview data regarding men's experiences of masculinity and spirituality, in which several participants emphasized the "roles" of men. Four participants explicitly mentioned the idea that masculinity has something to do with "roles" that men play. Three others mentioned men fulfilling their "duties" or "responsibilities," to "be a husband and a father and those kind of things," and to "provide for women according to the differing relationships." One participant said, "I see masculinity as something that's defined by God, […] and has to do with the different roles that we have."

Different expectations of masculinity based on gender settings. Two participants mentioned a sixth theme: that masculinity should look differently in an all-male setting than it should in a mixed or co-ed setting. Steve mentioned that, with men, "there's a way of self-reflection, […] learning," but "with ladies, it's more of an action of what you do, […] putting it into practice." Alex talked about feeling more masculine when with women "because [he sees] the varying difference of a woman's nature and

guys' nature," whil feeling masculine when around men because "[he's] a part of the group." Alex also mentioned the concept of "doing guy things," which he described as "certain things that whenever you're around guys are completely appropriate and can be viewed as a positive thing, but in the same sense if that was not in just a guy setting would be completely inappropriate and uncalled for." He explained these as "joking" and that he "wouldn't think twice about this around close friends and […] good Christian guys, but if [he] was in a different environment, [he'd] probably hesitate."

Discomfort with expressing certain spiritual acts as a man. The seventh and final theme related to a conflict between men's ideas of masculinity and their expression of religious acts. Though they described a deep commitment to their faith, two participants mentioned feeling discomfort (or possibly an embarrassment) with other men may perceive the participants' faith as unmanly. One participant recalled thinking, when praying before a meal in a public place, "Real men don't do this." Another recalled asking himself the question, "[Is it] manly to say you're in love with Jesus?"

Conclusion

That men learn about masculinity from other men emerged as the overwhelming finding from the interviews. This learning process takes shape through the observation of role models, as well as conversations with influential male figures—particularly fathers. For most men in this study, the process of thinking about one's masculinity began in adolescence and continued on through their college years.

All of the participants were students in a faith-based institution, and all but one self-identified as Christian. These men expressed understandings of masculinity using spiritual language and Christian concepts. These men constructed their ideas of

masculinity around what it looks like to live as a "man of God." In participants' experience of masculinity, faith and spirituality appeared of great significance and deeply intertwined in the language that they used.

In the masculinity construction process, these men also recognized a need for space to process their masculinity. Traditionally, these men have had environments in which they received dictated definitions of masculinity, but several participants spoke of needing the ability to find out what masculinity looks like on an individual, personal level.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Chapter five presents a discussion of the findings in light of previous research, implications for higher education professionals, and the limitations of this research project. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research on the interrelationship of masculinity and spirituality.

How Do Men at a Faith-Based College Construct Their Masculine Identity?

Based upon the responses of the nine participants in the study, the process of constructing a masculine identity includes the following components: the observation of other males, opportunities and space for reflection and contemplation on "what it means to be a man," and a specific time period in which these steps may occur.

The developmental timeline for participants' construction of masculinity spans from childhood through emerging adulthood. The latter end of this spectrum offers the same time period in which Parks (2000) believed students commonly develop strong spiritual commitments. As Engebretson (2006), Lewes (1988), and Anderson et al. (2006) described, men often develop their sense of masculine identity throughout their entire lifetime, where defining periods usually appear in conjunction with family upbringing and moments of conflict or challenge. Most participants stated they did not consider alternative ideas of masculinity until they entered college and found an array of different depictions of masculinity, creating conflict or challenge in their minds (Kimmel, 1996).

Participants in this study noted several factors in their own construction of masculine identity. However, all nine participants spoke about the importance or significance of the role other males played in the shaping process; specifically, all cited the prominent role of their fathers. As Frosh et al. (2002) described, the relationship between adolescent men and their fathers often lacks intimacy and consists of mostly joking behavior and talk. This dynamic could explain the phenomenon present in the current study, in which a large part of the influence of participants' fathers came from observation of their masculinity as opposed to intimate conversations about masculinity.

