THE EFFECTS OF GENDER ROLE STRAIN PARADIGM AND GENDER ESSENTIALISM ON SELF-COMPASSION AMONG MEN: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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AMONG MEN: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT:

The growing field of masculinity studies has opened the discussion around the tight constraints society places on men in hopes of changing the common dialogue around what it means to be a man. Detrimental behavior patterns, which are encouraged by hegemonic masculinity, combined with suppression of potential vulnerability leads to negative impacts on well-being such as depressive symptoms, higher levels of shame, stress, various forms of anxiety, and lower levels of self-esteem (Green and Addis 2012; Pleck 1995; Wester et al. 2012). This project uses in-depth interviews to gain insight into the potential ways in which these experiences influence each other and impact men’s behavior and well-being. I conducted nine semi-structured interviews to gain insight into how masculinity portrayals are conceptualized by the participants as well as how they navigate and regulate their emotions. The findings of this research include more internal than external pressure to conform to masculine norms, low belief in gender essentialism, and generally low self-compassion. Going against what was expected, higher levels of self-compassion were more related to a critical understanding of the effects of masculine norms on the individual instead of conformity to masculine norms. This research aims to contribute to the literature on masculinity with further insight into the gendered way men respond to difficult emotional experiences and the effect these responses have on overall emotional well-being.
INTRODUCTION

The past few decades have shown higher rates of mass casualties and obscene acts of aggression done by men. These instances are so common they are most often hardly news, and even when discussed by the media, the conversation remains stifled by explaining the problem away as simply mental illness and not the result of a societal failing of our men. Masculinity and the way it has been taught to boys in American society is not brought into question. This lack of dialogue allows the problem to persist without contention. Violence being at higher rates amongst men than women is often explained by the hegemonic masculine norms taught in America today that embody strength and symbolize violence (Berke and Zeichner 2016; Dagirmanjian et al. 2016). When gender is expressed only within these constraints, it can cause discomfort and lead to diminished mental stability (Green and Addis 2012; Pleck 1995; Reilly, Rochlen and Awad 2014; Wester et al. 2012).

These contemporary ideals of masculinity cast tight roles for men in American society. There has been a movement to create more conversation around different portrayals of masculinity and greater awareness about the reality for most men—which is that men do not fit this image, they feel conflicted about adhering to it, and that disconnect can be damaging (Pleck 1995; O’Neil 2008; Wester et al. 2012). Freeing men from these restrictive norms can promote gender equality for all by diminishing the socialization to oppress women and those who engage with alternative forms of masculinity (Addis et al. 2010). Social scientists studying masculinities have called for a more in-depth look into how socialization and environmental-cues influence men’s engagement with their emotions; this can contribute to a better understanding of the conditions necessary for men to engage in healthier emotion regulation strategies (Addis et al. 2010). I hope to contribute to that conversation with this research.

The majority of research on masculine norms and their effects on emotional well-being rely on quantitative methods, leaving much to be learned about the deeper meaning of how
these relationships interact and how they are understood by those they impact. This research used qualitative methods to add to the current dialogue around masculinity by incorporating a new framework that combines the theories of gender essentialism, gender role strain paradigm, and self-compassion, thus adding new perspectives to the discourse on the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and emotional well-being. I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with cisgendered men aged eighteen to twenty-three to contribute to the understanding of how college-aged men today have been socialized and what effect this has had on their emotional well-being.

Theorizations surrounding the socialization of masculinity and the effects this may have on men—regardless of their adherence to the norms promoted—has been increasing in focus in a wide breadth of disciplines including psychological, sociological, feminist, and others. Incorporating foundational theories regarding how individuals are socialized and the effects that institutions have on personality and behavior, scholars have discussed the emphasis that is placed upon men to be successful, control their emotions, and reject femininity and homosexuality (Connell 1995; Coprew, Matthews and Mitchell 2014; Pleck 1995). A core assumption from gender role theory argues that gender norms derived from sociocultural observations are internalized at the individual level (Berke and Zeichner 2016). While men do not have control over their life circumstances, they are able to influence their strength, aggression, and how they handle difficult emotions (Wester et al. 2012). The endorsement of traditional masculine ideology by greater society promotes participation in traumatic experiences, inhibits dealing with trauma and painful emotions, and encourages men to continue dysfunctional behavior (Pleck 1995; Lomas et al. 2012). These norms that permeate throughout society form what is understood as hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). The framework of hegemonic masculinity has been widely accepted for multiple decades now, but
due to the nature of it deriving from the culture, and therefore always changing, studies on how masculinity is defined in the present moment are always relevant.

