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Exploring the Shared Cores of Gender Issues: The Significance of Same-Sex Interactions as Pathways to Equality and Reconciliation

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EXPLORING THE SHARED CORES OF GENDER ISSUES: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SAME-SEX INTERACTIONS AS PATHWAYS TO EQUALITY AND RECONCILIATION

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Abstract

Achieving gender reconciliation involves the consideration of many different conflicts between the sexes, from institutional to individual conflict. Men and women have identified inequality in workplaces (Elkins, Phillips, & Konopaske, 2001), education systems (Ancis & Phillips, 1996), sexualized media (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001) and judicial courts (Sanauddin, 2012). Additionally, negative personal relationships have led to deeply rooted mistrust between men and women (Nomaguchi, Giordano, & Manning, 2011). Conflict exists at the most basic level of identity formation. Gender identities comprise behaviors and traits that have opposing gender associations (Long, Fish, Scheffler, & Hanert, 2014; Monin, Clark, & Lemay, 2008). Efforts are in motion, however, to reconcile men and women in society. Some programs focus on males and healing wounds left by fathers (Long et al., 2014; Jennings, 2011), and well-known public figures are taking a stand for global gender equality on behalf of both sexes (Watson, 2014).

This study explored the awareness male and female college students have of existing gender inequalities, as well as their evaluation of the feasibility of gender equality and reconciliation. Since discrimination and equality movements have become apparent in higher education (Ancis & Phillips, 1996), this study examined whether students can articulate the benefits and disadvantages both men and women experience

because of their sex. This study also explored ways college students can participate in gender reconciliation—on behalf of both men and women—on their campuses.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

On September 20, 2014, Emma Watson delivered a powerful speech to the United Nations assembly on gender inequality. As she discussed the disadvantages that women experience in society, such as sexual objectification (Kwan, 2010; Watson, 2014), submissive female gender roles (Toller, Suter, & Trautman, 2004; Van Beek, Van Dolderen, & Demon Dubas, 2006) and inequalities in the workforce (Calasanti, 2010), Watson turned to address her male audience. By drawing public attention to male-specific issues, such as the sometimes fatal pressure to be stoic and emotionally inexpressive (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Good & Moss-Racusin, 2010; Levstik & Groth, 2002; Watson, 2014), Watson recognized that men are not viewed as equals to women as advocates for gender justice:

> How can we affect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feels welcome to participate in the conversation? Men, I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue, too. (Watson, 2014)

Watson's speech contributed to an expanding body of literature that promotes gender equality on behalf of both of the sexes, recognizing that both men and women experience social privileges and struggles because of their sex (Sanauddin, 2012; Watson, 2014). Achieving gender equality demands the dismantling of current man-versus-woman

stereotypes in order that both may see each other as allies with a common goal (Sanauddin, 2012).

Equality and reconciliation prove easier preached than achieved. As a result of gender conflicts in society, a strong mistrust exists between men and women (Nomaguchi et al., 2011). Feminism carries strong negative stigmas (Keamy, 2008; Rosell & Hartman, 2001; Zucker, 2004), and men view it as a movement that directly attacks them as a sex (Anderson, Kanner, & Elsayegh, 2009; Prabhu, 2014; Watson, 2014). Male privilege, while no longer institutionalized, still exists (Ancis & Phillips, 1996; Lips, 2000; Lundeberg, 1997; Sanauddin, 2012). These obstacles must be overcome for gender reconciliation ever to become a reality (Sanauddin, 2012; Watson 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Social privilege stands one of the central pillars of gender inequality. Black and Stone (2005) presented a five-part definition of social privilege. First, privileges are special advantages that general members of society do not universally experience. Second, a privileged group experiences the advantages of social privilege without earning them or exerting effort. Third, they experience these benefits as a natural result of being part of a privileged population. Fourth, only the privileged population receives these benefits, while all others become excluded or even suffer as a result. Finally, those in privileged groups often remain unaware of their privileged status.

This unawareness of privilege makes gender discrimination and privilege difficult to address. Men who profess their perspective of women as equal to men in society (Byrne, Felker, Vacha-Haase, & Rickard, 2011; Glick & Fiske, 2011) may prove unaware of the privileged status they themselves possess, regardless of their beliefs

(Black & Stone, 2005). Recently, however, researchers and social media have begun to echo Watson's claim that men are also victims of gender discrimination by calling attention to ways that society overlooks men's issues in order to favor women's issues (James, 2014; Moss, 2014; Sanauddin, 2012). Whereas society has generally placed the responsibility of creating gender equality on the shoulders of men, researchers now advocate for a balanced view of gender reconciliation, in which women and men serve as equal partners and beneficiaries (Sanauddin, 2012; Watson, 2014).

In order to combat the lack of awareness of privilege and oppression that perpetuates gender inequality, advocates of equality must concentrate their efforts on college students. Wildman and David (1994) stated that universities have served throughout history as catalysts for social movements and the advancement of new ideas. If college students remain ignorant of the ways gender inequality affects them, they can not participate in the dismantling of unjust systems. For gender reconciliation to be possible, educators must instill awareness into their students to empower them as agents of change.

Purpose

Very little research exists that explores student perspectives on gender reconciliation; this lack proves surprising, as society has viewed colleges as platforms for social change (UN Women Asia and the Pacific, 2015; Wildman & David, 1994). Most scholarly research on gender reconciliation deals with marriage and family therapy (Bernstein, 2007; Makinen & Johnson, 2006; Marshall, 1995). Current research, while it does not address student perspectives on the subject, does engage such topics as the importance of mutuality in male and female relationships (Calasanti, 2010; Holland &

McElwain, 2013; Long et al., 2014; Marshall, 1995) and how disharmony in these relationships affects both the couple and other family members (Bernstein, 2007; Calasanti, 2010; Downey, Feldman, & Ayduk, 2000; Jennings, 2011; Lawrence, Jeglic, Matthews, & Pepper, 2006). Other research explores the formation of masculine and feminine gender identities (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Gilgoff & Ginwright, 2015; Jones, 2004; Levstik & Groth, 2002; Nomaguchi et al., 2011; Updegraff, Delgado, & Wheeler, 2009; Watson, 2014; Zamarripa, Wampold, & Gregory, 2003) and expands understandings of gender privilege and discrimination (Ancis & Phillips, 1996; Carson, 2001; de Silva de Alwis, 2011; Elkins et al., 2001; Lips, 2000; Lundeberg, 1997; Watson, 2014; Wildman & David, 1994).

Little research, however, speaks to the area of gender reconciliation specifically as it relates to the views of college and university students. As Wildman and David (1994) discussed, college and university students have significant influence in advancing important emerging social causes. With respect to gender reconciliation, students offer a social resource of vastly unrecognized potential and therefore have the ability to improve relationships greatly between men and women in society. In general, both scholarly and anecdotal evidence provide strong support for gender equality and the restorative health it can bring to society (Dwyer, 2003; Watson, 2014). Research by Barker (2000) and Branscombe (1998) detailed the benefits of reflecting on gender identities and their influences on society and relationships. While researchers have explored student perceptions of male-female relations (Utomo, Utomo, Reidmondos, & McDonald, 2012), attitudes toward sex roles (Utomo et al., 2012; Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman, 1968) and gender privilege (Branscombe, 1998), minimal research exists that

explores college students' attitudes and beliefs about how to achieve gender reconciliation itself. The opinions of students on the issue of gender reconciliation prove important, however (Utomo et al., 2012). With universities known for generating ideas that bring about social change (UN Women, 2015; Wildman & David, 1994), the perspectives of students on gender reconciliation require a great deal more attention.

Current research on gender reconciliation. In a 2012 study, Utomo et al. (2012) administered the Indonesian Gender and Reproductive Health survey to 1,722 Year 6 students and 6,555 Year 12 high school students from four provinces of Indonesia. The researchers asked students to describe the level of egalitarianism of their parents by matching various tasks to whichever of their parents performed them. Students also described their perceptions and attitudes toward gender roles.