The absence of space for participants to question and explore their masculinity reflects the observations of Frosh et al. (2002). Devoid of such contexts, college-age males struggle to express a wider variety of emotions and thoughtfulness without feeling stigmatized as feminine (Frosh et al., 2002). Such a fear can inhibit males from exploring their masculinity further. If given space to process a plethora of masculine identities, men might better understand how masculinity applies to them, as several researchers suggest (Raverty, 2006; Engebretson, 2006; Connell, 2005). Additionally, as Raverty (2006) and Engebretson (2006) indicated, an individual's understanding of masculinity fluctuates throughout his lifespan, indicating potential value in helping students explore masculinity at various points in their lives.

Each participant provided a unique definition of masculinity, leading to difficulty in forming a single, concise definition. This diversity reflects the petition by Connell (2005) to understand of masculinity beyond stereotypes and to focus on masculinity as it pertains to each individual. This finding also aligns with the perspective Raverty (2006) presented of viewing masculinity as on a scale or continuum versus a fixed state.

How Do These Men Experience Masculinity in Light of Their Spirituality?

For participants in the current study, experiences of masculinity have tied closely with spirituality. While participants allowed their faith to influence their understandings of masculinity, certain aspects of this relationship remain dissonant.

First, participants' conceptualization of masculinity appears consistent with previous research in that these men had a holistic view of masculinity as it affects many parts of their beings, including their spirituality (Engebretson, 2006; Forbes, 2003). Responses from the present study also indicate that many participants' exploration of masculinity have tied closely with their spiritual development. Specifically, participants recalled thinking deeply about their masculinity during or after moments of significant spiritual growth or challenge (Engebretson, 2006; Parks, 2000; Lewes, 1988).

Second, participants spoke about masculinity and masculine traits in relationship to spirituality or religious language, which fits into the descriptions by Eberly (1999) of a Christian understanding of masculinity, contrasting with many traits of present hegemonic masculinity. In light of the observations by Eberly (1999), participants not surprisingly defined masculinity in such religious terms.

Third, though most participants defined masculinity using spiritual terminology, they also stated they felt more masculine in situations likely classified as stereotypical or hegemonic. This response aligns with the research of Connell (1995), which states that males tend to align their lives and conceptions of masculinity with the values of hegemonic masculinity as the accepted normal. Some examples of such hegemonic values mentioned by participants included sporting activities, physical competition, and emotional and physical strength (Dempster, 2009; Schipper, 2007; Engebretson, 2006;

Connell, 2005; Murrie, 2000). In essence, dissonance exists between the cognitive definition of masculinity and its lived experiences. However, just as cognitive dissonance often provides a catalyst for spiritual growth (Fowler, 2000), this tension may indicate the developmental stage which male students exist during their college years and should thus achieve acceptance as a natural phase of the life-long process of masculinity construction.

Implications for Higher Education Practice

One of the most significant findings of the study emerged as the important role of fathers and other men in forming the masculine identity of the participants. While only a few participants mentioned the role their mothers played in shaping their masculinity, all participants cited the important influence of multiple significant men in this process. These findings prove especially important for male leaders responsible for leading and teaching college students in ways that facilitate the establishment of their masculine identity. As other men clearly play a vital role in shaping the masculinity of male college students, university administrators should equip, prepare, and train male faculty and staff members as positive, masculine role models and champions of masculinity exploration.

