"JUST CUZ YOU WEAR A COWBOY HAT DOESN'T MAKE YOU A COWBOY":
PERCEPTIONS OF MASCULINITY AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

by

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Abstract

Research conducted since 1990 suggests that young adults over 18 but under 29 years of age feel as though they are neither an adult nor an adolescent but somewhere between. This blur of boundaries between adolescence and adulthood can lead to the question, if a male does not yet think he is an adult, does he also not yet think he is a man? Guided by Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood, the purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to identify the inter-individual differences in characterizing masculinity and the factors that may contribute to the development of these definitions. Males ($n = 20$) from a public Midwestern university, ages 18-23 ($\bar{x} = 19.7$ years) participated in individual interviews addressing their perceptions and definitions of masculinity. Three dominant themes about masculinity emerged including physical, emotional and behavioral characteristics, with behavioral characteristics containing 11 dominant and 4 lesser themes. While participants' ideas about the extrinsic or visible characteristics of men and masculinity were similar to that of their peers in this study, the intrinsic or ideological characteristics of men were more closely aligned with that of their families. The majority of participants identified as not being men but stated that they are in the process of achieving manhood. Thus the development of a man may be separate from but similar to that of the development of an adult. Implications of this study include the practitioner response to influences responsible for differing masculine characteristics and the behaviors that result. Drinking alcohol has strong peer and media influences, as does disrespect toward women, both of which could have an impact on the individual. Also, the stress associated with various conflicting messages from family, peers, media, and their own opinions may be problematic for many youth.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

At times, it is difficult to find experiences that are representative of nearly half (49.1%) of the American population (Howden & Meyer, 2011). Often, while individuals may be part of a large group, their individual experiences may differ greatly depending on socioeconomic level, education level etc. Regardless of one's race, socioeconomic status, or education level, all American males are bombarded with constant messages and tests of masculinity.

Masculinity is a socially defined concept based on sets of behaviors and social rules that dictate the way in which men are expected to behave (Myers, 2012). It shapes the way that men of all ages interact with one another and with those of the opposite sex, creating a level of conformity if one is to be perceived as a "man." This concept is continuously circulated through various types of media and as such, is a fluid and dynamic part of life for men. Not only is masculinity socially defined, but it is also socially policed in an effort to maintain conformity (Slaatten & Gabrys, 2014). Obviously, those who are still developing their sense of self, or self-identity, are particularly vulnerable because they are bombarded with media messages telling them what the "ideal male" is and what they should do, look like, act like at the same time as they are constructing who they are. This means that the more messages about hegemonic, or dominant cultural masculinity traits children and adolescents consume, the less likely they are to have a positive self-image and positive psychological well-being, because it is extremely difficult to meet these nigh unattainable standards that are set. At the same time, the more messages about masculinity these children and adolescents see, the more likely they are to police one another based on these standards. Ultimately, reaching for these unattainable goals could have a negative impact on quality of life (Myers, 2012). However, as Arnett (2006) stated, because of several cultural shifts (e.g., onset of increased use of birth control, greater college

attendance by women, delay of marriage), traditional markers of adulthood changed. These changes allowed young adults (called emerging adults by Arnett) to extend their need of identity exploration from adolescence into what would be traditionally called adulthood. Currently, estimates from the 2010 Census put the population of those within emerging adulthood (ages 18-24 years) slightly above 30.6 million people, just fewer than 10% of the population (Howden & Meyer, 2011). These individuals by and large do not consider themselves full adults but also do not consider themselves adolescents (Arnett, 1998; 2000; 2001; 2003; 2006; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Nelson, Badger & Wu, 2004). They see themselves as in between these two developmental stages, primarily because they perceive themselves as not having met both their personal expectations as well as society's expectations to qualify as adults.

In the present study, I examine perceptions of masculinity among adult American males within the period of emerging adulthood (age 18-29 years) and how peers, family, media, and one's individual development affect these perceptions. Examining family, peer, and societal expectations that existed throughout their lives will add to the existing scientific literature on the development of masculinity as well as the unique experiences of those within emerging adulthood. If emerging adults do not consider themselves to be fully adult, do they consider themselves to be men? It would seem as though they would refrain from calling themselves boys because they would perceive themselves as past adolescence. However, prior research would suggest they would also refrain from calling themselves men because they do not consider themselves fully adult (Arnett, 1998; 2000; 2001; 2003; 2006; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Nelson, et al., 2004).

While understanding masculinity does not necessarily seem like a pressing issue, it must be remembered that for the 49.1 % of the population of the United States that identify as males

(Howden & Meyer, 2011), messages about masculinity are sent, received, interpreted, and acted upon. These actions affect the way in which males talk, behave, act in front of others, and even think. Those particularly vulnerable to these incoming messages are likely to be those still developing their identity (children, adolescents, and now emerging adults). Thus, it becomes critically important to understand the ways in which these messages take hold within the development of the self.

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

Development of Identity

Many have studied identity and its formation but one of the most influential researchers within the field was Erik Erikson (Marcia, 1980). Erikson proposed that there are specific stages with which one travels through as they mature, each with unique obstacles to overcome (Erikson, 1963, 1968). While he believed that identity was central to choices and decisions throughout the life span, he believed that its solidification occurred within adolescence (Erikson, 1963, 1968). A component of adult identity, as described by Erikson, was the occupation in which an individual chose and was trained in (1963). He suggested that with technological advances came the delay of adult identity due to the need for more specialized occupational training (Erikson, 1963). Adulthood was also described as having unique responsibilities. Erikson explained the necessity for peer groups in adolescence by stating that with adulthood, its subsequent responsibilities, and new physiological growth, there is a perceived loss of identity within the individual as the identity they have created throughout childhood now gives way to their adult identity (1963). This degradation of their prior identity and the anxiety that ensues creates an inner struggle with how they are perceived by others (Erikson, 1963, 1968). This perceived loss of identity is mitigated by the peer group, which functions as a clique of "sameness" (Erikson, 1963). This clique is created to protect against the discomfort and feeling of loss towards their past identity and serves as a placeholder while the individual rebuilds their identity (Erikson, 1963, 1968).

Marcia furthered Erikson's work on identity by attempting to understand the processes central to the development of identity. Marcia proposed that identity is the structure of oneself. The more developed one's identity is, the more attuned one is about their individuality and sense of purpose in the world, while the less developed one's identity is, the more difficult it is to

define one's individuality, requiring it to be defined and evaluated by others (1980, 1993). Marcia also believed that solidification of an individual's identity is the marker of the end of childhood and the start of adulthood (1993). One's identity, according to Marcia (1993), uses past experiences to create peace with the past and gives heading for the future. Thus, it is a dynamic process in regard to both time and structure. While adolescence is a time that is more heavily weighted with the demands of developing the structure of identity, it is not the only time within the lifespan that it is evaluated (Marcia, 1980). Also, the structure of identity is not a separate developmental process. Its development is occurring at the same time as other aspects of one's life (sexual orientation, career path, etc.) and is affected by these various processes as well (Marcia, 1980). Also, the structure of one's identity is developed gradually in small pieces and is furthered by the decisions made over time (Marcia, 1980).

Arnett took identity development further when he proposed that identity development and exploration extended past the boundaries of adolescence, a boundary within the lifespan that Erikson (1963, 1968) has provided defined limits. Arnett proposed that around the 1990's (Arnett, 2000), adolescents began to feel as though they were not fully adult. Arnett began calling this period of life "emerging adulthood." Arnett proposed that emerging adulthood was coming on the heels of a shift in the traditional benchmarks of adulthood due to the change from a manufacturing to an information-based economy (Arnett, 2006). Interestingly enough, Erikson predicted that this would occur, believing that with advances in technology would come a need for advanced occupational training that would delay the development of adult identity (Erikson, 1963).

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is the new coming-of-age term used by developmentalists to describe the transitional years between adolescence and full adulthood (Arnett, 2000). It is defined by some as the age, between 18 and 25 years, where these youth are able to extend their needs for exploration of self-identity from what is adolescence to what was traditionally called adulthood (Arnett, 2006). When compared to previous generations in the United States, the current generation of youth are labeled as lazy, irresponsible, or slackers (Grossman, 2005; Hart, 2005) but he argues that this is not necessarily the case.

Until the 1990's, strong social norms within the United States dictated that young adults quickly move out of the home, gain steady employment, get married, and have children after high school, which is evidenced by 35% of the U.S. population attending college in the 1960's (Arnett, 2000, 2006; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999). Of this 35%, women were a minority. While some women did attend college, their careers were severely limited and the expectation was to keep employment only until they began having children (Arnett, 2006). This is vastly different within the 21st century. Of all high school graduates in the United States, 66% have moved on to enrollment in postsecondary education (Kena et al., 2014) with 71% of women enrolling. This near doubling of overall college attendance from previous generations means that more traditional social norms of adulthood had to be put off and/or refined until later in life, allowing for more options in which to individualize life choices, such as where to live, with whom to partner, and where to work, each of which allows more time for traditional adulthood norms to be delayed (Arnett, 2006).