In a review of recent literature on gender social learning amongst men, Addis et al. (2010) call for more research that investigates how men regulate emotion and respond to stressful events in order to better understand the conditions necessary for men to use a wider range of emotion regulation strategies. This paper will contribute to this conversation by analyzing self-compassion found amongst men to understand what engagement level men have with this positive emotion regulation strategy and what may be influencing their engagement level. This analysis will provide insight into how young men today are experiencing masculinity, the influence gender role strain has on men’s emotional well-being, and what barriers men still face in regard to healthy emotional well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Widespread Concepts of Masculinity

Gender is one of the most influential aspects of personal identity. It shapes the way one presents themselves, the behavior they engage in, and how they interact with society. The United States emphasizes gendered relations with everything from deodorant to crying being related back to gender. While there are multiple masculinities men can engage with—typically, men engage with multiple at once—hegemonic masculinity is what is expected and promoted throughout society (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity often does not depict the lives of any actual men, but the model expresses widespread ideals, fantasies and desires (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Green and Addis 2012; Zeman and Garber 1996). In America, this is based on the practice that allows men’s continued collective dominance over women and characterizes men as assertive, heterosexual and antifeminine (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).
Early on, men are taught, often through experiences of ridicule or rejection, that there are negative consequences to expressing sadness or pain, as emotional expression is considered a feminine trait (Green and Addis 2012; Lomas et al. 2012; Wester et al. 2012; Zeman and Garber 1996). This socialization happens through peers, parents, schools—any social institution that an individual grows up in (Levant et al. 2018; Pleck 1995; Zeman and Garber 1996). In addition to emotional suppression, masculine ideology promotes deviant or antisocial behaviors that have been found to contribute further to emotional detriment; these include joining fraternities despite the inevitable “hazing” ritual, remaining stoic in situations of romantic intimacy, and aggressive or violent responses to threats (Dagirmanjian et al. 2016; Green and Addis 2012; Pleck 1995; Wester et al. 2012).

Gender essentialism suggests that the differences between men and women are biologically based and are therefore, fixed, unchanging, and stable (Smiler and Gelman 2008). While essentialism is widely considered to be an incomplete explanation of human behavior by many social scientists, it is important to study as it persists in the everyday reasoning of a majority of people within the United States and it is a strong influencer in the rigidity around masculine norms (Addis, Mansfield and Syzdek 2010; Smiler and Gelman 2008). Essentialist beliefs have been found to influence prejudice and to justify social inequalities; these beliefs are used every day to reinforce the belief that men and women have fundamental differences and it is for this reason that women are subordinate (Addis et al. 2010; Smiler and Gelman 2008). Gender essentialist beliefs are more commonly held by men, especially those who report greater conformity to masculine norms, and more generally, there is greater essentialism surrounding masculinity-related concepts (Smiler and Gelman 2008). The desire to secure men’s higher gender status leads to overidentification with masculine attributes and an elevated importance of manhood in one’s self-concept (Kray et al. 2017). This is especially concerning
when considering the stricter an understanding of what it means to be a man, the higher the toll on the individual (Kray et al. 2017).

**Effects of Masculine Socialization on Emotional Well-Being**

One of the main theoretical perspectives surrounding research on masculinity is the gender role strain paradigm; this theory posits that traditional masculine ideology has negative psychological effects on the men who adhere to it (Pleck 1995). Restated, masculine ideology translates into expectations and norms placed on oneself that are often inconsistent with behavior, and this discrepancy leads to distress (Pleck 1995). An internal conflict typically ensues between socially acceptable and unacceptable personal aspects that leads to a diminished emotional well-being (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Lomas et al. 2012). Even the fulfillment of these standards can have negative consequences due to the inherently dysfunctional behaviors they promote (Pleck 1995). Detrimental behavior patterns combined with suppression of potential vulnerability leads to negative impacts on well-being such as depressive symptoms, higher levels of shame, stress, various forms of anxiety, and lower levels of self-esteem (Levant et al. 2018; Pleck 1995; Reilly et al 2014; Rice et al. 2016; Wester et al. 2012; Yang et al. 2018). It also impacts external factors such as relationship intimacy and social connectedness which then compound the aforementioned effects (Wester et al. 2012).