Furthermore, based on participants' accounts, the most influential men prove those who spend a significant amount of their time and energy with them. For example, during childhood, the father often served as the most visible and present older male in the participants' lives. During adolescence, youth pastors played a significant role in masculinity formation for many participants. In the college years, both student affairs professionals—who live and work with the participants in residence halls—and their friends or peers in the residence halls have played key roles in shaping the masculine identity of participants. Consequently, the most effective and influential agents of

masculinity development during the college years emerge as other males who live in close proximity and willingly devote time to fostering growth and development. For scenarios in which leaders do not live or work in proximity to students, these young men may benefit from facilitated opportunities to see leaders modeling character, spirituality, and masculinity for concentrated periods of time in activities such as retreats, camping trips, internships, mentoring, service projects, or sports and recreational activities.

Though participants seem to contradict their own definitions of masculinity at times, a great amount of congruence and interconnectedness exists in participants' understandings of masculinity and spirituality. While this congruence made it difficult to differentiate between participants' thoughts on the two variables, student affairs professionals should encourage this sort of holistic congruence among all aspects of an individual's life—institutions of higher education should serve as places where the whole person receives education. The responses of a handful of participants communicated that they had not really ever questioned their own ideas of masculinity, which might indicate the potential benefit of offering opportunities and space to do so. Participants indicated the value and importance of the time and space to ask hard questions of others and themselves in shaping their own masculine identity. This inquiry should happen in both individual reflective settings and conversations with members of a larger community (such as a floor of a residence hall), so that men can contemplate masculinity as it pertains to them individually and to other males. Students who place a high value on exploring and developing their spirituality may also benefit from opportunities for vulnerable and transparent reflection in such venues as chapel services, small group Bible studies, courses on religious studies, or other programming with a spiritual emphasis.

A few participants mentioned their masculinity as tied to an understanding of one's role. Therefore, male students may appreciate help in in discerning their roles in a vocational sense and in what ways their gender might relate to their specific vocation, work, or life calling, if any.

One participant asked the question, "[Is it] manly to say you're in love with Jesus?" This discomfort, as echoed by at least one other participant, may show the value of exploring other narratives or frameworks for understanding men's relationships with God as presented in the Bible. Building on the existing research in this area, this sort of hesitancy likely comes from the predominant view of man's relationship with Jesus Christ as the "beloved" or "bride of Christ" (Matthewes-Green, 1999). Though Christian subculture has isolated this metaphor as the prevailing one, the Bible presents a myriad of other metaphors for God, such as God as a strong fortress, a loving father, or rock. Perhaps shifting this focus could change the way men perceive their faith and spirituality.

One question from the findings of the present study is, "What role do women play in men's development of masculine identity?" As the men in this study seemed to learn best from seeing an example of masculinity, do women possibly play any significant role in masculine identify formation? One participant mentioned his mother's minor influence, and others implicitly referred to their mothers by using the term "parents," but the presence of female influence on the construction of masculinity appeared largely absent in the present study. Several participants did mention that the presence of female peers affirmed feelings of masculinity—in that the men could see a clearer distinction between their own identities and "roles" as men and the differing nature of those women—but it remains unclear what weight this differentiation holds in the larger picture

of men's development. Women can benefit from an understanding of research surrounding masculinity, and higher education professionals should discuss ways to facilitate helpful dialogue between male and female students. Additionally, education professionals can continue to foster healthy interaction between males and females.

Lastly, males holding leadership roles need to practice thoughtfulness in the ways they discuss and describe masculinity. For example, they should avoid using blanket statements that place males in unhelpful stereotypes, such as, "All men act like this…" or "Act like a man." Similarly, in any dialogue regarding masculinity, higher education practitioners should avoid hailing one expression of masculinity as supreme, based on the perspective presented by Connell's (2005) that no single type of masculinity fully captures every aspect of every male. Participants in the present study indicated that they would benefit from having such an open-ended discussion of masculinity.

Limitations

Although this study explicitly followed appropriate phenomenological design procedures, several limitations of the study follow.

First, this research project utilized methods of qualitative research and semi-structured interviews and therefore could not control all of the variables. Although the researcher asked each of the participants the same protocol questions, the semi-structured nature of the study allowed for participants to address unique follow-up questions.