Their research revealed an increase in egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles from the sixth year to the twelfth year, although the majority of students tended to favor the view of the man as the breadwinner (Utomo et al., 2012). Utomo et al. speculated that students gain a raised awareness of alternatives to traditional gender stereotypes as they progress through school, and that this mindfulness contributes to their greater egalitarian beliefs. The research underlines the importance of the opinions of young people in achieving equality: "Mapping the attitudes of gender roles among young people and understanding how these attitudes are shaped are useful instruments for policy makers seeking to design effective strategies to achieve gender equity" (p. 5).

In a similarly themed study designed to explore perceptions of privilege, Branscombe (1998) asked 76 men and 84 women to think of ways their sex experienced either benefits or detriments within society. Results showed males experienced feelings

of guilt and low self-esteem when they reflected on the benefits they reaped from their privileged status. Females, on the other hand, experienced an increase in self-esteem when they thought about the societal disadvantages of being in their gender group.

Masculine privilege and oppression of women, however, provide only half of the story. As stated above, current gender reconciliation research has begun to expand the definition of gender inequality to include male issues as well as female issues (James, 2014; Moss, 2014; Sanauddin, 2012; Watson, 2014). While gender inequality still exists, gaining a fuller understanding of how it affects both men and women will more effectively empower men and women to combat the various forms of inequality that exist for both of the sexes (Watson, 2014).

Research Questions

Feminism stands as perhaps the most well known social activist movement associated with gender equality. Yet the most common associations with feminism are a hatred of men (Watson, 2014) and extremism (Anderson et al., 2009) rather than social equality on behalf of both of the sexes (Watson, 2014). This imbalance perhaps has become perpetuated by the very word "feminism" (Watson, 2014), which implies an exclusive focus on women's issues and does not invite men to participate in the conversation (James, 2014; Moss, 2014; Watson, 2014). As a result, gender equality movements tend to polarize men and women (James, 2014; Moss, 2014) rather than bring them together and reconcile their grievances (Watson, 2014). Reconciliation efforts in the therapy and counseling realms prove effective in resolving conflicts between individual couples (Bernstein, 2007; Makinen & Johnson, 2006; Marshall, 1995). Gender reconciliation on a larger scale, however, remains an abstract concept (Dwyer,

2003; Watson, 2014), certainly with regard to the attitudes and beliefs held by college students.

With this in mind, three questions shaped the current study: “What do college students believe are the most important gender inequalities to address on their campuses and in society?”, “Why did students identify these issues?” and “What do college students believe they can do to achieve gender reconciliation in these areas?”

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

One of the media's favorite ways to capture the attention of the masses is to pit men and women against one another and to sensationalize gender conflicts (Connell, 1996). Portrayed parents experience marital conflict and conflict with their children (Holland & McElwain, 2013), women struggle for equality in education and the workplace (de Silva de Alwis, 2011; Dowling, 2006; Lundeberg, 1997; Wildman & David, 1994), women's bodies become fuel for sexual appetites (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Weinberg & Williams, 2010) and men experience conflict as society erases their traditional identities (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Orzeck, Rokack, & Chin, 2010). Societal guidelines for gender identities, roles and behaviors isolate men and women into opposing groups (Connell, 1996), creating conflicts in families, social relationships and many other areas of life (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Holland & McElwain, 2013). This review described the different pressures and wounds that men and women experience in society as well as current movements emerging within society that focus on gender reconciliation.

Male and Female Relationships

The most crucial element that gender reconciliation must address comes as the conflicting nature of the formation of male and female gender identities (Nomaguchi et al., 2011). Research shows that men and women form their gender identities in relation

to each other (Calasanti, 2010) as well as by what culture and society dictate at the time (Calasanti, 2010; Jessup-Anger, 2008). Despite the common understanding that different traits often carry masculine or feminine connotations, such as aggression or caregiving, both genders exhibit them, albeit in socially acceptable contexts (Calasanti, 2010; Watson, 2014). In addition to constructing identities based on gender traits, men and women also use parents as models (Jones, 2004; Nomaguchi et al., 2011; Updegraff et al., 2009). As researchers examine the gender identities men and women construct, positive and negative male-female social interactions gain a clearer foundation.

The changes in gender identities and roles complicate the process of gender reconciliation. Men in particular experience severe conflict as their traditional roles disappear, feeling confused about the meaning of developing a masculine identity (Blazina & Watkins, 2000). Men have used a system of identity construction that relies heavily on the separation of traits into distinct gender categories. Male gender development isolates certain traits as examples of masculinity and rejects other traits strongly associated with femininity. This categorization creates a gender identity focused on avoidance of behaviors and traits perceived as "weak" in order to adopt "strong" masculine traits associated with authority (Hall, 2006; Toller et al., 2004; Van Beek et al., 2006). Failure of men to adopt such traits often results in social punishments and rejection (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Good & Moss-Racusin, 2010; Levstik & Groth, 2002). Complicating the issue further, multiple masculinities have emerged that do not conform to traditional concepts of masculinity. Men feel a sense of loss with regard to their gender identities and often gravitate toward traditional male gender roles in an attempt to regain a sense of masculinity (Connell, 1996).

Women also face pressure in their construction of female gender identities. While rejecting traditional restricting gender roles, they live in a society that still generally favors males. Similar to males, women construct their identities based on gender-associated behaviors and traits (Blazina & Watkins, 2000). Pressures and stereotypes of traditional femininity include the formation of strong relationships (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012), the importance of physical and sexual desirability (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001) and an emphasis on caregiving and caretaking (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012).

Despite the fact that females seem more naturally adroit at forming intimate relationships (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012), both men and women place importance on close friendships during their adolescent and college years (Johnson et al., 2007). Females generally receive more responsibility, dependence and connectedness within their families than males do, and this imbalance supports the claim that society encourages women to adopt the caregiving component to their gender identities and roles (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012). As they may not connect within families to the degree women generally do, men tend to exhibit more agentic and problem-solving behaviors. Research suggests female-female relationships have the most mutual giving, and male-male relationships have the least (Monin et al., 2008). Male-male relationships remain deeply important, however. While they may not exhibit the same caregiving as females, male-male relationships offer valuable sources of intimacy, trust and identity formation for men (Grande, Sherman, & Shaw-Ridley, 2013).

Reconciliation between men and women is possible, Watson (2014) stated, if culture allows freedom for both genders to build identities not prescribed and therefore conflicting by nature:

> If men don't have to be aggressive in order to be accepted, women won't feel compelled to be submissive. If men don't have to control, women won't have to be controlled. Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive; both men and women should feel free to be strong. It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum instead of two sets of opposing ideals. (Watson, 2014)

In order for the movement of gender reconciliation to succeed, advocates must recognize gender conflict as existing not merely between individuals but in increasingly larger spheres.

Gender Identities and Family

Gender conflicts exist within families, the most basic unit of society (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Holland & McElwain, 2013). Exploring the ways men and women build relationships as spouses, parents and children proves crucial to achieving enduring gender reconciliation (Updegraff et al., 2009; Watson, 2014).

Same-sex and heterosexual relational intimacy operates on a spectrum similar to gender roles (Calasanti, 2010), although strong stereotypical gender patterns still exist. Within families, the greater involvement of women comes into conflict with less-involved men (Calasanti, 2010; Monin et al., 2008). Society dictates that males gain self-efficacy through problem-solving and task performance (Calasanti, 2010; Zamarripa et al., 2003), avoiding caregiving and other "female" tasks (Blazina & Watkins, 2000), and gaining self-worth from their accomplishments more than from their relationships (Calasanti, 2010; Zamarripa et al., 2003). As women typically establish self-worth through relationships, they experience stress by bearing greater emotional responsibilities within their families than their male counterparts (Calasanti, 2010).