While some of these "traditional" norms are mentioned by young people as defining the threshold of adulthood (Arnett, 1998, 2001, 2003; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Mayseless & Scharf,

2003; Nelson et al., 2004), the norms are changing into more abstract concepts instead of easily measurable ones such as having a child or getting married. By and large, some of the top answers young people (between the ages of 18-29 years) have given for defining adulthood are accepting responsibility for their own actions, creating their personal beliefs and values without the help of others, and being able to support themselves financially (Arnett, 1998, 2001, 2003; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004).

As research on the period of emerging adulthood expands, some researchers propose that it is a unique period in the lives of young adults only within industrialized countries (Arnett, 2000). The definition of adulthood and the way young adults determine whether they are adults depends on socially constructed experiences (Johnson, Berg & Sirotzki, 2007), although others have suggested that it is ultimately determined by the young adults themselves, a subjective age identity (Shanahan, Porfeli, Mortimer & Erickson, 2005). However, Benson and Elder (2011) found that this subjective age identity and maturity are linked; in fact, they help to explain one another. Largely absent from the empirical literature, however, is a discussion on how emerging adulthood affects minorities, including individuals with disabilities. For those with physical disabilities, the thresholds for adulthood may be slightly different, but evidence to date suggests that those who are physically disabled see themselves as typical and identify with the traditional benchmarks of what adulthood is, as defined by other emerging adults (Gibson et al., 2014). In regard to racial and ethnic minorities, both traditional and nontraditional benchmarks of adulthood were identified (Lowe, Dillon, Rhodes & Zwiebach, 2013). Sexual minorities also identify with emerging adulthood; however, the benchmarks of adulthood do not fully encapsulate their differing experiences from the heterosexual majority. This is a problem that Torkelson (2012) argued should be changed, so that emerging adulthood is more inclusive of

individuals who do not identify with the traditional benchmarks of adulthood, both heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Gender Identity

In 1981, Sandra Bem introduced her Gender Schema Theory to the academic world (Bem, 1981) using a cognitive psychological approach to explain gender identity development. Bem's prior research on sex typing behavior (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976) was seminal to the development of her theory. Bem explained that sex typing was endemic within American culture and that its roots were strongly tied to culture and society (Bem, 1981). Gender Schema Theory proposed the idea that schema, or cognitive organizational structures used to categorize all incoming stimuli, were not only directed by one's current perspective of the world but also employed a lens of gender to classify not only people and behaviors but also objects and ideas (Bem, 1981). Within the introductory article of her theory, Bem used the example of how young girls are not lauded for increased strength, just as young boys are not praised for their enhanced nurturing behavior to show that this gender categorization is so consuming that even the dimensions of gender themselves were sex-typed (Bem, 1981). Ultimately, Bem proposed her theory was centered on the idea that gender schema separate incoming stimuli into two categories: male or female. This dichotomous categorization, furthered by cultural and societal values, began children's understanding of gender by linking their sex with the appropriate sex-typed schema, spurring the development of their ideas on what masculinity or femininity was throughout their life (Bem, 1981). To avoid leading children to a dichotomous path of being either male or female, Bem later suggested that parents could help their children understand that some behaviors, ideas, objects, for example, are androgynous and are open to both sexes by teaching their children about sex differences as well as providing

additional or alternative schema (Bem, 1983). It should be noted that while Bem originally

extolled the possible virtues of androgynous individuals, those that identified with both

masculine and feminine behaviors, ideas and objects, her ideas changed with time. Bem later

proposed that instead of being judged on one specific gender criteria (male *or* female),

androgynous individuals would be judged on two (male *and* female) and thus would find it more

difficult to fit the mold created by society (Bem, 1983).

Masculinity

Previous research on the development of masculinity has suggested that is it an

epigenetic process (Lerner, 1998) including genetics from the family and environmental

experiences (Mitchell, Baker & Jacklin, 1989) with primary players "such as teachers and other

adult role models." More recent research has found that the media can effectively teach young

boys about hegemonic, or dominant cultural masculine traits (Myers, 2012) as well as family and

peers (Galambos, Berenbaum & McHale, 2009). These sources are clearly taken to heart as they

begin to manifest themselves in perceived inadequacies within the children, namely through

differing body types (Phelps et al., 1993; Vilhjalmsson, Kristjansdottir & Ward, 2012). These

negative perceptions are further engrained within school-aged children due to the intense social

pressure to conform to masculine norms. When behavior contrary to these norms appears, it may

be labeled as feminine by peers and gay-related slurs may be used to call out the perceived

differences (Slaatten & Gabrys, 2014). While this research suggests that hegemonic masculine

traits are quickly and easily transmitted to children and policed by their peers, it also shows the

power that these traits can have on self-esteem and masculine identity, namely by the low levels

of self-esteem and masculine identity within the children of these studies (Vilhjalmsson et al.,

2012). However, at least within the African American community, these negative effects of

hegemonic masculinity on children may be mitigated with adult support. Current research on children within African American communities has shown that positive male role models can play a large part in determining healthy and adaptable masculine identities (Roberts-Douglas & Curtis-Boles, 2013).

Experiences within higher education, which examine gender identity and masculinity, may also have an impact on perceived masculinity, helping it to transform from a rigid to fluid set of rules (Johnson & Weber, 2011). Emerging adulthood, on the whole, is a time for identity exploration (Arnett, 2000) and as such, is a time when young men have the ability to develop more flexible gender role attitudes (Jaramillo-Sierra & Allen, 2013). Also, for male emerging adults, solid friendships, specifically with gay men, allow them to do away with hegemonic gender roles and can have a large impact on their sense of self (Barrett, 2013).

Although engaging with the media contributes to the construction of hegemonic masculinity traits within young boys, it is also a powerful source for the continued construction and maintenance of hegemonic masculine attitudes later in life, although this is dependent on the target audience. For instance, researchers found that magazines geared towards less educated and less affluent men contained more hypermasculine advertisements (Vokey, Tefft & Tysiaczny, 2013) while advertisements found in men's lifestyle magazines from Taiwan, China, and the United States discovered that the "ideal" man was characterized by refinement and sophistication, was trendy, had a refined appearance, and had a knack for commodity consumption (Tan, Shaw, Cheng & Kim, 2013). These masculine characteristics are so engrained within media that when asked to pick out types of men, male participants were able to not only do this successfully but were also able to attribute typical behaviors to these different male types (Dunlap & Johnson, 2013). Advertisers and program directors in the media are becoming so

efficient at portraying these masculine ideologies that using it was related to men's views on women's bodies. The more media consumed, the more likely men were to view the female body as a sexual object, so much so that it caused negative views about breastfeeding and childbirth (Ward, Merriwether & Caruthers, 2006). Due to the efficiency and effectiveness at portraying these masculine ideologies, establishments that traditionally did not advertise events are doing so with masculine ideologies in mind. Christian churches have begun using elements of masculine ideologies by advertising cookouts, meats, and barbecues in an effort to get more male parishioners to participate in church activities (Gelfer, 2013).

While hegemonic masculinity portrayed in media can alter self-perceptions of body image among children (Vilhjalmsson et al., 2012), it also has an effect on men later in life. Like the youth with "unsatisfactory" bodies (as defined by the media) (Vilhjalmsson et al., 2012), older males also become dissatisfied with their bodies, primarily with their body weight, penis size and height, all of which are associated with appearance and self-esteem (Tiggemann, Martins & Churchett, 2008). Among other factors attributed to the "ideal man" were the ability to become erect and ejaculate (Johnson, 2010), as well as the ability to grow body hair, which is associated with power and virility (Fahs, 2011). Body hair was so engrained in hegemonic masculinity that its voluntary removal for a college project was nearly-universally condemned for men by their heterosexual peers. Also, for those that participated in Fahs' study, body hair removal was "masculinized" by "using box cutters, refusing to use shaving cream or pink razors, saying aloud that it showed off their leg muscles, and so on" (Fahs, 2011, p. 488). However, while in mainstream heterosexual culture trimming of or complete removal of body hair is considered effeminate, within the culture of "metrosexuals" (heterosexual men who engage in traditional feminine behaviors such as eating healthy, grooming pubic hair, visiting spas, shaving

body hair etc.), body hair removal or trimming is acceptable (Fahs, 2011). Within subsets of the gay community, there are those that value body hair. While Filiault and Drummond (2013) mentioned that gay culture may embrace a hairless physique, gay athletes found body hair removal unnecessary, unattractive, and unnatural (Filiault & Drummond, 2013).