A similar, but slightly more nuanced perspective that is more often used in empirical research as opposed to theoretical, is that of gender role conflict. It measures the strain on men caused by conflict between norm adherence and situational expectations and is considered to be the concrete outcomes of gender role strain (O’Neil 2008; Wester et al 2012). The Gender Role Conflict Scale measures four subscales including: success, power and competition which examines focus on personal achievement, restricted emotionality, restricted affectionate behavior between men, and the conflict between work and family relationships (Wester et al. 2012). It occurs when adherence to gender norms results in restriction, devaluation, or violation
of the self or others; the four main situations this happens in are major life transitions, intrapersonal experiences, expressions toward others, and expressions from others (O’Neil 2008). While not being used in this study, it relates heavily to the gender role strain paradigm and is often used in quantitative research; excluding it from the discussion would leave many important insights around masculine research out. In a research summary of the Gender Role Conflict Scale, a diminished psychological well-being was found to have cross-cultural and racial significance which speaks to the broad influence hegemonic masculinity has across cultural boundaries (O’Neil 2008). While admittedly outdated, a synthesis of studies on gender role conflict studies since the 1980’s found substantial evidence that men’s restrictive gender roles relate to men’s depression, anxiety and stress; what is not entirely clear is whether these problems are caused by gender role conflict or if these problems cause gender role conflict (O’Neil 2008).

*The Promise of Self-Compassion*

The detrimental effects of hegemonic masculinity and the pressure to conform are stark and concerning. Because of this, a significant field of research has begun measuring the various impacts this has on society, relationships, and men themselves. Regarding the latter, there has been significant work on men’s emotional well-being. Much of this research comes from popular measurements such as self-esteem due to the correlation self-esteem has with happiness and the negative association it has with depression and anxiety (Neff and Vonk 2009). However, new research has shown that although self-esteem is correlated with optimism and positive affect, self-compassion, which showed equivalent statistical significance in the same parameters, may be a more accurate measure of emotional well-being (Neff and Vonk 2009). High self-esteem has shown to be positively associated with negative corollaries such as narcissism, aggression, prejudice towards out-groups, and the success, power and competition pattern measured in the GRCS (Neff 2003; Neff and Vonk 2009; Wester et al.
Additionally, experience suggests that when one is going through a difficult time, it is easier to find a temporary solution, such as boosting self-confidence, rather than addressing the root of the problem, such as self-cruelty. Specifically regarding masculinity, past research has shown that conformity to masculine norms increases self-esteem, especially amongst those with high levels of trait shame (Reilly et al. 2014). From this, one could conclude that self-esteem increased by highly gendered performances is the result of an unhealthy relationship to masculinity and should not be considered a positive result.

Kristin Neff’s theory of self-compassion is defined as being open to and alleviating one’s own suffering through patience and kindness (2003). The three main tenants of self-compassion include self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness—this study analyzed all three (Neff 2003). Self-kindness refers specifically to the act of expressing kindness to oneself instead of harsh judgement or criticism (Neff 2003). Common humanity involves viewing the experience of pain or personal failure as an aspect of human experience rather than something dealt with on one’s own (Neff 2003). Realizing that one is not alone and that everyone experiences personal failure lessens the level of blame and shame placed on oneself (Neff 2003). Finally, mindfulness is the act of holding painful feelings in a balanced awareness instead of over-identifying with them; it allows the mental-space necessary for one to extend themselves kindness and place their experience in the broader human context (Bluth and Blanton 2014; Neff 2003).

As a resource that relies heavily on self-soothing behaviors and an emphasis on utilizing the self for emotional support, self-compassion may be especially functional for men who have been socialized to embrace emotional isolation (Pleck 1995; Reilly et al. 2014; Wester et al. 2012; Zeman and Garber 1996). Additionally, research has found that gender role strain faced by men could be reduced through methods of relaxation and stress management that fosters positive coping strategies (Yang et al. 2018), which self-compassion addresses. Self-
compassion decreases depression, anxiety, and stress, and increases life satisfaction and happiness (Bluth and Eisenlohr-Moul 2017; Neff and Germer 2013). Additionally, it has been shown to increase compassion for others and decrease aggressive and violent behavior (Neff 2003; Neff and Germer 2013). Potentially the most important aspect of self-compassion is that it is a teachable skill (Neff and Germer 2013). Programs have been created to teach various population groups ways to practice self-compassion with consistently positive results (Bluth and Eisenlohr-Moul 2017; Neff and Germer 2013). Worth noting, in Neff’s pilot study of this program, the results were maintained at a one-year follow-up (Neff and Germer 2013).