While female gender identities develop in the context of relationships and community (Monin et al., 2008; Thompson & Lougheed, 2012), the journey of developing a Western manhood proves a solitary one. When young men use the examples of their fathers to construct a masculine identity, they most often imitate an emotionally or physically withdrawn or absent father (Long et al., 2014), perpetuating the development of insecurely attached, emotionally withdrawn and solitary men (Downey et al., 2000; Jennings, 2011; Lawrence et al., 2006). Disconnect from fathers becomes perpetuated as society severely undersells the importance of a father's role due to their frequent absence (Watson, 2014). Researchers define psychological abuse as any behavior that proves harmful insensitive to a person's developmental needs or that results in psychological or emotional damage (Miller, 2013). This definition qualifies male emotional wounds left by an absent positive father figure as an arguable form of psychological abuse.

The stoic picture of manhood resulting from absent fathers and social expectations contributes to male inexpressiveness (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Zamarripa et al., 2003), as men have unmet emotional needs they feel forbidden to express (Blazina & Watkins, 2000). This restraint results in unhealthy coping mechanisms such as pornography, by which men supposedly gain gratification without rejection (Stewart & Szymanski, 2012). Since society does not foster male emotions but encourages women to emote (Gilgoff & Ginwright, 2015; Lawrence et al., 2006; Levstick & Groth, 2002; Watson, 2014; Zamarripa et al., 2003), men do not often share their emotions with others, which frustrates female partners who desire mutual exchange of intimacy (Calasanti, 2010). Efforts to achieve gender reconciliation must recognize that gender conflicts exist

due to negative relationships and personal insecurities (Weinberg & Williams, 2010). Gender reconciliation relationships within families will become realized as individuals within those families find freedom and safety in being vulnerable with one another (Holland & McElwain, 2013; Long et al., 2014; Watson, 2014).

Gender, Sexuality and Intimacy

Cultural portrayals of male and female sexuality create one of the greatest obstacles for gender reconciliation to overcome (Watson, 2014), as society exploits both male and female emotional and sexual insecurities (Stewart & Szymanski, 2012; Weinberg & Williams, 2010). Sexual media content daily bombards men and women alike (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001), a reality that leaves neither unscathed.

Media and body image. Whether or not the message is explicit, sexualized media emphasizes the importance of an athletic physique (Stewart & Szymanski, 2012). Objectification and dissatisfaction with one's body primarily affects females, but recent research shows that objectification of males and male dissatisfaction with their bodies has also increased (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Kwan, 2010; Weinberg & Williams, 2010), although nowhere near to the prolific level of female objectification (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001).

The pressure females experience to be physically attractive stems from the belief that men desire attractive female partners such as those portrayed by media (Stewart & Szymanski, 2012), and research supports the idea that men desire an attractive mate (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001). Since society encourages men to prioritize sexuality over relational intimacy, females go to extreme measures such as eating disorders, dieting and exercise to obtain the physique they believe men desire (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Kwan,

2010). Extreme physiques portrayed by the media, however, do not always prove achievable or realistic, and women experience low self-esteem and dissatisfaction with male partners with unrealistic expectations (Stewart & Szymanski, 2012). Preoccupation and frustration can reach the point at which women cannot appear in public without feeling self-conscious (Kwan, 2010). Although they realize the near impossibility of attaining these extreme physiques, women feel like failures if they cannot achieve society's expectations for their bodies.

College-aged men's discomfort with physical appearance has begun to rise (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001), despite reports of higher general comfort with even overweight physiques (Kwan, 2010). Media messages to men call for muscular torsos, low body fat percentages and high sexual activity (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001). While extreme diets and eating disorders affect males as well as women (Grossbard, Atkins, Geisner, & Larimer, 2013) particularly if they belong to a sexual orientation minority (Matthews-Ewald, Zullig, & Ward, 2014), males most commonly employ the methods of exercise and substance use to achieve their ideal bodies. A muscular physique appears as one of the few remaining essential components of a masculine gender identity—one possible reason for this rise in male preoccupation with body image (Kwan, 2010).

Feminism

The feminist movement attempts to reconcile men and women in society (Watson, 2014) but has met with resistance from men and women alike who see feminists as troublemakers (Anderson et al., 2009; Watson, 2014), responsible for the downfall of masculinity (Anderson et al., 2009) and encouraging hostility toward men (Anderson et al., 2009; Prabhu, 2014; Watson, 2014). However, studies have shown these attitudes as

not universal or even common among feminists, who score no higher levels of hostile male tendencies than non-feminist women (Anderson et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, people still hold misconceptions about the meaning of feminism, associating it with man-hating and extremism (Prabhu, 2014). Studies show an existing reluctance and fear of engaging or identifying with feminism (Anderson et al., 2009; Keamy, 2008; Rosell & Hartman, 2001; Zucker, 2004) that may be due to a general prevailing conservative attitude toward women's rights (Byrne et al., 2011). Some men avoid allying with the feminist movement for fear the alliance will require the surrender of their masculine identities (Keamy, 2008).

Research demonstrates that both men and women experience pressure to become publicly feminist, despite perhaps having private beliefs that do not completely align with feminism (Rosell & Hartman, 2001). This pressure and the resulting fear lead men in particular to worry whether their actions will upset someone with feminist beliefs, leading to accusations of discrimination or harassment (Keamy, 2008).

Gender Reconciliation

Apathy, fear and mistrust between genders are some of the obstacles that stand in the way of gender reconciliation. Feminists hope to change the negative perceptions of their cause as well as continue to grant females the unpressured free choice to adopt nontraditional roles (Prabhu, 2014). Research on the reconstruction of feminism's definition and image proves optimistic. One of the central ideas that advocates of gender reconciliation emphasizes that men and women, particularly at the college level, often deal with the same issues and struggles, albeit in different ways and in differing amounts (Zamarripa et al., 2003). The call for an alliance between men and women emerges at the

center of achieving reconciliation on behalf of all victims of discrimination and prejudice (Murphy-Graham, 2009; Sanauddin, 2012; Watson, 2014).

Current efforts and limitations. One of the most significant areas research has recently identified as crucial to gender reconciliation is the restoration of the father-son relationship, emphasizing emotional connections and stronger bonds between fathers and sons (Jennings, 2011; Long et al., 2014). Programs focused on improving male relationships place value on shared life experiences, brotherhood, building trust and collectivist action (Grande et al., 2013). Watson (2014) believed that men who can engage in meaningful relationships with other males will have significantly improved relationships with women as well, a belief that founded the HeForShe movement, dedicated to addressing the struggles of both men and women.

Interestingly, despite the disadvantages women experience in education and the workplace, men's overall perceptions of women in education and the workplace appear increasingly favorable (Glick & Fiske, 2011; Nesbitt & Penn, 2000). Today's college and university students perceive men and women as equals, although cross-sex attitudes remain unhealthy (Byrne et al., 2011). Research supports this state by showing some efforts with good intentions, such as organizations that provide and encourage maternity leave, inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes based on biological differences (de Silva de Alwis, 2011; Quinian & Bute, 2013). The difficulty in achieving reconciliation in this area lies in illuminating instances of inequality without exacerbating them and without creating illusions of nonexistent inequality (Pandolfelli, 2010).

Emerging trends. Research has established colleges and universities as places for students to interact with new ideas (Wildman & David, 1994). Researchers, teachers

and theorists highlight students as the greatest potential agents for social change. Researchers have identified several opportunities for change in the realm of higher education as well as in larger society, such as HeForShe's Impact 10x10x10 initiative that universities have adopted to address inequality on their campuses. Impact 10x10x10 challenges and empowers institutions of many varieties to identify ways men and women experience inequalities at their institutions and implement necessary changes (UN Women, 2015).