While body hair removal is a relatively neutral behavior, hegemonic masculinity can have more negative impacts on behavior, particularly sexual behavior. Hostile masculinity levels and peer norms were associated with highly aggressive sexual behavior (Thompson, Swartout & Koss, 2013); overt hostility and anger expression was linked to masculine ideology (Jakupcak, Tull & Roemer, 2005); and masculinity was associated with indirect aggression, albeit no more than femininity (Leenaars & Rinaldi, 2009). Within several higher education introductory courses with an ethnically diverse sample, researchers found that adherence to masculine norms was associated with an increase in the portrayal of the "playboy" image and violence while the importance of work decreased (Kahn, Brett & Holmes, 2011). Masculine self-consciousness was a strong predictor of smoking in heterosexual men (Pachankis, Westmaas & Dougherty, 2011) and masculine ideologies were also a component of hypermasculinity (Corprew, Matthews & Mitchell, 2014).

While masculinity obviously has an impact on the relationships men have with women and with one another, its manifestation may be different than what the media suggests. Various forms of media may show men having blunt conversations about sexual activities but one study found that talking to peers about sex was more common among women than men (Lefkowitz, Boone & Shearer, 2004). When men did talk to their peers about their relationships, the conversation was divided equally between warm and intimate sentiments (generally perceived as a more feminine characteristic), as well as emotionally distant ones (to maintain masculinity)

(Korobov & Thorne, 2006). Thus, our perceptions from the media of how men talk to one another about relationships may be flawed. Less surprising however, was the fact that men were more likely to initiate romantic intimacy than women, which was associated with the traditional male gender role (Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011). Men also had more strict rules on what types of behavior outside of the relationship constituted cheating than women, although this was lessened when talking about oneself versus the spouse (Gute, Eshbaugh & Wiersma, 2008). However, increased gender role conflict in men, among other things, was associated with the use of pornographic material (Szymanski & Stewart-Richardson, 2014).

Masculinity is a complex and individualized process with ties to self-esteem and self-identity. While the factors that may affect the development of masculinity are well defined within the current literature (family, peers, media, etc.), there is no indication as to how the development of masculinity continues over time. The literature on the process and depth of the development of masculinity within the individual is shallow and more must be understood about how this process affects the identity of the individual. This study examines the question what does it mean to be a man separate from being an adult and the factors that contribute to that characterization in an attempt to understand how perceptions of masculinity pair with the perception of adulthood.

Chapter 3 - Method

Approaches

The current study was designed to examine the development of masculinity during emerging adulthood. Therefore, a phenomenological study with a symbolic interaction and social construction approach was appropriate because masculinity is a unique concept to those that identify as male within a particular society. Also, those that identify as male are inundated with messages and symbols of ideal masculinity every day through the media and masculinity is socially defined.

Research Questions

The overall research question for this study was: what is the meaning of "being a man" among emerging adults? Specifically, I wanted to know what are the defining characteristics of "being a man" according to emerging adults, and what factors influence the definition of "being a man" according to emerging adults.

Theory

I used the theory of emerging adulthood by Arnett (2006) to guide the study about the understanding of masculinity. The theory suggests that societal rules and traditional benchmarks that define adulthood are delayed, allowing for an additional exploration into self-identity from adolescence into what was traditionally adulthood (Arnett, 2006). Arnett suggests that these delays in traditional benchmarks have caused many young people to believe that they are not adults or at least "full" adults. Arnett (2006) describes emerging adulthood as the age of identity exploration, the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities. These ages correspond to emerging adults and their extended period of finding themselves, feeling insecure in living arrangements and relationships, focusing on identifying

their needs, feeling constantly in-between adolescence and adulthood, and possessing remarkable hope for their future.

Unit of Analysis

In order to understand the developmental process of masculinity in emerging adulthood, the unit of analysis within this study was the individual male within the period of emerging adulthood. Arnett originally suggested that emerging adulthood be defined as the ages between 18 and 29 as did other researchers (Arnett, 1998, 2001, 2003; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004). More recently Arnett has come to define emerging adulthood as the ages between 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2006). Due to the differing age definitions, for this study males between the ages of 18 to 29 were invited to participate. While it is frequently assumed that a bachelor's degree is finished in four years, students may decide to continue into graduate school directly without a break. With this additional education, it may be assumed that traditional benchmarks of adulthood must be delayed further. This would suggest that some graduate students may not feel fully adult. Consequently I decided the broadest age range, based on past research, would allow for both undergraduate and graduate students to participate.

Sampling Strategy and Criteria

In order to answer the research questions, I examined one specific group of individuals so that I was able to focus on depth within my study instead of breadth. I sought to understand what these individuals experienced and how they defined masculinity. Therefore, I used a criterion-based sampling strategy (Patton, 2002). I wanted to study young men living the Midwest that are within emerging adulthood. Therefore, the criteria were all emerging adult males, who identified as American citizens between the ages of 18 and 29. Participants were both undergraduate and graduate college students at a Midwestern university and were recruited by flyer (Appendix A) in

a large introductory college course and by announcement in a campus-wide, online daily news release (Appendix B). A monetary incentive was advertised to be given to students who agreed to participate in the study.

Participant Demographics

Twenty male college students participated in this study. Demographic information was collected by questionnaire (Appendix C). All participants in this study identified as males between the ages of 18 and 23 years ($\bar{x}$ = 19.7) (Appendix D). A vast majority of participants (n =18) identified as White (90%), one participant identified as Asian (5%), and another participant identified as Black (5%). Of the participants, two (10%) identified as married. None of the participants had children. Participants were nearly homogenous in their educational attainment with 19 (95%) stating they had "some college" and were undergraduate students and one (5%) stated that he had attained his bachelor's degree and was currently a graduate student. All participants stated they were in school full time; however, their employment status varied. One participant (5%) identified as self employed, eight (40%) held part time employment, and 11 (55%) mentioned that they were unemployed.

Data Collection and Design

Data were collected through individual interviews. The style of these interview were between that of the guided interview and that of the standardized open-ended interview. This structure allowed participants to answer the same questions but the flexibility to venture beyond the question with their answers (Appendix E). In total, 20 interviews were conducted in a quiet, accessible office space on-campus where participants were allowed to speak freely about their experiences. All interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

Participants provided written informed consent (Appendix F) and completed paperwork required

for receipt of the incentive.

Participants were asked to visually represent in any way they would like, their definition

of masculinity, whether it be through using symbols, drawing pictures, or simply writing it out.

A variety of writing utensils were offered, including crayons, colored pencils, a pen and markers

of various colors. This artwork was not analyzed further. Participants were asked questions

consisting of their personal definitions and opinions about masculinity as well as messages

received from family, peers, and the media about men or masculinity (Appendix E). Field notes

were taken during and upon completion of the interview.

The four factors. Extant literature was analyzed from which four major factors emerged

which then guided the development of the question protocol. These factors included the

participant's own opinions, the opinions and ideas of their families, the ideas among their peers,

and the messages they received from the various media consumed (Galambos et al., 2009;

Myers, 2012). These factors guided the interviews, beginning with personal opinions, moving to

family, peers, and media, and then finishing with questions about the participants' personal ideas

and opinions.

 Analysis

Data handling, organization, and protection. Each recording was transcribed

immediately after the interview. Transcripts were read multiple times per research question as a

continuation of immersion until I felt that I "knew" the data. Being immersed in the data was

beneficial as it allowed me to begin to identify emerging themes and patterns.

Audio recordings and transcripts (which contained pseudonyms for the participants) were

placed on a secure server within the University. This server was accessible only through a

password. In addition, a master copy of the recordings and transcripts (placed on a flash drive) and a hard copy of all transcripts were placed in locked storage.

Coding and analysis of data. Findings emerged through my saturation and immersion within the data but there were also preconceived ideas from the past literature as to what were the factors related to masculine characteristics. While a deductive (Patton, 2002) process was used to define the research questions guided by theory and existing research, an inductive process (Patton, 2002) was used to analyze the data to identify common themes. Findings were discovered through the process by simple repetition until reaching a point of saturation. It became apparent that there were multiple words, phrases, and ideas that were repeated from interview to interview, question to question, and factor to factor, which suggested a theme may be present (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

To answer each research question, data were color-coded by emerging theme. Multiple themes were revealed and were compared to see if a pattern was present or if they could be further sorted into categories. In order to determine whether substantive significance exists, themes were compared across interviews as well as to the extant literature (Patton, 2002).

Rigorous methods. The methodology included strengths and weaknesses. While 20 interviews offered saturation, I alone conducted the interviews. This was a strength in offering consistency and depth. For example, by doing each interview, I was able to anticipate where clarifications may be needed. However, one interviewer my also allow for consistent bias. To minimize bias during the analysis, I invited a co-analyst, a female, to assist in this process. After a week of immersing herself within the data, we met and discussed the themes and patterns that emerged. Using a co-analyst allowed new findings to surface, ones that I had either been unable to find by myself or had simply overlooked, such as sports. Both the co-analyst and I decided

that a finding became a theme after three or more participants mentioned it within their interviews. We found that similar phrases or words were often used to describe masculinity. However, a distinction needed to be made between dominant and lesser themes. Therefore, dominant themes were defined as those mentioned by a majority (11+) participants, while lesser themes were defined as those that were mentioned by a several but not a majority of (7-10) participants.