Second, the limited sample size included nine college age males. Therefore, the participant pool did not completely represent either the institution studied or the larger population of males according to class, age, ethnicity, or religious denomination.

A third limitation that may inhibit generalization of results came in the faith-based nature of the institution studied. Because of the faith-based context and orientation of the participants involved, some responses contained "evangelical jargon" that might not clearly translate into other contexts.

As a fourth limitation, the researcher conducted participant interviews at different times of day and week, which could have affected the responses or moods of participants.

Fifth, the researcher had made casual acquaintance with at least two participants prior to conducting the study, which could have affected participants' degree of openness.

Lastly, the researcher's own bias as a male with an interest in understanding college student spirituality could present a limitation to the study.

Suggestions for Further Research

The unanimous responses of participants who spoke to their fathers' role in their masculine development appear incredibly significant. The researcher recommends for further research to explore the father-son relationship and its masculinity-forming power. Another area of further exploration remains the role of women in men's development of masculine identity. The present research suggests that men play an incredibly significant role in the construction of masculinity but stays relatively silent as to the role women play. As most men exist in environments populated by both men and women, women likely do play a role in this process, though perhaps unnoticed or seemingly insignificant.

Both the participants and the researcher noted the incongruence between men's definitions of masculinity and the lived experiences and feelings of masculinity. Therefore, further research may illuminate how men's own definitions of masculinity relate to their practices and experiences of it.

Conclusion

The process by which college males form their masculine identity remains complex and multi-faceted. However, student affairs professionals can still play a vital role in modeling desirable traits and expressions of masculinity at a critical phase in the lives of college students. As the most apparent and helpful elements of this process prove reflection and observation, student affairs practitioners should facilitate space for men to ask hard questions and investigate masculinity on an individual level. Of equal importance, male leaders need to embody a healthy self-awareness of their own masculinity. While the results of the present study provide valuable insight into the masculine identity formation of college students, further research remains necessary to learn how to better serve populations of men on college and university campuses.

References

Abbot-Chapman, J., & Denholm, C. (2001). Adolescents' risk activities, risk hierarchies and the influence of religiosity. *Journal of Youth Studies, 4*, 280-297.

Adebayo, B. (2008). Gender gaps in college enrollment and degree attainment: An exploratory analysis. *College Student Journal, 42,* 232-237.

Anderson, D. W., Hill, P., & Martinson, R. D. (2006). *Coming of age: Exploring the identity and spirituality of younger men.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsberg Fortress.

Astin, A. W., Astin, H. S., & Lindholm, J. A. (2011). *Cultivating the spirit: How college can enhance students' inner lives.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W., Astin, H. S., Lindholm, J. A., Bryant, A. N., Calderone, S., & Szelényi, K. (2004). Spirituality in higher education: A national study of college students search for meaning and purpose, summary of selected findings [Electronic Version]. Retrieved from

http://spirituality.ucla.edu/spirituality/reports/FINAL%20REPORT.pdf.

Benyon, J. (2002). *Masculinities and culture.* Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Bly, R. (1990). *Iron John: A book about men.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Boyd, C. O. (2001). Phenomenology: The method. In P.L. Munhall (Ed.), *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective* (3rd ed., pp. 93-122). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett.

Burke, P. J. (2006). Men accessing education: gendered aspirations. *British Educational Research Journal, 32*, 719-733.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities.* Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Connell, R. W. (1996). Teaching the boys. New research on masculinity and gender strategies for schools. *Teachers College Record, 98,* 206-235.

Connell, R. W. (2000). *The men and boys*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Craig, S. (1992). Considering men and the media: Introduction. In S. Craig (Ed.), *Men, masculinity, and the media* (pp. 1-7). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc.

Cunningham, L., & Egan, K. J. (1996). *Christian spirituality: Themes from the tradition.* New York, NY: Paulist Press.