Higher education. Male and female students still have unequal undergraduate experiences (Ancis & Phillips, 1996; Lips, 2000; Lundeberg, 1997; Watson, 2014). Research calls for educators to treat students equally without focusing on gender (Dowling, 2006). Administrations should emphasize the recruitment of female faculty (Sax, 2008) in order to accurately represent their student bodies with respect to gender (Hall & Charmaraman, 2011). Gender studies classes should focus on reconciliation and facilitate student dialogue (Lincoln, 2012) in the hope that more men and students of color will feel welcomed into the conversation, as these courses have not historically attracted these students (Quinian & Bute, 2013; Yoder, Fischer, Kahn, & Groden, 2007).

Social movements. Social media and commentators begin to advocate for the discontinuation of gender-based jokes and humor, as they often alienate people and perpetuate stereotypes (Dixon, 2015). Continued efforts should be made to change negative stereotypes of feminism (Anderson et al., 2009; Sanauddin, 2012; Watson, 2014) and to improve perceptions of women (Murphy-Graham, 2009). Research also emphasizes the importance of positive father-son relationships in masculine constructs (Holland & McElwain, 2013; Jennings, 2011; Jones, 2004; Long et al., 2014; Miller,

2013). Miller (2013) believes that if these relationships provide safe places, father-son bonds will bring healing for both the father and the son. Social movements such as HeForShe and the "meninism" hashtag recognize psychological healing and honesty as nonnegotiable elements of gender justice (McKay, 2000).

Conclusion

The road to achieving gender reconciliation appears lined with many obstacles. In order to become effective, gender reconciliation must address the larger issues, such as organized discrimination and inequalities (Ancis & Phillips, 1996; Carson, 2001; Elkins et al., 2001; Lips, 2000; Lundeberg, 1997; Sanauddin, 2012), as well as the foundational problem of men and women's identity formation (Calasanti, 2010; Monin et al., 2008; Nomaguchi et al., 2011). Gender conflicts comprise a variety of wounds that touch nearly every aspect of male and female relationships (James, 2014; Moss, 2014; Weinberg & Williams, 2010), making reconciliation a complicated and long-term, but necessary, endeavor (Watson, 2014).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative Research

While much research exists exploring students' attitudes toward gender roles and relations, research on student attitudes toward gender reconciliation proves scarce. The current study explored the reflections of male and female college students in response to watching two documentaries that detail societal pressures on females and on males, respectively. The study also examined the reconciliatory efforts proposed by these students to social inequality issues their reflections identified as most critical to address. In order to make the concept of inequality more tangible, the study asked students to reflect on how social injustices affecting both the sexes were present in their campus community. Students also reflected on ways that they could combat the instances of inequality that they observed. From this point, students explored how the issues they observed on their own campus appear in larger society beyond their campus environment and considered how those issues could be resolved on these larger scales.

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research begins with a central concept, focus or idea and gathers data in order to explore that idea (Creswell, 2012). Phenomenological designs examine the experiences of multiple individuals and find commonalities among their experiences that relate to the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2013). The current study explored the

significant issues male and female college students identified as most important to resolve regarding gender inequalities, both in their campus communities and in society at large. In order to discern why certain social issues might prove more significant to college students than others, the study used short-answer essay questions that are "open-ended, general questions" (Creswell, 2012, p. 132). Using open-ended questions provided students with a guided, yet flexible opportunity to describe the importance of addressing the issues they identified for their campuses and for society. By using a qualitative approach, the study examined common themes from the participants' responses to determine how male and female students generally think about how to achieve gender reconciliation in their communities.

Participants

At the beginning of the study, 1,900 undergraduate students from a small, predominantly white, private Christian liberal arts institution in the Midwestern United States (referred to as Eastridge University) received an invitation to participate in a survey of ten short-essay questions. The student participants were between the ages of 18 and 22 and ranged from freshmen to seniors. Approximately 45% of the students at Eastridge University identify as male, 55% female; most identify as Protestant. In order to avoid a population bias, the researcher made the study available to all students at Eastridge University. In the end, 27 students—9 men and 18 women—participated in the study.

Procedures

Eastridge University advertised student viewings on campus of two documentaries entitled *Miss Representation* and *The Mask You Live In*. The films were

viewed in the evening, one week apart from one another. Posted advertisements invited male and female students to attend the showings of both documentaries. At the conclusion of each film and following a short debrief of the documentaries, attendees had the opportunity to sign up on an email list to be contacted after the second film showing, asking them to participate in a survey (see Appendix A). The email included a link to the survey as well as a description of the study. The survey was hosted and the data collected through SurveyMonkey. After contacting the students via email, the researcher destroyed the sign-up sheet to protect participant confidentiality.

Students who chose to participate in the survey answered reflection questions specific to the films they viewed. Participants selected the films they viewed from a menu and answered five short-answer reflection questions for each film they viewed. The survey questions explored what male and female college students perceived as the most pertinent gender inequalities to address within and beyond their immediate campus communities. Additionally, building on the claims of Wildman and David (1994), the survey asked participants to describe the efforts they saw as necessary in order to achieve reconciliation in the areas of need they identified.

Data Analysis

After collecting the surveys, the researcher coded them for common themes and repeated trends communicating the complexity of social gender relations while linking individual experiences together (Creswell, 2012). The study looked for and grouped trends into four areas of interest: Significant Female Issues on Campus and in Society, Significant Male Issues on Campus and in Society, the Role of College Students in Gender Reconciliation, and Barriers to Achieving Reconciliation. This method held a

threefold purpose. First, it examined the prioritizations of both sexes on specific gender issues. Secondly, it explored similarities or discrepancies between the issues male and female students identified as most important to address. Finally, the study determined whether similarities existed between student proposals for change on their campuses and in greater society.

To code themes for the data, the researcher employed a three-stage process. First, the researcher grouped the answers to each individual question together. Second, the researcher looked for key repeated words or phrases that showed up in multiple responses. Third, the researcher matched together similar responses that did not share key phrases or words but did communicate the same ideas—for example, "a fear that they will move too far in one direction that they cannot go back" with "Some people do not want to engage or write off this conversation because they are afraid of change." The researcher's three-stage process borrowed elements from the modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data by Moustakas (1994). Following the data analysis process, the researcher set the data sets aside for four months and returned to the data following the fourth month in order to see whether the themes still accurately represented the responses, similar to the data-mining process that Corbin and Strauss (2008) outline.

Benefits

Since colleges and universities have historically served as sources of new ideas for cultural and societal change (UN Women, 2015; Wildman & David, 1994), it follows that these institutions should serve at the forefront of conversations about equality and reconciliation. It is important, however, that both men and women feel welcomed into

the conversation (Watson, 2014). Men, who often feel disengaged from conversations about equality, do not feel invited to participate as equals or feel as though their perspectives on gender reconciliation hold less value than those of women.

As its overarching goal, this research sought to foster a sense of partnership between male and female college students in their campuses and larger communities, encouraging them to treat gender equality as desirable for both of the sexes (Sanauddin, 2012; Watson, 2014). Furthermore, the study develops a sense of constructive empathy and forgiveness between males and females (Mellor, Fung, & Mamat Muhammad, 2012), rather than negative emotions that produce guilt, shame (Branscombe, 1998; Mellor et al., 2012), avoidance or defensiveness (Makinen & Johnson, 2006). Through facilitating reflection on social pressures of both men and women, this research will empower male and female students to see themselves as capable of addressing the inequalities around them (Barker, 2000).

Chapter 4

Results

The results section of this study compiled the responses of student participants from Eastridge University in one of three categories: those who had viewed the documentary *Miss Representation*; those who had viewed the documentary *The Mask You Live In*; and those who had viewed both documentaries. For both documentaries, the researcher coded the responses to each question for common themes, which generated a total of eight primary themes. For the purposes of anonymity, the researcher changed the names of all participants.

Table 1 and Table 2 describe the significant inequalities participants described for females and males on the Eastridge campus that mirror inequalities for both sexes in larger society. Table 3 and Table 4 outline ways college students can become advocates for gender reconciliation in their communities, and Table 5 and Table 6 list several barriers to achieving gender reconciliation that participants identified. Interestingly, the themes participants identified shared common cores for both men's and women's gender-related struggles, although the outward manifestations of these struggles proved different depending on the sex in question.