Credibility of researcher and co-analyst. This topic resonated with me because I had vivid prior memories of my experiences with defining masculinity. As I went through adolescence I struggled with my masculinity. While this could be the case for many, my parents were divorced, time with my father was limited and I spent much of my younger years around my grandmother. Therefore, I did not know how to engage in sports and did not have much interest in things such as cars, hunting, or doing risky things. In an effort to look better in junior high, I attempted to emulate my older brother's style, but did not understand the style from one generation may not be perceived in the same way as another generation and I was labeled as gay. Although I knew I was not gay, the intense scrutiny throughout school weighed me down. I was able to overcome this by developing new friendships that were open to those that were labeled as different from others. Our motley group of friends was able to celebrate our individual uniqueness and allowed for its expression, which allowed me to overcome the stress associated with not fitting in.

Having grown through this pressure and now trying to carry out a qualitative study on masculinity, I felt as though I knew more about the differences in perceptions of masculinity and how individualized the process of building one's own masculine ideologies was. I also believed this helped with both the data collection and analysis. However, my experience may narrow my

perception because I could miss subtle nuances within the data if it did not match my experience. I also feared that I could relate more with some participants than others, which I thought might have resulted in deeper interviews and results for experiences that mirrored my own. However, this was not a problem.

One way that I attempted to limit my biases was by creating semi-structured interviews. This allowed me to create a guide for myself as a researcher to avoid additional questions about individual experiences that participants identified. Another way in which I attempted to limit my biases is that I reflected on my own experiences. While this seemed rather simple, I believe that understanding my biases and owning them allowed me to overcome them, thus minimizing the influence. Being able to reflect on my experiences and the research on masculinity allowed me to know and understand my experiences better. I believe that this deeper understanding made it possible for me to identify if something mirrored my experience, which would have lifted a red flag for me to proceed with caution. But, as it turned out, my experiences were relatively unique and this mirroring of experiences did not occur.

My co-analyst also reflected on her prior experiences in an attempt to limit her biases in regard to the subject matter by saying:

> *"I'm a gay white woman with a fiercely critical orientation and approach to*
> *research. I cannot read write or speak without thinking of the power struggles*
> *and injustices that are apparent in our society. My mother, my grandmother and 4*
> *aunts are all feminists and my grandmother and one aunt lived with us while I*
> *was growing up. Often times it was like I had 3 mothers so their views inevitably*
> *molded my viewpoints on life. I can see the heteronormativity throughout society*
> *due to my reality as a lesbian wife and mother. I also recognize the social*

construct that is race and the privilege that I am provided by my majority race. I am torn as I fit into the majority being white but my mindset and lens still resonate with my minority brothers and sisters, be it race, ability, sexual orientation, gender, and many more. All of these reasons affect my view on masculinity. I am disturbed by the stereotypes and gender roles placed on people. I am definitely an outsider to both the sample and my co-analyst. My co-analyst recognized the usefulness that this difference could bring to the analysis of his work. He was cognizant of the fact that there are things he could miss from being an insider in his population."

Chapter 4 - Findings

Throughout the analysis process, the following research questions were addressed: 1) What are the defining characteristics of "being a man" according to emerging adults? 2) What factors influence the definition of "being a man" according to emerging adults?

What are the defining characteristics of "being a man"?

Physical characteristics. Being a man means that one possesses specific physical characteristics. Even without prompting, physical characteristics were stated or drawn during the representation activity. One of the most mentioned physical characteristics was physical strength.

Lanky figures, hairy figures, and detached body parts such as flexed arms were drawn in the introductory activity to symbolize the necessity for strength, as were the words *strong* and *strength*. Strength was a consistent indicator of masculinity and men and was mentioned by a majority of participants. *"The emphasis is on strength and how big someone looks"* (Participant 1).

Facial hair was identified by more than half of the participants, specifically beards: *"Like beards. Make you look manly"* (Participant 14). Several participants, while mentioning that facial hair was important, acknowledged that they could not grow any with one speculating that some may consider them not masculine: *"You first think of all the beard, which I can't grow so maybe I'm not the quintessential man"* (Participant 17). A "clean" appearance was either valued or displayed for them within the four factors that emerged in response to the second question. Several also mentioned hairiness as masculine, with one mentioning that it is a distinguishing factor between boys and men: *"You know, boys haven't gone through the physical matureness that a man has yet. Gotten their man size and strength and hair and whatever"* (Participant 15).

Another defining characteristic was height. Being tall suggested masculinity: *"Someone who's tall and tan and has a beard and a strong jaw"* (Participant 12). While strength was the most consistently mentioned physical characteristic, the second was hair, particularly short hair.

Emotional characteristics. "Feelings, when I think of masculinity I don't typically think of feelings, feelings are like taboo in masculinity, just like what I feel" (Participant 1). While certain physical characteristics were presented as important to participants, emotions were quite the opposite. Emotions, according to the participants in this study, were not only unvalued, but by and large they were actually considered not masculine or becoming of a man. Feelings should be controlled. One participant mentioned a man was someone who is emotionally stable saying, "Generally, someone that's emotionally unstable can't really be a leader" (Participant 3). However, another participant felt quite differently saying, "I'll tell people exactly how I feel. If I'm upset or if I'm sad, I'll cry, I don't give a shit. I'm a man, I can cry if I want to, that's kind of how I look at it" (Participant 15).

While generally emotional expressions were discouraged, some emotions were acceptable to express, particularly happiness, excitement, and anger or frustration however sadness and/or crying were not. *"They will show you anger in a heart beat, it's a hug and I love you that is hard…Anything that is not royally pissed off is kinda hard; you have to read between the lines"* (Participant 14). The frequency of expression of emotion mentioned by participants was far outweighed by the frequency of no emotional expression. However, even though no expression of emotion was seen as ideal among those around them, when asked what the males around them would to if the participant was visibly upset or crying, most mentioned that the males would help as best they could. *"I think also he would want to get me back to feeling better*

but I think his natural response would be bringing my mom in but he would try his best" (Participant 12).

Behavioral characteristics. Many types of behaviors were discussed when speaking of what is becoming of a man thus themes were further divided into dominant (occurred in at least 11 or more interviews) and lesser categories (occurred in seven to ten interviews). Eleven dominant themes and four lesser themes emerged within behavioral characteristics.

Dominant themes.

Financial characteristics were described throughout all of the interviews, with each participant mentioning specific financial rituals that were common. These rituals included saving, investing, and spending.

Saving was clearly a relevant behavior to the men around them: "*Save, save, save, save*" (Participant 3). However, the type of financial behavior was differentiated by the group with which they were affiliated. All participants, when speaking about groups such as their peers or the media, mentioned that they readily spent their money. As for investing, few mentioned that those around them either invested their money or knew how to invest their money.

> "*One of my big cousins, I was talking to him about a week ago and we were talking about how to become wealthy. So he has multiple streams of income and I think that is a key. So he has investments and stuff like that. We were talking about just how to become wealthy, you've got to have multiple streams of money coming in*" (Participant 20).

Respect for others was a second dominant theme regarding characteristics of being a man. Overall, participants mentioned that they saw the men around them treating others with

respect. One participant simply said, "*Very respectful*" (Participant 1). A man also treated women with respect: "*Very courteous, very respectful*" (Participant 9).

Activities such as consuming alcohol and playing first-person shooter video games such as *Call of Duty* were defining characteristics of men for most participants. Additionally, many identified sports games, with FIFA (soccer) being the game most referenced. "*So recently FIFA has been a big part of my life which may be a bad thing…I've just been playing, a lot of guys around the house have just been playing it recently*" (Participant 10). Playing sports were the last major activity mentioned by a majority of participants. "*Sports, definitely a big thing, we always go play basketball or ultimate Frisbee*" (Participant 2).

Other dominant concepts that defined men were relevant and necessary knowledge on girls and sex, cars, fixing cars and other things, as well as hunting and guns. Participants also noted that it was important for men to know about women. "*Being able to go and talk to a random girl at the bar. Like being confident with yourself, being able to hold a conversation with women and not get all scatter brained when you're talking to them*" (Participant 6). Knowledge about cars and how to drive them was also important for men to know. "*How to drive a car, that's always big*" (Participant 6). Also, the knowledge of fixing cars and other things around the house was necessary to know; over half of participants mentioned this was important.

> "*I guess there's things like how to change your own tire, that was kind of something me and my sisters learned at a young age and basic things with your car like how to check your oil and stuff like that*" (Participant 15).

Knowledge about guns emerged as a dominant theme by the majority of emerging adults interviewed.