Dempster, S. (2009). Having the balls, having it all? Sport and constructions of undergraduate laddishness. *Gender and Education, 21*, 481-500.

Driscoll, M. (n.d.). Mark Driscoll biography. Retrieved from http://www.marshill.com/markdriscoll/

Duffy, R., & Sedlacek, W. (2007). The work values of first-year college students: Exploring group differences. *Career Development Quarterly, 55,* 359-364.

Dyson, J., Cobb, M., & Foreman, D. (1997). The meaning of spirituality: A literature review. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 26,* 1183-1188.

Eberly, D. (1999.) *The faith factor in fatherhood: Renewing the sacred vocation of fatherhood.* New York, NY: Lexington Books.

Ehrmann, N., & Massey, D. (2007). Gender-specific effects of ecological conditions on college achievement. *Social Science Research, 37,* 220-238.

Eldredge, J. (2001). *Wild at heart: Discovering the passionate soul of a man*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Engebretson, K. (2006). Identity, masculinity and spirituality: A study of Australian teenage boys. *Journal of Youth Studies, 9,* 91-110.

Erikson, E. (2000). *The Erik Erikson reader*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Fawcett, B. G., Francis, L. J., & Robbins, M. (2009). Psychological type profile of religiously committed male and female Canadian Baptist youth: A study among participants at Tidal Impact. *The Journal of Youth Ministry, 8*, 25-38.

Finley, S. C. (2007). Homoeroticism and the African-American heterosexual male: Quest for meaning in the black church. *Black Theology: An International Journal, 5*, 305-326.

Forbes, D. (2003). Turning the wheel: Integral school counselling for male adolescents. *Journal of Counselling and Development, 81*, 1-12.

Fowler, J. (1978). Life/faith patterns: Structures of trust and loyalty. In J. Berryman (Ed.), *Life-maps: Conversations on the journey of faith* (pp. 14-104). Waco, TX: Word.

Fowler, J. W. (2000). *Becoming adult, becoming Christian: Adult development and Christian faith.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Frosh, S., Phoenix, A., & Pattman, R. (2002). *Young masculinities: Understanding boys in contemporary society*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

Garber, S. (2007). *The fabric of faithfulness: Weaving together belief and behavior*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.

Gough, B., & Edwards, G. (1998). The beer talking: Four lads, a carry out and the reproduction of masculinities. *Sociological Review, 46,* 409-435.

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(1). Article 4. Retrieved from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf

Harris III, F. H., & Harper, S. R. (2008). Masculinities go to community college: Understanding male identity socialization and gender role conflict. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 142,* 25-35.

Harris, M., & Moran, G. (1998). *Reshaping religious education.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Higher Education Research Institute. (2003). Spirituality in higher education: A national study of college students' search for meaning and purpose. Retrieved from http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu/

Hoover, S. M., & Coats, C. D. (2011). The media and male identities: Audience research in media, religion, and masculinities. *Journal of Communication, 61,* 877-895.

Hughes, K. L., Karp, M. M., Fermin, B. J., & Bailey, T. R. (2005). *Pathways to college access and success*. U.S. Department of Education: Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Hunter, D. E., & Whitten, P. (Eds.). (1976). Sex roles. In *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (pp. 348). New York, NY: Harper & Row.

James, W. (1958). *The varieties of religious experience.* New York, NY: The New American Library.

Jurkovic, D., & Walker, G. A. (2006). Examining masculine gender-role conflict and stress in relation to religious orientation and spiritual well-being in Australian men. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 14*, 27-46.

Kahn, J. S., Brett, B. L., & Holmes, J. R. (2011). Concerns with men's academic motivation in higher education: An exploratory investigation of the role of masculinity. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 19*, 65-82.

Kahn, J. S. (2009). *An introduction to masculinities*. Malden, MA: Blackwell/Wiley.

Kehler, M., & Greig, C. (2005). Reading masculinities: Exploring the socially literate practices of high school young men. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 9,* 351-370.