Significant Issues

Tables 1 and 2 discuss the most frequently cited gender issues female and male students on Eastridge University's campus face. Themes emerging from discussions of

campus issues and greater societal issues appeared nearly identical in content and frequency of mention, so Table 1 and Table 2 present data in both areas. Each gender-related issue divided into three components, and while each of these components matches one sex, each component also matches one from the other sex. The matching of sub-categories supports the theory that male and female students face common pressures that manifest themselves in unique expressions.

Media portrayals and emotional withdrawal. Both male and female participants identified *body image and shame* as the most significant issue female students experience on the Eastridge campus. For male students, participants identified the *unhealthy masculine construct*. Participants discussed media portrayals as contributing to female students' negative sense of self on campus, particularly with respect to sexuality as a necessary expression of femininity. When talking about males, students discussed the pressure on males to match the emotionally withdrawn or inexpressive male figures portrayed in media. While both issues seem unique to sex—sexuality for females and stoicism for males—they stem from a common root: society outlines a specific expression of gender required in order to be appropriately "male" or "female."

Sexualized portrayals of women appeared most frequently in participant reflections as the greatest source of distress for women on campus. Caroline described how placing a woman's value in her body creates the mentality that a woman is only as good as she looks, resulting in a female's obsession with appearance as a way to find value in herself. This idea, Caroline went on to discuss, results in a two-tiered hierarchy with women as "less than" and unable to be viewed as equals to men, since the only way

they can find meaning in their identity as women revolves around sexuality alone. Adam discussed the perceptions of inferiority surrounding women on Eastridge's campus:

> There is an oppression within the social setting but it is very implicit. Living in an all male dorm there are many subtle comments that are made that portray women as being less than or inferior to men. Many times women get written off as being emotional or dumb in general as a way to describe the man's lack of understanding.

Victoria addressed the topic of language from the female's perspective: "I believe that it is important to talk about the language that is used about women on this campus. There is a lot of demeaning talk, whether the perpetrator is male or female. Language creates reality." Daniel echoed her thoughts, "Females are often made to be something that they are not. Simply put, they have to fit a mold, be an object of lust, use makeup, etc. These issues are pervasive and ugly."

Both male and female students recognized the devastating impact of an emphasis on emotionlessness as a central characteristic of ideal masculinity. In his reflection, Spencer discusses males' struggle of loneliness due to a lack of intimacy: "A lack of emotional awareness and depth...would be the inability for men to be seen as weak, which is exactly what is required for healthy vulnerability, confession, and healing to take place." Participants see society placing men between a rock and a hard place, unable to emote because they must appear strong—yet the masculine construct forbids them from receiving emotional support from others that would actually make them strong. In particular, male-male intimacy and support prove less common than any other kind of relational connectivity (Monin et al., 2008). As Evangeline noted, "There are a lot of

people struggling with depression, and I don't know if males can count on each other for support." Victoria touched on the social punishments faced by men at Eastridge who step outside of the traditional masculine construct: "Again, language, such as 'be a man' or 'grow a pair' is used on this campus, which reinforces those thoughts and barriers for men to be whole people."

Self-judgment and defining gender. The second component pairing is *self-judgment* in females with *defining gender* in males. As female students commonly understand the attributes of a "properly" feminine body, they experience stress when they cannot achieve their socially prized physique. Kate discussed the pressures that women in the residence halls face to adopt certain lifestyle choices to help them achieve the ideal feminine physique. She described the inner shame that develops when girls do not meet the expectations:

> It's expected that you will exercise and eat right, unless you can pull off being thin and doing what you want. This pressure leads to a lot of obsessing over food, exercise, and clothes. Most women seem to struggle with body shame, myself included.

According to Kate, shame or self-judgment results from an inability to meet a certain defined standard, leaving females with a sense of hopelessness and self-criticism.

For males, *defining gender* also results in a sense of hopelessness. While females feel hopeless because they cannot meet a common standard for femininity, the emerging trend of "multiple masculinities" (Connell, 1996) creates a sense of despair among males who do not have a standard definition of masculinity. Males at Eastridge attempting to define what is "properly masculine" default to the characteristics of traditional

masculinity in order to feel like men, including having a lean, muscular body and seeming emotionally withdrawn. Participants used phrases like "macho" and "emotional masking" to describe the suitable aspirations for males. In addition to feeling defeated when they cannot achieve the ideal masculine physique and the cool masculine demeanor, males at Eastridge feel emotionally stifled. Adam describes this pathway thus:

> The huge emphasis our culture has on strength, power, dominance, not showing emotion and not being vulnerable in any way. Also this notion that men have to deal with issues on their own. They cannot go to others for help which leads to loneliness.

Felicia had similar thoughts, using her faith to challenge the perpetuation of an emotionless, independent man:

> I think there is a need for more education among men at [Eastridge] regarding emotional and mental health struggles. It is often encouraged to show strength and hide weakness, even though as Christians we profess that our weakness becomes our strength through Christ. Though Jesus shows himself as a man through humility, we still expect men to take care of themselves, by themselves.

Without a safe environment for emotional vulnerability, as well as the absence of a stable sense of gender identity, men at Eastridge retreat into themselves and perpetuate society's unhealthy masculine construct.

Pressure within genders. The third pairing—*girl-on-girl animosity* for females with *proving masculinity* for males—provides massive support for the idea that the greatest source of gender-related pressure on Eastridge's campus comes from same-sex peers. Participants of both sexes discussed pressure for females to achieve a certain body

type, but female participants specifically used the expression "girl-on-girl" when describing the peer pressure women experience to be stereotypically feminine. The manifestation of girl-on-girl animosity appeared particularly evident in all female halls, as Talia mentioned:

> Living in an all girl dorm, I have been exposed to glances, scoffs, and curt comments by girls to other girls about things ranging from their appearance to the things they put on their plates at [the dining hall].

Annalise mentioned that women on Eastridge's campus contribute to unhealthy feminine constructs as much as men do: "I would say that women on my campus need to be more empowered for themselves. I think that we have a disturbing trend of women being sexist against themselves." The greatest influence over females' negative self-perception, according to female participants, comes from other women who critique their habits and appearance, rather than the expectations of males for an ideal femininity.

Males at Eastridge similarly experience *proving masculinity*, in which they compare themselves with other men who they believe embody the ideal male archetype more successfully than they themselves do. In order to feel secure in their masculinity, males must continually prove their manliness—particularly to other males—either in physique or in traditionally masculine character traits such as aggression. Study participants identified several aspects of the masculine construct male students must excel in as a way to demonstrate their masculinity, such as athletic achievement and sexual appeal. Participants used competitive language to describe the masculine archetype that men hope to achieve by these means, such as "macho," "one-up" or "strongest wolf in the pack."

Table 1

Significant Female Issues on Campus

Theme	Description	Components	Frequency
Body Image and Shame	Participants identify how media images and female-to-female critiques distort the way women perceive their self-worth.	- Media portrayals - Self-judgment - "Girl-on-girl animosity"	85.7% (18)

Table 2

Significant Male Issues on Campus

Theme	Description	Components	Frequency
Unhealthy Masculine Construct	Participants discuss how society's definition of masculinity results in insecure male identities and emotional harm.	- Emotional withdrawal - Defining gender - Proving masculinity	85.7% (18)

The Role of College Students in Gender Reconciliation

Building on the research of Wildman and David (1994), participants generated ways they believed college students like themselves could advocate for gender justice on behalf of both males and females at Eastridge and in greater society. Three themes emerged from their reflections, displayed in Table 3 and Table 4. Despite the similarities between theme descriptions across sexes, participant discussions proved more specific in their reasons for implementing these measures. In order to best discuss the data, the researcher separated the themes by the participants' respective sex.