"Guns, all my uncles, a decent amount of my uncles are in the military but my dad's not so I kind of missed out on that and they're like, now that I go to school out here they're like "Hey, like come down one weekend, we're gonna teach you everything"…how to take it apart, put it back together, clean it, shoot it accurately, reload, the basics and probably more."

Hunting was also touted as being necessary to know and understand as a man. *"How to clean a deer and how to dress it, how to get the meat off of it and same with ducks and pheasants, squirrel, everything"* (Participant 6).

Nearly three-quarters of the participants mentioned in some way that maturity was essential for becoming a man. At the beginning of the interview some participants emphasized the difference between a boy and a man was a maturity level, both physically and psychosocially. *"I think a man, what's different from a boy, I guess would be a little more mature than a boy, I mean physically and emotionally and mentally. Definitely just maturity would be the main thing"* (Participant 4).

Engaging with their father or a father figure was necessary as a man. *"I would say if there isn't a father figure, typically I think of less masculine at post development stage. When there is a father figure I would say more masculine, more man-like"* (Participant 1).

While speaking about his father figures, one participant mentioned role models, another theme that was communicated by the majority of the participants. *"Well, they're literally my father figures and they've just been my role models for me growing up"* (Participant 19). Role models were mentioned as both necessary for the development of a man and as part of the participants' own growth.

"You're not just getting a manly influence from your dad, you're getting it from

their dads and stuff and so you're like seeing how their, what they think and

you're all kind of emulating off each other and…using each other to bounce ideas

off and figure out what life is, where you're gonna go" (Participant 13).

While no participants mentioned exactly what they were taught from their role models or father figures, it may be concluded that through their phrasing, they were implying masculine traits, or how to act like a man

Independence was frequently identified when asked what was required for the development of a man,. The use of the word independence was used to describe two things. First, independence is used to describe being on their own in the world without their parents, *"So…coming to college and realizing that you kinda have to fend for yourself"* (Participant 1). Secondly, independence was also used to describe a man and his financial independence. One participant, when asked about whether he felt like a man mentioned,

"I'd say I don't know yet because I'm not financially independent and once I'm

off every dime of my parents' then I feel like I know. I mean I have a pretty good

understanding of what it means, you know, how I can achieve that and I'm going,

I feel like I'm on the right path but once I am completely on my own and can

support myself then I feel like I will become a man" (Participant 6).

Included with independence was the idea that men, were responsible for themselves *"I definitely feel like I have taken on more responsibility, once I feel like I've become a man, to me it's responsibility and taking ownership for yourself"* (Participant 2). For a few participants, responsibility also meant, *"taking care of more than himself"* (Participant 14).

While half of the participants mentioned that they had become men, half believed they were not yet men. For those that believed they were men, they were straight forward, *"I believe that I am"* (Participant 18), *"I'm a man"* (Participant 15), *"I do, I do"* (Participant 17), *"I think I am a man"* (Participant 13). However, emerging adults suggested that manhood was a continuum of development rather than dichotomous characteristics. They said, *"Getting there"* (Participant 9), *"I am getting there"* (Participant 14), *"I am on my way"* (Participant 19), *"I'm pretty close to the end"* (Participant 7). In every instance participants suggested they were in the process of becoming a man.

"Well, in the physical sense, not quite at 100% yet. I mean, but as for accepting responsibility as an adult, there are some things that I haven't had to take responsibility for yet" (Participant 5). Of the participants that self-identified as an adult, most believed that it mostly had to do with age.

"Being an adult is a little different because when the law states that you're 18,
you're an adult, even though they still keep you from doing all sorts of shit. I'm 21
years old, so I can pretty much do anything on the planet like law-wise. There's
nothing restricting me…I can do anything. I can rent a hotel, I can travel to India
if I want to, which hopefully I will. I'm an adult" (Participant 15).

Most believed that financial independence was necessary for one to become an adult, however when asked whether they felt they were financially independent, nearly all participants believed they were not financially independent. *"I try to be as [in]dependent from my parents as possible but they're always trying to help out in some way and they feel obligated to do that"* (Participant 16).

Responsibility for oneself and actions were important to being an adult. However, when multiple participants were asked whether they believed they were responsible for themselves and their actions, all agreed that they were.

All participants agreed that being an adult meant being able to make one's own decisions and nearly all agreed that they did. The single participant that disagreed gave the following reason. *"Before I make a decision I talk to probably too many people. I feel like I value other's opinions too much than my actual"* (Participant 12).

Lesser themes. Four lesser themes (identified between seven and ten times) emerged regarding behavior characteristics of a man: included living the Golden Rule, working out, leadership, and hardship.

Men were characterized as adhering to the Golden Rule when working with others. When prompted to explain, one participant describe it as *"treat others the way you want to be treated" (Participant 1).* Working out or intentionally engaging in physical activity to build muscle and body tone was relevant as well. *"My dad goes to the gym like every day so that's kind of an encouragement like how you should be outside"* (Participant 11).

The ability to lead others was also noted as characteristic of being a man and observed in masculine role models, *"They show what men look like, they are independent, they're leaders, they lead by example…just seeing the men, the way they held themselves was just, I thought, very manly because they led by example too through their actions"* (Participant 20).

Finally, experiencing hardship was identified as integral in the development of a man mentioned, *"You just, you go through so much adversity and you learn so much and you bend but you don't break"* (Participant 9). No participants mentioned what specific events to

characterize hardship only that there were some challenges one must face and resolve successfully in order to move toward manhood..

In summary, participants mentioned three dominant characteristics of men: physical, emotional, and behavioral. Physical characteristics were exemplified as strength, facial hair, and height while the only acceptable emotional characteristics for men to express were happiness and anger. Behavioral characteristics contained both dominant and lesser themes. Behavioral characteristics were described as various internal and external behaviors men should engage in and were exemplified by savvy financial transactions, maturity, and other behaviors. While lesser themes such as the Golden Rule, working out, leadership, and hardship were not mentioned by enough participants to be considered dominant, they had important connotations for what it meant to be a man. Many more themes emerged from the data but were not mentioned by enough participants to be considered dominant or lesser themes.

What factors influence the definition of "being a man"?

Family. One of the most influential factors associated with participants' perceptions of masculinity was that of the family. By and large the messages received from the family were unique from the other factors in that they conveyed a sense of later success as a man.

Participants identified the family as the primary source for identifying a man as one who handles money carefully and responsibly, emphasizing the importance of saving, a responsible behavior.

> *"They definitely value saving money over spending it and they've taught me from*
>
> *an early age to save money. Like my dad, which helped me in the long run, but he*
>
> *set up a bank account and everything I earned, he had me put 10%, 15% in this*

bank account so by the time I was in fifth grade, I had at least a couple thousand

saved up." (Participant 4)

Participants discussed that their families either invested or helped them to invest their

own money. *"They helped me with my investments and keeping the proper amounts in savings,*

checking, and then invested and told me all about my 429 and Roth IRA plans and things so it

was a big topic of conversation" (Participant 18).

While saving was an essential behavior, spending the saved money was not discussed.

On the whole, families did not offer guidance on how to approach spending. In regard to

spending, only one participant mentioned that his family mentioned spending to him and when

they did, it was only to not spend or to be careful what he spent his money on.

"*I would say it's not unwise spending. Things that need to be dealt with get dealt*

with and then always been taught that money doesn't bring happiness. So it's not

like a huge part of our family, it's just If you have it great, if you don't great"

(Participant 1).

Family members emphasized three specific types of knowledge as necessary for the

development of a man. It was through the family that knowledge about cars was deemed as

important to men, with one participant saying about his father: "*He thought it would be good for*

me to know how my car works" (Participant 12). The use of guns and hunting also emerged from

families: "*I love hunting, I love shooting…I've been hunting since I was five*" (Participant 15).

Another said, "*My dad thinks that knowing how to shoot and operate a gun is also important*"

(Participant 19). Finally, family members deemed knowledge of household and car repairs

necessary for men.

"Yeah, you should definitely know how to fix simple things around your house. I mean if it's something simple with your bathroom, a simple appliance in your house, mounting up a TV. Your car, you should be able to fix your car as long as it's something not extensive" (Participant 20).

Respect for others, particularly women, was also a significant contribution by families. Many participants, when asked how they were taught to treat others and women, said: "*Very respectful*" (Participant 1), "*Utmost respect*" (Participant 9), "*Respect definitely*", "*Just respect*" (Participant 15).

A review of the messages from participants' families suggests a common aspect: later success or independence. Saving money has always been a financial maneuver that allowed for later successes, either through successful retirement or by successful passage through difficult financial situations. This financial success frees the individual from having to look to external sources of support in the event of a financial emergency, allowing for maximum independence of the individual. Also, understanding the inner workings of one's car was implied by several participants to be helpful if problems emerged. It was implied that that knowledge would allow a fair transaction with an auto shop. One participant mentioned that his father "*pushed the idea of knowing basic stuff about our car so you don't get ripped off at a car dealership*" (Participant 3). This feeling of success and independence was furthered by comments about being able to fix cars or moderate household issues. This would also be relevant to the conversation on financial success, as not having to call a handyman when a household issue arises can save a significant sum of money. Finally, successful relationships are not built on disrespect. Being respectful to those around you is necessary to cultivate a healthy relationship, not just with women but also in everyday interactions.