Kimmel, M. S. (1996). *Manhood in America: A cultural history.* New York, NY: Free Press.

Lewes, K. (1988). *The psychoanalytic theory of male homosexuality*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Longwood, W. M., Muesse, M. W., & Schipper, W. (2004). Men, spirituality, and the collegiate experience. *New Directions for Student Services, 107*, 87-95.

Longwood, W. M., Schipper, W. C., & Culbertson, P. (2012). *Forging the male spirit: The spiritual lives of American college men.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Mathewes-Green, F. (1999). Men need church, too. *Christianity Today*, 70.

McBrien, R. (1994). *Catholicism.* Victoria, Australia: Collins Dove.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
Publications Inc.

Murrie, L. (2000). The Australian legend and Australian men. In P. Nile (Ed.), *The
Australian legend and its discontents* (pp. 81-94). St. Lucia, Australia: University
of Queensland Press.

National Public Radio. (2005, February 9). Laura Bush: Putting boys in the spotlight. *All
Things Considered, NPR.*

O'Neil, J., Helms, B., Gable, R., David, L., & Wrightsman, L. (1986). Gender-role
conflict scale: College men's fear of femininity. *Sex Roles, 14,* 335-358.

Parks, S. D. (2000). *Big questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young adults in their
search for meaning, purpose, and faith.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pope, H., Phillips, K. A., & Olivardia, R. (2000). *The Adonis complex: The secret crisis
of male body obsession.* New York, NY: Free Press.

Raverty, A. (2006). Are we monks, or are we men? The monastic masculine gender
model according to the rule of Benedict. *Journal of Men's Studies, 14*, 269-291.

Renold, E. (2004). 'Other' boys: Negotiating non-hegemonic masculinities in the primary
school. *Gender and Education, 16*, 247-266.

Rolheiser, R. (1999). *The holy longing: The search for a Christian spirituality.* New
York, NY: Doubleday.

Roussel, J. F., & Downs, C. (2007). Epistemological perspectives on concepts of gender
and masculinity/masculinities. *Journal of Men's Studies, 15*, 178-196.

Sax, L. (2008, September). Her college experience is not his. *Chronicle for Higher Education, 55,* A32.

Schipper, W. C. (2007). *Masculinity, spirituality, and sexuality: The interpreted, lived experience of the traditional age college male.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (3351167)

Shanasy, S., & Bates, G. (2002). Dimensions of Christian spirituality and their implications for counselling Christian clients at life's low points. *The Australian Journal of Counselling Psychology,* Autumn, 51-60.

Smith, C., Denton, M., Faris, R., & Regnerus, M. (2002). Mapping American Adolescent Religious Participation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *41*, 597-612.

Tacey, D. (2003). *The spirituality revolution.* Sydney, Australia: Harper Collins.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). *IPEDS enrollment data* [Data file]. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/Statistics.aspx

Warin, J., & Dempster, S. (2005). The salience of gender during the transition to higher education: male students' accounts of performed and authentic identities. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*, 887-903.

Whitehead, S. (2002). *Men and masculinities: Key themes and new directions.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Withers, G., & Russell, J. (2001). *Education for resilience.* Melbourne, Victoria: Australian Council of Educational Research

Zinnbauer, B. J., Pargament, K. I., & Scott, A. B. (1999). The emerging meanings of religiousness and spirituality: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Personality, 67,* 889-919.

Appendix A

Protocol Questions

Research Questions:

1. How do men at a faith-based college construct their masculine identity?

2. How do these men experience masculinity in light of their spirituality?

1. How do men at a faith-based college construct their masculine identity?

How would you define masculinity?

When did you first start thinking about what it means to be a man (or to be masculine)?

Describe people, figures, or mentors in your life who have contributed to your formation of masculine identity.