Subversive subcultures. While students proposed creating a counter-cultural environment friendlier to nontraditional gender constructs as a solution on behalf of both sexes, they discussed it more explicitly in terms of its benefits for females. The first element of creating an effective subculture came as personal reflection—examining and identifying one's own contributions to gender injustice through word, thought or action. Caroline discussed the importance of self-examination, saying it is not enough to call out injustice in others if one does not willingly engage in change one's self. Spencer echoed this idea in his own reflection: "To stop sin in the world, we must first stop sin within our hearts."

Creating a subculture that supports nontraditional femininity calls for personal change in other areas as well. Participants specifically identified language and consumer culture as two practical starting points for tackling gender inequality. Adam provided this definition of disrespectful language use on Eastridge's campus: "implicit...subtle comments that are made that portray women as being less than or inferior to men." Victoria also identified degrading language as a significant campus issue at Eastridge. Regardless of whether the speaker is a man or a woman, she said poignantly, "Language creates reality." With this in mind, shaping language in a more positive way can contribute to a campus culture that supports women and helps them see themselves as the equals of men.

Vocalizing issues and lack of conversation. As with the identification of significant issues facing both males and females, a strong parallel exists between *vocalizing issues* for females and *lack of conversation* for males. When discussing issues affecting women, study participants highlighted the lack of open conversation on their

campus regarding various aspects of the oppression of women. Students listed many reasons why these conversations did not receive more attention, including a general lack of awareness concerning the issues, strong levels of discomfort and awkwardness and the prevalence of apathy and indifference among the student body. When discussing issues affecting men, participants investigated how a lack of conversations and safe spaces prevents males from engaging in healthy dialogues relating to any gender issues.

Adam specifically talked about the negative effects of a lack of an education regarding male and female gender issues. After watching both documentaries, he reflected on the dramatic changes in awareness he has experienced in recent years:

> I found it absurd that I wasn't even aware that this was an issue until I was about 18. I think conscientious conversations that see the negative parts of the way our culture portrays BOTH men and women in a way to meet in the middle so that everyone feels the freedom to be who they are.

He went on to stress the importance of having open conversations, regardless of discomfort, since conversations have the ability to change gender constructs and set people free. Conversations, Adam states, have the power to bring men and women together: "I think a lot of this notion loses its power when it is spoken out loud. When there is mutual understanding that our society puts this pressure on us it almost seems a bit silly." Peter included the idea of role modeling in his reflection on the need for honest conversation: "I think college students need mentors and thinkers exploring different ways of viewing [gender constructs]. The introduction of those ideas allows for widespread informal communication and percolation of those ideas."

Table 3

How Can College Students Address Significant Female Issues?

Theme	Description	Components	Frequency
Subversive Subcultures	Participants encourage college students to create counter-cultures on their campuses that empower females.	- Personal reflection - Changing language	61.9% (13)
Vocalizing Issues	Participants highlight the importance of supporting females on campus through discussing women's issues and advocating for change.	- Having conversations - Advocacy	52.4% (11)

Table 4

How Can College Students Address Significant Male Issues?

Theme	Description	Components	Frequency
Lack of Conversation	Participants discuss how conversations regarding male issues create space for vulnerable conversations between males.	- Conversations - Male vulnerability	85.7% (18)

Barriers to Achieving Gender Reconciliation

Gender reconciliation proves more complex than identifying the issues or even the root causes of gender issues for men and women. While participant reflections illustrate an encouraging trend for college student interest in engaging in gender justice, significant obstacles impede progress toward the reconciliation of men and women within society. The current study found three themes in participant reflections on barriers to

reconciliation—two for females and one for males. As with the issues themselves, strong correlations exist across sexes.

Battling culture and societal messages. The pairing of barrier themes is *battling culture* for females and *societal messages* for males—and, as in previous sections, these themes identifies a shared core issue with gender-specific manifestations. Participants identified the strength of traditional male and female gender constructs as the most significant barrier to achieving gender reconciliation. Caroline mentioned, "This subject is largely unknown and not talked about, and so to bring it up, and go against what you may have been brought up to believe is highly uncomfortable and at times awkward."

Despite the many emerging social movements dedicated to the deconstruction of gender constructs, participants recognize these current constructs have deep and well-established roots. Zachary remarked that

> these problems are so heavily ingrained into our culture. We grew up immersed in it, so can't help being influenced. The trick is to learn to fight what our culture is saying about women and learning to form our own, more healthy opinions.

In their reflections, participants discussed how men have learned from the earliest stages of life that they must remain unemotional, independent and strong. Caroline discussed,

> I think some barriers would be doubting if society at large is actually wrong. I think that society tells us from a young age "men have to be strong and not cry," while sources like this documentary tell us that it is OK to cry...yet still I think we doubt if documentaries like this are actually true, and we still wonder if manhood is determined by your "toughness" because that is the way it has "always been done."

The sheer time and effort needed to redefine masculinity completely for an entire society seem, according to participants, the most formidable obstacles to social activists.

Likewise for females, traditional feminine constructs perpetuated by sexualized media and a lack of positive nontraditional female role models continues to undercut the progress of gender reconciliation. Kate comments,

> As for female leadership, we need to encourage the positive leadership qualities in the women around us. For the most part, female leadership seems strong on campus, but I don't know how many women are planning on continuing in leadership after school. Many students believe that leadership positions, especially in the church, are reserved for males by God. This is not promising for the future of our student body, and I think we need to have more conversations about this so we can be more informed as a whole. Very few people on campus who believe women shouldn't be in leadership actually talk about it.

General lack of conversation surrounding gender inequality and reconciliation, as well as the negative cultural messages about the feminist movement, cause men and women to feel awkward or even afraid of discussing such sensitive topics. Caroline discussed the negative stigmas of feminism in her reflection:

> I also think that people are scared that if they associate themselves with the feminist movement, then they are associating themselves with extreme feminism and are going to an extreme...I think people have a fear that they will move too far in one direction [and] they cannot go back to a more middle ground that they are comfortable with.

Due to these fears and a lack of informed discussion—as discussed in the previous section—change becomes much more difficult to achieve.

Lack of conversation. Apathy, indifference and a lack of education concerning inequality combat the deconstruction of unhealthy gender constructs, and they have significant influence on the absence of conversations regarding change. Regardless of the reason for their lack of participation, Kate reflects that students need to choose to engage, since "their resistance to addressing the issue makes it difficult for there to be understanding." Spencer identified the need for an "invitation to both genders to participate in reconciliation" as a way to begin conversations among otherwise uninvolved parties. Evangeline summed up both of these opinions in her reflection:

> It's going to take a lot of work on an individual level as well as on a community (or campus) wide level. The biggest obstacle is our own laziness and inertia. We have to really believe that this is a problem [that] needs fixed before we are willing to put in the time and love that it will require.

Reflections, therefore, outline some necessary steps to engaging everyone—men and women—in the conversation: education, invitation and motivation. Men and women must join as allies who value one another if they hope to achieve gender equality that truly benefits both sexes to the healing and reconciliation of society.

Table 5

Barriers to Achieving Reconciliation for Female Issues

Theme	Description	Components	Frequency
Lack of Conversation	Participants identify factors that contribute to a lack of conversation that would otherwise advance reconciliation.	- Fear - Discomfort - Unawareness	61.9% (13)
Battling Culture	Participants acknowledge the power of current cultural messages regarding feminine worth and roles.	- Fighting messages - Apathy and disconnect - Selfishness and profit	57.1% (12)

Table 6

Barriers to Achieving Reconciliation for Male Issues

Theme	Description	Components	Frequency
Societal Messages	Participants discuss how the societal masculine construct is deeply ingrained in the American psyche, and that changes will be extremely difficult.	- Fighting messages - Vulnerability	61.9% (13)

Chapter 5

Discussion

Common Themes

Participants provided different reflections for the pressures males and females experience, as well as how those pressures manifest on a university campus differently than in society at large. Despite this disparity, both male and female participants shared that their societal pressures stemmed from similar sources, although these pressures manifest differently depending on one's sex. While the manifestations did not prove identical across sexes, some pressures have common origins, demonstrating men and women are, in many cases, affected by and struggling with the same societal pressures (Zamarripa et al., 2003). The behaviors that result from societal pressures, however, appear unique because of the specific gender constructs men and women adhere to.