Ultimately, these traits of success and independence can be combined to say that the messages received from the families of participants were intrinsically motivated. The messages sent were attempts to create a wholesome member of society that developed participants from the inside, out. Conveying messages of independence and success allows for the understanding that participants are capable of living on their own, which could lead to behaviors and decisions that are ultimately beneficial to them.

Peers. Peers were influential to participants in different ways than their families. While there were a few messages from peers that were intrinsically motivated, such as knowledge about cars or being able to fix cars or other minor household issues, the vast majority of messages received from peers were not intrinsically motivated.

While peers did send messages about finances, it was the opposite of what was encouraged by the family. When asked about the financial habits of their peers, only half of the participants mentioned that their peers saved. However, over half of the participants mentioned that their peers spent their money, often quickly. One participant, when asked how their peers spend money said, *"Just waste it. One of my friends bought an $80 pair of Sperry's and a $100 pair of sunglasses because he was having a bad day"* (Participant 14).

Messages from peers were also received in regard to body image. Peers were particularly influential about the need for strength and muscles, with over half of participants mentioning that strength was a message they received from their friends and peers about what an ideal man is or looks like. *"All of us strive to get fit and be big and strong"* (Participant 9).

When asked in what type of activities their friends engaged, participants mentioned "Video games, definitely video games" (Participant 7). Knowing about video games was also mentioned by a few participants as necessary for their friend group. *"...I would say video games*

is always a competition. If someone's good they'll make sure everybody knows they are the best at it. They'll say "Let's play" just so they can win, make them feel good about themselves" (Participant 12).

Peers had an apparent contradictory message for participants in regard to treating others and women. The attitude of peers suggested respect of others was characteristic of men, only half of the participants mentioned that their friends respected women. Respect for women depended on the proximity of the women, noting male friends frequently talked about girls in a derogatory manner when they were not present. One participant, said, *"Well, when there's women around I guess they're friendly to them. If they're not, probably talking down on them. Probably talking bad about women…that they're all hoes, that they get around, that you can't trust them"* (Participant 20). This follows closely with another value of peers: knowledge about girls and sex. *"You probably need to know how to get girls. You should probably be good at sex"* (Participant 20).

Finally, the attitude of peers weighted heavily on the importance of drinking alcohol.. Three-quarters of the participants mentioning that their friends drank alcohol. *"As I grew up through high school, drinking with the guys became more of a masculine thing. Hard alcohol, beer, whatever"* (Participant 19).

A review of the messages received by emerging adults by their peers suggests peers offered contradictory and sometimes dangerous characteristics that defined being a man. In comparison, messages received from peers were largely about extrinsic characteristics or behaviors. Strength was highly valued among peers and while physical fitness is beneficial to the individual, fitness and health were not communicated together. Overall, strength was used to define the ideal body image, not physical health. The manner in which peers characterized

women combined with the perceived importance of female and sexual knowledge suggests that male peers valued sexual exploits rather than the development of a meaningful relationship.

These extrinsically motivated messages seem to be directed at making the individual appear masculine to others, not to necessarily increase their intrinsic self-worth. The more one drinks and the more one has sex could be perceived by some to be "manly", possibly because it implies a level of experience with life. At any rate, the individual himself would not necessarily be more mature in their development with the values and expectations of peers as there are no characteristics that develop them in a holistic way.

Media. The media (television, social media, movies, advertisements and the like) had a defining role in characterizing manhood among the emerging adults. Intrinsically motivated messages identified from the media included men knowing how to fix objects and problems around them but the vast majority of messages were not intrinsically motivated, promoting the outward appearance or characterization of masculinity.

The financial messages followed closely with the actions of their peers, with only two mentioning wise money management (saving, investing), while over three-quarters of the participants mentioned that men in the media were portrayed as spending money. Men within the media were perceived as rich, thus their spending involved *"bars, women, cars, sports"* (Participant 7), *"parties"* (Participant 9), and *"a big house"* (Participant 20).

Strength was also perceived as a necessity for men. One participant gave a simple, yet telling response to what men in the media look like: "*They're ripped. Always just jacked dudes*" (Participant 9). This physical characteristic of strength also sent messages about acceptable body image. For some participants, the men in media were exemplars for how they should look.

"I feel like we see a lot of super fit guys, those are the ones we normally see on

social media, the ones that have their shirt off and have the big muscles and ones

we strive to be, the ones why we go work out, we have in our head" (Participant

12).

The media portrayed men as drinking alcohol and being savvy with women. One

participant remarked that within the rap music to which he listened men were

characterized as using women for sex, *"definitely taking shots, getting fucked up, and*

then hooking up with girls" (Participant 19) Media sources also suggested "*how to pick*

up women" (Participant 1). One participant remarked about the portrayal of women by

men in the media as: "*Honestly, not that respectfully…calling them names and stuff like*

that, or maybe only using them for like sex or something" (Participant 14).

Similar to the messages received by peers, emerging adults perceived messages about

men from the media as extrinsically motivated. Men were characterized by their physical

strength, by their ability to engage with women, and by their objectification or sexualization of

women. Again, this outward appearance of masculinity was implied to place those with more life

experience in high regard.

Self. Several dominant themes emerged from participants' own personal constructions of

what it means to be a man, which included both extrinsic (sports and strength) and intrinsic

qualities.

Again, physical strength emerged as a personal value by participants. When explaining

their drawings before the interview one participant said, "*…if you're masculine, it feels like it*

should mean strong" (Participant 1). Another noted, "*I find it important in my life to be as big*

and strong as I can and I find it pleasing" (Participant 15). Sports were another extrinsic

characteristic that was valued by participants. *"I guess you could say sports, when it comes to that. Sports is a big manly factor"* (Participant 16). Also, about a fourth of the participants mentioned that they themselves engaged in sports.

Social maturity was another element of masculinity. When asked about whether one could be an adult and not a man, maturity was discussed by one participant. *"It depends on your definition of a man. I mean, I would think of it more as becoming a man thinking of maturity and experience and your sense of purpose"* (Participant 18).

Father figures and role models were also important to participants, with several participants mentioning the need for a father figure and multiple participants mentioning the importance of role models. "*I'd say the father's a really big role model when it comes to masculinity*" (Participant 5). One participant, when mentioning role models, mentioned it specifically to state that it is important for a man to be a role model to others. "*I think a man would be someone you look up to to embody yourself*" (Participant 4).

Leadership was another important quality for men to possess. For some, this meant more generalized leadership:

> "*George Washington…the picture of crossing the Delaware comes to mind where he faces the darkness head on and says "Hey, let's step into this, let's do this together" and he was able to call other men to action and together they stepped in so I think, just a great example of courageously leading other guys and calling other guys to action*" (Participant 17).

When speaking about leadership, one participant mentioned being the leader of their family was important. *"My father…being willing to lead his family, his wife, and his kids into*

some of the darkness, the unknown" (Participant 17). *"What it is to be male is to be a leader so things like family man kind of thing"* (Participant 3).

Participants also held the expectation of themselves that in order to identify as a man, they had to overcome hardships successfully. The particular type of hardship endured was not identified, however, *"You've already been through those trials and stages that made you [who you] are today"* (Participant 8).

Finally, participants self-defined independence and responsibility as markers of being a man. In regard to independence, one participant said, "*a lot of people think once you have sex you are a man, I don't think that's it... [it's] once you can kind of take ownership for yourself and make your decisions*" (Participant 2). With respect to responsibility, "*you are accepting responsibility for what is going on in your life. Then you're a man*" (Participant 17).

Similar to the messages received by family, the opinions and expectations for what a man is according to the participants themselves were intrinsically motivated. Nearly all of the necessities listed led to positive or healthy development of an individual. Learning to lead others, gaining independence, becoming a role model for others, gaining maturity, taking responsibility, and going through hardship are all events that may allow a person to develop additional skills that will help them to grow into a competent and successful member of society. The overall goal of success and competency as an individual echo the lessons that are developed by the messages received from the family.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Two major findings emerge from this study. First, results suggest that being a man and being an adult are similar but separate processes. Secondly, males receive different and sometimes conflicting messages about what it means to be a man from family, peers, the media, and their own ideas, which is emblematic of cognitive dissonance.

Being an Adult and Being a Man

Participants in this study reveal overwhelmingly that they reached adulthood only legally but did not possess completely the characteristics of a mature adult. These ideas are consistent with the work of Arnett and others (Arnett, 1998, 2001, 2003; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004), who, through their research on whether young people consider themselves adults, agree that there are three components to the definition of an adult. These components are 1) being financially independent, 2) being responsible for oneself and actions, and 3) making independent decisions.