What environments or spaces have you found most conducive to processing your masculinity (if any)? Describe them. What made those specifically conducive to processing your identity as a man?

How has your understanding of masculinity changed over time?

Describe any other specific catalysts that have caused you to think about your identity as a man.

2. How do these men experience masculinity in light of their spirituality?

Are there certain situations in which you feel more masculine than in others?

Identify and describe these.

What qualities of masculinity do you value and/or strive to exhibit?

How has your spirituality (or faith) influenced the way you live as a man?

Are there any personal qualities of masculinity that you believe are directly

informed by your spiritual beliefs? Identify and explain these.

How might your concept of masculinity differ from men at a secular institution?

3. *Either/Both…*

How would you describe your experience of spirituality (or faith)?

What experiences have led to your development as a person of faith?

How does your experience of faith/spirituality differ from that of other men? How

does your experience of faith/spirituality differ from that of women?

How has your identity as a man influenced the way you live out your

faith/spirituality?

4. *Other*

Is there anything you would like to add?

Is there anything you wish I had asked?

Appendix B

Demographic Questions

Class Level (Circle One): Freshman / Sophomore / Junior / Senior

Month/Year of Graduation: _____

Age: _____

Religious Affiliation/Denomination: _____

For purposes of anonymity and your protection, the researcher would like you to select a

pseudonym by which you will be referred in publication of research results. If you decide

not to choose a pseudonym, the researcher will select one for you.

Pseudonym: _____

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Boys to Men: A Phenomenological Study of
Men's Construction of Masculinity at a Faith-Based University

You are invited to participate in a research study of masculinity and spirituality. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you many have before agreeing to be in the study. The study is being conducted by Taylor Smythe, a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development program at Taylor University, as part of his Master's thesis.

STUDY PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to gain greater understanding of how male undergraduate students at a faith-based university construct their ideas of masculinity, and how those ideas are interrelated with their ideas about faith and spirituality.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY
Participants in this study will first be asked to complete a short questionnaire (five questions) to provide the researcher with basic demographic data. On this questionnaire, the participant will write a pseudonym to which they will be referred in any documentation of data. This is to protect participant confidentiality. After providing consent and filling out the questionnaire, the participant will be asked a series of protocol questions. This interview is expected to last approximately one hour.

RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY
The current research project is not expected to induce any serious risk beyond the minimal risks of everyday life. The topic of gender and sharing of personal life experiences may be considered risky to some participants, but this risk is also expected to be kept to a minimum via the use of pseudonyms and the ability of the participant to withdraw from the study at will.

BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY
Direct benefits of participation in this study are unknown. The results of this study may benefit the field of higher education research.

COMPENSATION
Participants will receive no compensation.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. You will be given the opportunity to select a pseudonym. If you decide not to select one yourself, the researcher will ascribe a pseudonym of his choosing with the intent to protect your identity. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored. The researcher alone will have access to audio recordings of interviews, which will be destroyed following transcription and analysis of this data.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Taylor University. The participant has the right to not participate in any study that is connected to a teaching exercise.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS
If you have any questions at any time concerning this research study, contact the researcher Taylor Smythe at 561.676.3068 or taylor_smythe@taylor.edu, or in his office upstairs in the Student Union. If you have any additional questions, you may also contact faculty supervisor Dr. Steve Bedi at steve_bedi@taylor.edu or 765.998.4578.

Inquiries regarding the nature of the research, your rights as a subject, or any other aspect of the research as it relates to your participation as a subject can be directed to Taylor University's Institutional Review Board at IRB@taylor.edu or the Chair of the IRB, R. Edwin Welch at 756-998-4315 or edwelch@taylor.edu

SUBJECT'S CONSENT
In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study.

A copy of this form will be given to me for my personal records. I have had the opportunity to read this consent form, ask questions about the research project, and am prepared to participate in this study.

Participant's Printed Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____   **Date: _____**

Researcher's Signature: _____   **Date: _____**