Proving gender with the body. Participants identified body image as the most significant issue for women on the Eastridge campus and identified unhealthy masculinity as the most significant issue for men on campus—with the requirement for a stereotypical masculine body as one of the strongest elements. Both themes reveal that male and female students experience pressure from their same-sex peers to achieve a certain media-endorsed body type in order to become appropriately "masculine" or "feminine." Interestingly, neither male nor female participants mentioned pressure or expectations from the opposite sex as influences in their reflections, suggesting same-sex

pressures have a greater influence on body image for both men and women than opposite-sex pressures.

How same-sex pressures on body image and physique affect behavior differs between male and female college students. Participants identified that female students use exercise and diet to achieve the ideal feminine physique and sexual appeal, consistent with previous research (Kwan, 2010). While the current study supported previous research in identifying these common methods, findings proved inconsistent with previously identified motivations for female engagement in body-modifying behaviors. Previous research proposes that females primarily diet and exercise in order to have a body that pleases men (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Kwan, 2010; Stewart & Szymanski, 2012). Findings from the current study, however, suggest women's primary motivation for their behaviors shifts from a focus on pleasing males to a focus on comparing one's own physique to those of other females.

The findings on male students follow the trend of same-sex comparison as a rising motivation for physical behaviors. As the masculine construct emphasizes what one participant referred to as being the "strongest wolf," the current study suggested the primary motivation for males in becoming strong and sexually attractive is to impress other males, just as much as—if not more so than—to impress women. In this way, men prove their masculinity through sports and physical activity. Physically fit males appear more masculine and manly than those not—a belief wholly consistent with previous research (Kwan, 2010).

Reconciliation and barriers. The importance of engaging in conversation emerged as the most significant theme for both male and female issues. Participants

discussed a general lack of conversation concerning the specific issues of injustice as significant barriers, although this absence is quickly changing with nationally recognized social movements such as HeForShe (Watson, 2014). Through a raised awareness of the issues men and women face, people gain empathy and become more motivated to actively engage in pursuing gender reconciliation (Parks & Roberton, 1998b, as cited in Parks & Roberton, 2000).

More than lack of awareness, participants cited apathy and disinterest as instrumental in the lack of headway society makes in the area of gender reconciliation. Conversations must take place that not only raise awareness but also educate people on the importance of resolving the gender inequalities that affect both men and women (Watson, 2014). Only by convincing society the struggles men and women face truly do damage and merit attention can proponents of reconciliation hope to alleviate the hurtful pressures men and women face.

Female-Specific Struggles and Reconciliation

As discussed previously, women's primarily experience the pressure—from both society and from their peers—to achieve a specific body type. While the current study showed men also experience pressure from both of these sources to achieve a particular physique, it does not emerge as the primary pressure they experience as for women.

Achieving reconciliation necessitates a change of behaviors and value. Gender reconciliation on behalf of women starts first within the minds of individuals, as an examination of the self, in order to see how they might contribute to gender injustice. Through personal reflection and evaluation, members of small communities—both men and women—should take it upon themselves to speak out against instances of

discrimination, rather than submitting through fear to the bystander effect (Fischer et al., 2011, as cited in Leone, Parrott, Swartout, & Tharp, 2015). The combined efforts of these subcultures render healthy change in greater society possible. Although challenging cultural norms seems intimidating, the mass of small actions of individuals will result in a lasting change.

Female participants in this study revealed the most acute pressure they experience with respect to their physiques comes from peer interaction and critiques from fellow students. Their reflections on reconciliation collectively outline the importance of fostering judgment-free communities that encourage females to accept their own bodies without feeling the need to conform to media-endorsed standards. The significance of positive media cannot be understated—after all, the stereotypes female students struggle to aspire to come from media portrayals. If, however, female-to-female relationships do not provide the support and acceptance that engenders a positive self-image, female students will continue to feel judged and shamed for having what they perceive as a sub-standard physique.

Students need encouragement and support from members of their communities, but this study showed the encouragement within same-sex relationships remains absolutely imperative. Women must have the support of other women in their environments in order to build confidence in exerting a positive, healthy femininity that allows them to be themselves. Females must receive this affirmation in order for them to function as healthy women.

Male-Specific Struggles and Reconciliation

In the same way, men also need the support of other men in order to become

healthy males with a healthy masculine construct. Males must feel safe to receive relational support from other males for the sake of their own holistic health as men and as individuals—however, traditional masculinity makes this support rarely safe enough for them to seek. The suppression of emotions, a well-documented phenomenon among males of all ages (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Downey et al., 2000; Gilgoff & Ginwright, 2015; Jennings, 2011; Miller, 2013; Watson, 2014; Zamarripa et al., 2003), proved the most frequently discussed sub-category in the theme participants identified for male struggles. The current study reveals the two most significant influences on the stifling of male emotions come from strong societal messages and from the pressures to exhibit masculine qualities competitively.

With respect to masculinity, if affirmation comes only in response to masculine behaviors and social punishment in response to feminine behaviors, males will not include feminine traits in their masculine identities. The primary drive for males to adopt traditionally masculine identities comes from fear of rejection, and males refuse to assimilate feminine traits into their identities, regardless of whether they desire to do so or not. It is crucial that the masculine construct expand in such a way that males can adopt healthy behaviors traditionally considered more feminine—such as emotional expression or more caregiving behaviors—without the fear of persecution from society (Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Good & Moss-Racusin, 2010; Leone et al., 2015; Levstik & Groth, 2002). Removing the stigmas associated with male vulnerability proves a crucial step in freeing men both to be whole persons and to value traditionally feminine traits—as well as women in general. The influence of male-male mentorship and positive, respected male role models who display a well-rounded masculinity offer some of the

most powerful ways for the masculine construct to expand beyond its traditional boundaries.

The removal of stigmas surrounding male emotional sharing, however, is not an easy goal to meet and does not depend on the efforts of men alone. Power exists in the public affirmation of men by women as well as other men, and this affirmation of males when they display traits or behaviors considered traditionally feminine remains necessary for healthy growth. Nevertheless, the efforts to alter the masculine construct should operate as a delicate and intentional process. As a point of nonnegotiable importance, the inclusion of traditionally feminine characteristics in the masculine construct cannot become framed merely as a "deconstruction," as if masculinity were something innately dangerous to be done away with. "Corrective" attitudes related to a changing masculine identity represent the greatest concerns for males, as a fear and sense of loss are the reasons they cling to traditional masculinity, which they feel gender reconciliation proponents try to take from them (Connell, 1996).

Efforts surrounding the restoration of feminine behaviors to the masculine construct should be presented as an addition to masculinity. It is important to show males they will not lose their masculine identities, nor will they experience shame for traditionally masculine traits. Behaviors and characteristics manifest in both sexes in different ways by society—even those strongly associated with one particular sex, such as aggression or caregiving (Calasanti, 2010; Watson, 2014). Men must experience the freedom to acknowledge ways in which they already exhibit core characteristics typically associated with females and feel released to exhibit those characteristics as part of a masculine identity. If males do not have to prove themselves through hyper-masculine

behaviors but feel they have free choice to construct their gender identities with nontraditional elements (Prabhu, 2014; Watson, 2014), they will prove valuable partners in advancing gender reconciliation.

Implications for Higher Education

This study demonstrated programming dedicated to normalizing discussions of gender injustice and reconciliation as highly effective and desired among students. Many participants discussed educational programming as an effective way to raise awareness and motivate students to participate actively in achieving gender reconciliation on their campuses. Universities have a responsibility to provide creative programmatic opportunities for students to engage with the topic of inequality, whether on their own campuses or in partnership with organizations beyond their campuses.