Participants perceive themselves as able to make independent decisions and are responsible for themselves and their actions but few indicate they are financially independent. Likewise, a vast majority of participants in this study do not see themselves as having achieved adulthood. Most who identify as an adult, do so only based on having passed the legal age for adulthood, not because they hold intrinsic values of adulthood. Financial independence is the major reason they feel as though they have not reached adulthood, which is consistent with the findings of Arnett and others (Arnett, 1998, 2001, 2003; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004). Furthermore, participants understand that adulthood is on a continuum and most state that they are somewhere in the process towards adulthood. Those who

are on this continuum use words ("*not quite at 100% yet*" [Participant 5]) that suggest some sort

of linear progression to becoming an adult.

Becoming a man appears to be a parallel process to adulthood. As with adulthood, there

is a specific set of words used to explain a linear progression to becoming a man ("*I am on my*

way" [Participant 19]). This suggests that emerging adults may see manhood as they do

adulthood, not as a dichotomy but the degree to which they are a man. In other words, this

suggests that emerging adults see both manhood and adulthood an active process whereby a male

shifts progressively from boyhood to manhood just as one shifts progressively from childhood to

adulthood.

> *"I feel like becoming a man is a big thing and it happens at different ages for*
>
> *every person but once it happens you'll know…I feel a man is more internal and*
>
> *more stuff in your head and in your heart"* (Participant 12).

Conflict Amongst Factors

Four factors serve as sources of influence on perception of manhood: family, peers,

media, and participants' own opinions. One of the first inconsistencies in the expectations

between factors was that of respect for women. While a slight majority of participants mention

they are instructed by their families to respect women and half say their peers respect women,

several mention that at the same time, the behaviors of their peers suggest a lack of respect for

women; they speak about women covertly. These participants mention that not only are the

appearances of women judged but also sexual fantasies and perceived negative attributes of

women (they are promiscuous, they cannot be trusted). Referring to the media, several

participants mention that women are objectified or sexualized. Thus, the action of objectification

and sexualization of women and their bodies amongst peers seems to align with the same actions

that take place within the media. Another inconsistency appeared between families, peers and the media with respect to drinking alcohol. While only a couple participants mention drinking alcohol in regard to their families, a vast majority of participants reveal that their friends drink alcohol. Also, nearly half of participants mention that men within the media are often seen drinking alcohol. The third inconsistency focuses on financial planning. While the majority of participants mention their families prioritize saving, only half say that their peers save money. The majority note that their peers spend more money than save. These findings illustrate the multiple and often inconsistent messages those within emerging adulthood receive. Therefore, it is possible that males within emerging adulthood could be experiencing some social conflict with the various contradictory messages from major groups or factors within their lives. However, the intrinsic values of being a man that participants share are consistent with the values associated with their families, while the extrinsic characteristics and behaviors are more closely aligned with their peers and the media suggesting that participants are truly in a time of transition and identity development.

Connections to Past Research

This study built on prior research and compliments the research done by Marcia. Marcia stated that identity is a gradual process and does not develop on its own (1980). This corroborates with my evidence that manhood and adulthood function in largely the same way, through a gradual process.

This study also builds on Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood through confirmation of a couple of the five characteristics identified as part of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2006) described emerging adulthood as the age of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities. The evidence within this study supported two of these

characteristics. Feeling in-between and exploring their identities were mentioned by several participants within the interviews conducted in this study, which compliment Arnett's findings. Many participants within this study mentioned that they had not yet achieved adulthood. These participants agreed that they were not adolescents but were not yet adults, feeling in-between the two periods of life. Also, several participants mentioned that they still needed to attain aspects of masculinity they deemed important before assuming the title of "man" such as complete independence or full responsibility for their life.

The exploratory factors (family, peers, media) within this study are consistent with Myers' (2012) findings in that masculinity is socially defined. The ideologies and decisions that participants within this study held were similar to their families, their peers, or the media. Also, behaviors were policed in such a way to conform to the prescribed norm, echoing the research of Slaatten and Gabrys (2014). However, while Slaatten and Gabrys found that policing by peers could involve labeling the behavior as feminine or gay-related slurs, one participant mentioned that these labels could come from his father as well. "*My dad would probably call me a pussy*" (Participant 15). Advertisements often show men with a refined appearance and with a knack for spending money on nonessential items (Tan, Shaw, Cheng & Kim, 2013). These results are consistent in that several participants mentioning men in the media they consumed wore nice clothes and often spent their money.

 Strengths and Limitations

Strengths. Through the semi-structured interview questions, participants were able to articulate their individual opinions and the opinions of their family, peers, and the media they consume, which allowed for robust answers that exemplified their individual understanding of masculinity. While there were similarities within the answers, having participants that were from

differing geographical areas, races/ethnicities, and cultures would have allowed for a diverse set of experiences and opinions.

As a man, I believe my gender was influential on the comments participants were willing to disclose. It is possible that if a woman has conducted the interview, some parts of what some participants mentioned as becoming of a man would have been glossed over or completely omitted. Specifically, I believe that if asked by a woman, male participants would not be as open to discussing the obvious disrespect of women that they mentioned their friends and themselves engaging in.

Limitations. One limitation of this study is the singular cultural context in which it was conducted. The Midwest is known culturally for containing more traditional messages about gender. While some participants acknowledged that they grew up in cities, several also acknowledged that they were from small towns that were primarily agriculturally-based. Due to the socially defined nature of masculinity, the differences in the definition of masculinity may not be representative of the larger male culture. Generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, however. The results of this study could be quite different if conducted in the same place in just a decade and would likely reflect the culture of the people geographically situated in the area.

Implications for Practitioners

Professionals working with populations that are predominately within emerging adulthood such as professionals within higher education or student affairs should be aware of the several characteristics that inform students' development of identity from boyhood to manhood.

For instance, suggestions of an ideal image for men emerged, one that is fit, muscular, and strong. Providing adequate access to resources such as fitness centers or fitness equipment so

that these young men have an opportunity to cultivate what they believe is an ideal body may be important. However, steps should be taken and programs should be introduced that promote a healthy and realistic body image for men. Also, mediating the influence that peers and the media have on them in regard to body image may be essential to a positive lifestyle and university experience.

Professionals must also be cognizant of the potential for disrespectful and seemingly predatory behavior of men towards women. One participant, on attitudes about women, revealed, "*Who can get the most. Who can get whatever they want the fastest and the easiest, with it being very legal, no question about it*" (Participant 9). Providing education to deter and minimize or eliminate this behavior could help emerging adult females better understand the decision-making process of some males and help to avoid potentially harmful relationships in which manipulation is used for sex. Also, it is relevant to give females access to sexual assault programs that educate and encourage reporting if a sexual assault occurs.

Finally, professionals should be aware of the cognitive dissonance in regard to the values of the family and those of peers and the media. There appears to be a difference as to how one should behave and understand their surroundings and these conflicting messages about what is expected from these emerging adult males could be informative when addressing stress in their lives. This could aid those that help to counsel students within higher education and their parents, if needed.

Further Research

Ongoing research is essential in order to better understand this period of development. The findings of this study indicate that reaching manhood and adulthood may be similar in that they consist of a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Thus, additional research on the

developmental process that emerging adults experience to reach manhood must be conducted in order to better understand both the process and the overlap it shares with that of adulthood.

Also, further research is necessary to better understand the cognitive dissonance amongst emerging adults and various ideologies that they possess such as treating women and drinking. Conflicting messages from their families and peers could cause stress amongst emerging adults that may not have yet been identified and only through further research will we better understand these potential stressors. We could also better understand the complex decision-making process emerging adults go through when confronted with an issue that may be seen negatively by their family but positively by their peers.

Future research could also focus on body image among emerging adult males. Participants within this study had a very specific ideal image of what a man is. One participant even mentioned that his friend group works out with that image in mind, attempting to become what they have seen around them and in the media they consume. This ideal image could have a direct impact on the body image of males around this age, which could affect their development of identity.

Research should continue how men view the capabilities of women. Through this study, it was suggested by a few participants that women were viewed as needing help or being deficient in various ways. Better understanding how men view what some mentioned as chivalry versus how women feel about chivalrous acts as well as how men generally view the capabilities of women could give additional insight on how the opposite sexes view one another.

Media was also a source of peculiarity within the findings. Nearly a quarter of participants mentioned that they did not consume traditional mass media for their news but consulted the internet. These participants mentioned that the mainstream news was biased and

that they tried to find sources of news that were unbiased to make up their own opinions about what was going on around the world. Further research on how emerging adults view the news media and the alternative news outlets they use could yield interesting insight into how the worldview and politics of emerging adults are identified and constructed.