In addition to encouraging student activities, university administrations have a responsibility to advocate for gender justice and reconciliation within the university's leadership. Whether by creating a more gender diverse staff or developing strategic partnerships with outside organizations that empower gender minorities to pursue leadership, administrations should model the attitudes of equality they hope to foster in their students.

Gender justice and reconciliation also have implications for Title IX and how universities respond to gender discrimination on campus. Universities must establish policies that encourage campuses to eliminate language that marginalizes or degrades students based on gender or sex, as well as addressing instances of discrimination purposefully. By treating gender discriminatory language and behavior seriously, administrations can help students understand the power of language and empower victims

to receive justice, as well as empower other students to advocate for one another. Institutions will also likely see a cultural shift toward more inclusive language on behalf of gender minorities.

Since the study reveals the importance of relational support from same-sex community members—male support for men and female support for women—higher education professionals should invest more in mentoring opportunities for students. Whether the relationship exists between a faculty member and a student or reflects "big brother, big sister" peer mentorship, colleges and universities should prioritize providing safe relational spaces for both male and female students to learn to affirm their own identities. If students can see respected mentors and peers model healthy masculinity or femininity within the context of relationship, they will find the confidence and faith to begin creating and accepting their own nontraditional, healthy and human gender construct.

Study Limitations

The current study faced several limitations. The sample size, while reasonable for qualitative research, remained nevertheless small. In order to gain a more full understanding of how gender issues appear on Eastridge's campus, a larger group of participants would have been more desirable. A higher response rate, or perhaps a response rate at a larger institution with a more ethnically diverse student body, may have produced different reflections or generated unique themes. The documentaries themselves may have been biased in the way they presented statistics, stories and information in such a way as to generate a tendency toward gender justice advocacy among viewers.

The current study also took place at a small, religious, liberal arts institution. Religious affiliation likely influenced how students interacted with the topic of gender justice, particularly with regard to how students discussed women in leadership areas such as the church. The opinions of religious students may not prove representative of a larger population that includes nonreligious students or even students of a more diverse sample of religious affiliations, whether Christian or a non-Christian religion. An emphasis on the liberal arts may have also affected how students think about gender issues or interpret the inequalities they described in their reflections. At institutions such as trade schools that have different educational goals and desired learning outcomes, students may approach gender inequalities differently or may see different manifestations of the issues altogether. The unique campus culture of Eastridge University—a smaller population with an emphasis on close relationships— also may have influenced the nature of participant reflections. Perhaps at a state institution without the reality of a close-knit campus community, students might see different gender inequalities or may interpret them in light of different student-student or student-faculty relationships.

Future Research

Research on the presence of gender-related pressures and behaviors should take place at a more diverse range of institutions, such as for-profit, nonreligious, community colleges or trade schools. The perceptions of gender inequality on such campuses would greatly expand current understandings of what issues and societal messages most affect male and female college students at other institution types. Additional research should study the perceptions of university faculty, administration and staff of gender inequalities and their attitudes and beliefs toward gender reconciliation. The perspectives of students

on the topics of gender inequality and reconciliation remain valuable, but the views of administrators would contribute to a more complete illustration of how a university as a whole interacts with the subject of gender reconciliation.

Another future area of research should examine how an increased awareness of gender issues affects student leadership engagement. To quote Victoria in her reflection on the subject: "College students are the perfect people to talk about these issues with because we will be shaping society soon." If discussing gender issues will equip students as better future leaders, a study could interestingly address whether engagement with the topic during college influences their desire to participate in campus leadership roles.

An additional area of interest to future researchers would come in the impact of same-sex mentorship on the creation of healthy gender constructs and gender relations. Since students model their gender constructs based on observations of same-sex peers and media representations, it follows that the negative self-images and harmful male-female relations that stem from these constructs would improve drastically if students had access to positive role models from whom they could base their self-constructs.

Conclusion

Gender reconciliation exists a multi-faceted social issue that affects nearly every part of people's lives. While the wide reach of gender inequality, affecting both men and women, makes it a daunting obstacle to overcome, it is encouraging to see young men and women recognize the importance of reconciliation and how it affects their peers. The expansion of gender constructs, the reconciliation of male and female relationships in society and the reconstruction of discriminatory systems will take a long time. As Evangeline noted, however, "[I]mportant change is [n]ever easy." As long as male and

female students believe in the importance of gender reconciliation, they will find themselves empowered to go the distance and begin the slow process of change and freedom. Partnership offers the key to reconciliation—men and women working together for the success, health and human flourishing of both men and women.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please check one:

__ Male
__ Female
__ Prefer not to say

How many years of college have you ***COMPLETED***?

__ less than 1 (FR)
__ 1 (SO)
__ 2 (JR)
__ 3 (SR)
__ 4+
__ Prefer not to say

Which of the following best describes your living situation?
__ Single-sex
__ Co-educational
__ Off Campus
__ Prefer not to say

"MISS REPRESENTATION"

Did you watch "Miss Representation"?

__ Yes (*continue*)
__ No (*skip to "The Mask You Live In"*)

1. What issues and/or struggles concerning females in society did this documentary portray?

2. Of these issues, which do you believe is/are the greatest need(s) to address ***on your campus***? Explain why.

3. Of these issues, which do you believe is/are the greatest need(s) to address ***in society***? Explain why.

4. How do you think ***college students*** can address the significant issues that you identified, both on campus and in society?

5. What is/are barrier(s) to achieving reconciliation for the needs that you identified in Questions 2 and 3?

"THE MASK YOU LIVE IN"

Did you watch "The Mask You Live In"?

__ Yes (*continue*)
__ No (*skip to "Further Comments"*)

6. What issues and/or struggles concerning males in society did this documentary portray?

7. Of these issues, which do you believe is/are the greatest need(s) to address ***on your campus***? Explain why.

8. Of these issues, which do you believe is/are the greatest need(s) to address ***in society***? Explain why.

9. How do you think ***college students*** can address the significant issues that you identified, both on campus and in society?

10. What is/are barrier(s) to achieving reconciliation for the needs that you identified in Questions 7 and 8?

FURTHER COMMENTS

Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

THANK YOU

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Exploring the Shared Cores of Gender Issues: The Significance of Same-Gender Interactions as Pathways to Equality and Reconciliation

You are invited to participate in a research study of college student perspectives on gender inequality and reconciliation. You were selected as a possible subject because you are a student who has viewed the documentary "Miss Representation" and/or the documentary "The Mask You Live In." We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

STUDY PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to determine what significant needs male and female college students see on their campus and in society with regard to gender inequality. In particular, the researcher is interested in seeing whether there are common themes within and across genders with regard to identifying these needs.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:
If you agree to participate, you will be one of approximately 1,900 subjects who will be invited to participate in this research.

PROCEDURES FOR THIS STUDY:
If you agree to be in this study, you will do the following:
Take part in an online survey consisting of reflection questions relating to ideas presented in "Miss Representation" and/or "The Mask You Live In." You will answer five reflection questions for each documentary that you viewed. The survey will take an estimated 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey will be completed in full confidentiality. There will be three demographic questions. The results of individual surveys will not be released to participants. However, an overall anonymous summary of results will be provided upon the completion of the study. The survey will be open for a total of two weeks beginning on Tuesday March 24, 2015 until Tuesday April 7, 2015. The results of this study will be used to assist colleges and universities to create student-

led initiatives that foster gender equality on their campuses. There are no risks associated with participating in this study beyond the experiences of everyday life.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee complete confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored. Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Institutional Review Board or its designees, the study sponsor, and (as allowed by law) state and federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) etc., who may need to access your research records.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:

For questions about the study or a research-related inquiry, contact the researcher. If you cannot reach the researcher during regular business hours (e.g. 8:00 AM-5:00 PM), please leave a voicemail and the researcher will call you back as soon as possible.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

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 the Institutional Review Board.

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 the university. You will not be compensated with pay for taking part in this survey.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

__ Yes

__ No