Conclusion

My study sought to better understand the intricacies of what it means to be a man among emerging adults. Emerging adults are exploring their identity in order to understand their place in the world. It is a gradual process, just as Marcia (1980) suggests. Using a phenomenological approach while focusing on perceptions of masculinity and the factors that help to shape those perceptions in young males, I was able to understand that there are multiple ways in which a man is defined, physically, emotionally, and behaviorally. I found that family, peers, and the media that one consumes have differential impact on the ways in which masculinity is conceptualized, all with differing underlying values. I also discovered that just as emerging adults understand reaching adulthood as a gradual process, a gradual process was also seen by young people as the way in which to develop into manhood. There is no single definition of being a man. Participants mentioned in their own opinions, when it comes to being a man, there are many intrinsic qualities that one must possess. This is in spite of what many saw men portrayed as within their friend groups and the media, which portrayed men as needing to look like and engage in extrinsic behaviors. Therefore, participants understood that being a man is more than just being perceived as one, which echoes one comment, "Just cuz you wear a cowboy hat doesn't make you a cowboy."

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Appendix A - Recruitment Flyer

Participants Needed for a New Study about the Perceptions of Masculinity Among Young Adults

If you are **18-29 years old**, a **man**, and are an **American citizen**, then you are invited to participate in a study focused on masculinity!! Within this study, you will be asked about a variety of topics relating to masculinity, including your ideas of what a man is and the definition of what a man is according to those with whom you are close. All of your answers will remain **confidential**.

You will be asked to participate in a 30-45 minute on-campus interview. To ensure confidentiality, your name will not be associated with your responses in this study. After completion of the interview, a **$20 Visa gift card** will be given as compensation for your time.

For more information, please contact **Kris Grinter**, master's student in Life-Span Human Development, by **February 20th, 2015** through email: **kgrinter@ksu.edu.** You are also welcome to drop by my office: **326 Justin Hall** on **Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 1:00-2:00pm as well as Tuesday and Thursday from 9:00-10:00am** . If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report any concerns about this study, please contact the **KSU Institutional Review Board** at **(785) 532-3224**, or email: **comply@ksu.edu**.

Thank you for your consideration!

Kris Grinter & Bronwyn Fees, Ph.D.
Family Studies and Human Services
College of Human Ecology
Kansas State University
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Appendix B - Newsletter Announcement

Graduate student invites young men to discuss masculinity for study

Depending on life experiences, many young men between 18-29 years often feel as though they are in a unique period in life: past adolescence but not yet an adult. Does this describe you or someone you know? If so, we invite their participation in a research study seeking to understand the development of masculinity in single young American males. Participants will receive monetary compensation upon completion of a 30-45 minute interview.

For more information on this study or to volunteer to participate, please contact Kris Grinter at kgrinter@k-state.edu or Bronwyn Fees, family studies and human services, at fees@k-state.edu.

Appendix C - Demographic Questionnaire

Please share a little about yourself by responding to the questions below:

Gender: Please check the gender:

_____ Male   _____ Female

American Citizen: Please indicate whether or not you are an American citizen:

_____Yes   _____No

Race: Please check that which best represents your race:

_____American Indian or Alaska native   _____Multi-racial

_____Asian   _____Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

_____Black or African American   _____White, non-Hispanic or Latino

_____Hispanic or Latino   _____Race unknown

Age (Date of Birth): Month/Day/Year _____/_____/_____

Educational Attainment: Please check that which best represents your level of education:

_____Less than high school   _____Associate's degree

_____High school diploma or equivalent   _____Bachelor's degree

_____Some college, no degree   _____Master's degree

_____Postsecondary non-degree award   _____Doctoral or professional degree

Do you have any children? Please check: _____Yes   _____No

If yes, how many? _____

Current Employment: Please check that which best represents your current level of employment:

_____Employed full time or more   _____In school full time

_____Employed part-time   _____Homemaker
     (less than 35 hours per week)

_____Self-employed   _____Unemployed

Appendix D - Participant Demographic Table

Participant Demographic Table

Participant Number	Gender	American Citizen	Race	Age	Educational Attainment	Children	Employment
1	Male	Yes	White	18	Some college	None	In School F/T Employed P/T
2	Male	Yes	White	23	Bachelor's degree	None	In School F/T Employed P/T
3	Male	Yes	White	19	Some college	None	In School F/T Employed P/T
4	Male	Yes	White	18	Some college	None	In School F/T
5	Male	Yes	White	21	Some college	None	In School F/T
6	Male	Yes	White	22	Some college	None	In School F/T
7	Male	Yes	White	19	Some college	None	In School F/T
8	Male	Yes	Asian	21	Some college	None	In School F/T
9	Male	Yes	White	19	Some college	None	In School F/T
10	Male	Yes	White	19	Some college	None	In School F/T
11	Male	Yes	White	18	Some college	None	In School F/T
12	Male	Yes	White	19	Some college	None	In School F/T Employed P/T
13	Male	Yes	White	20	Some college	None	In School F/T
14	Male	Yes	White	18	Some college	None	In School F/T Employed P/T
15	Male	Yes	White	21	Some college	None	In School F/T
16	Male	Yes	White	18	Some college	None	In School F/T Employed P/T
17	Male	Yes	White	23	Some college	None	In School F/T Self-Employed
18	Male	Yes	White	20	Some college	None	In School F/T Employed P/T
19	Male	Yes	White	19	Some college	None	In School F/T
20	Male	Yes	Black	18	Some college	None	In School F/T Employed P/T

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Appendix E - Interview Questions

1. Describe the difference between a boy and a man?
2. Give 1-3 examples of who the quintessential man would be.
    a. Why did you choose these men?
    b. What makes these men ideal?
    c. What characteristics do you share with these men?
3. Describe the factors (e.g., people, experiences, other) that you believe contribute to the development of or becoming a man.
4. Describe the messages have you received from **your family** about what a man is. (or maybe, According to your family, what is a man)
    a. Physical characteristics
    b. Behavioral characteristics
    c. Emotional characteristics
    d. Financial characteristics
    e. How to treat others including women
    f. Knowledge me are supposed to possess are men supposed to know?
5. Describe the messages have you received from **your peers** about what a man is? (or maybe: According to your closest peers, what is a man?
    a. Physical characteristics
    b. Behavioral characteristics
    c. Emotional characteristics
    d. Financial characteristics
    e. How to treat others including women
    f. Knowledge me are supposed to possess.
6. Describe the types of media you use? (Examples: TV, radio, social internet, magazines…)
7. Describe the messages have you observe about what a man is?
    a. Physical characteristics
    b. Behavioral characteristics
    c. Financial characteristics
    d. Emotional characteristics
    e. How to treat others including women
    f. Knowledge men are supposed to possess.
8. Explain whether or not it is possible to be an adult and not a man.
9. How will you know you have become a man?
10. Describe where you are on your journey to becoming a man?
    a. Describe where you are on your journey to becoming an adult.
        i. Financial Independence
        ii. Responsibility for oneself and actions
        iii. Making independent decisions
    How will you know you have become a man?

Appendix F - Informed Consent Agreement

Informed Consent Agreement
Research Study: Understanding Masculinity

Purpose of research study. The purpose of this study is to understand how young men define masculinity. Masculinity often includes a set of beliefs, behaviors, and ideas that dictate what is acceptable in order to be considered a man in a particular context. Your participation will help researchers to further understand the development of masculinity particularly what influences both the process and definitions of masculinity among young men.

What is involved? If you agree to participate in the study, you will be interviewed about your beliefs and definitions of masculinity. The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed The interview will be analyzed with other interviews on the same subject matter to determine whether any themes or patterns emerge that could help the researchers to understand how masculinity develops..

Confidentiality. The information you share will be kept confidential. The names will be replaced with pseudonyms. The audio recordings as well as a master copy of the transcripts will be kept on a secure server at Kansas State University.

What is the time required? The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour on campus or at another agreed-upon location.

Potential concerns and benefits. There are no anticipated risks by participating in this study. You will not receive any direct benefits for your participation. However, we anticipate sharing the composite results of the study with other researchers.

Compensation. The compensation ($20 Visa gift card) you will have earned through participating in this study will be given immediately following the interview. In order to receive

compensation, you must complete a W-9 form and sign a document acknowledging that you received compensation.

Participation is voluntary. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There will be no penalty if you do not wish to participate in the project. You may withdraw at any time during the study.

Questions/Comments? This project was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Kansas State University (Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, 785-532-3224); the staff can answer any questions you may have about the rights of participants in research. If you have any other questions about the project, please feel free to call or email Dr. Bronwyn Fees (785-532-1421) fees@ksu.edu or Kris Grinter (913-609-6400) grinter@ksu.edu.

If you agree to participate, please sign below

Participant Name _____ Date _____

Participant Signature _____

Researcher's signature _____

Date _____

     (A copy of this form will be given to the participant.)