Previous research on masculinity and self-compassion has used the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory to measure the levels at which men adhere to masculine norms; however, it was found to be a poor fit as it is specifically the gender role strain that arises from conformity that is theorized to impact emotional well-being, and the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory does not accurately measure this (Pleck 1995; Reilly et al. 2014). Additionally, research comparing various masculinity scales and their relationships to health risk behaviors found that only the Gender Role Conflict Scale predicted high risk health behaviors (Levant et al. 2009) which proves the relevance of both frameworks to this research as self-compassion positively influences health-promoting behaviors (Sirois, Kitner, and Hirsch 2015). These findings and the prominence of gender essentialist beliefs show the importance of further understanding the stress men are under to conform to masculine norms (Smiler and Gelman 2008).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To gain further insight into the detrimental effects hegemonic masculine norms have on individuals, this research used qualitative methods to investigate the impact of gender essentialism and gender role strain on levels of self-compassion. One-on-one interviews recruited individuals who attend a west-coast public, American university; recruitment was
open to ages eighteen to twenty-five, all ethnicities and sexual orientations. Although all gender identities are influenced by hegemonic masculinity, each have unique relationships with it, so this research focused exclusively on cisgender men to fully understand that relationship. Hegemonic masculinity is based off culture and is therefore different for various ethnic groups; that being said, it still exists internationally and impacts all those exposed to it (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; O’Neil 2008). The theory I will be using to gain insight on the individual’s masculinity, gender role strain paradigm, focuses less on the specific norms men adhere to and more on the effects of diverse masculine norms which makes this research relevant to all ethnicities and sexual orientations (Wester et al. 2012).

Previous studies on masculinity and emotional well-being of men have called for further investigation of the relationship between masculine socialization and emotional well-being using alternative scales of measurement to gain insight on mechanisms involved in emotion work and how they can potentially be improved (Addis et al. 2010; Reilly et al 2014; Yang et al. 2018). To further understand the ways in which these experiences are understood by individuals, I conducted one-on-one interviews with nine participants. I found participants by posting flyers in high-traffic areas around campus and announcing the research project in the front of various classes. After the initial recruitment, I sought out additional interviewees through snowball sampling by asking those I interviewed if they knew of others interested in participating. Sample demographics are shown in Table 1 below. Much of the research on masculinities focuses on questions about “how men are” and “what masculinity is” instead of how men learn about gender, how to influence what men learn about gender, and how to use this information to develop healthier models of masculinity (Addis et al. 2010). I aim to contribute to literature with further insight into the emotion regulation strategies used by men with specific attention on how men have been taught to respond, how this has changed over time, and what the perceived effects of this are.
Interview

The interviews were conducted from an exploratory approach and both the questions asked and the post-interview analysis were guided by the theories of self-compassion, gender essentialism, and gender role strain paradigm. Questions focused on the ways in which masculinity was socialized, the individuals’ personal understanding of what it means to be masculine, and how they feel in reference to hegemonic masculine norms. These questions specifically asked for situations in which the individual felt masculinity was being taught to him, situations in which he felt emasculated, and experiences in which he felt the most masculine to gain insight into how they each individually articulate masculine socialization. I then asked questions regarding hardships and negative feelings with attention to how participants typically handle these situations. Questions about managing stress, maintaining positive internal dialogues, and navigating difficult emotions enabled me to compare responses to the tenants of self-compassion. This also gave insight into the individual’s personal conception of the emotion work they engage in and how they believe this may or may not be affecting their overall emotional health. Lastly, I introduced the theory of self-compassion to the individual and allowed them to respond to the concept.

Interviews were recorded and later transcribed using NVivo and Otter.ai with hand edits done by myself. Analysis began during the interviews in note form. I then created memos during the transcription process, and all other analysis was done through coding using Google Highlights. I used deductive coding for specific norms that have been internalized, essentialist beliefs, gender conformity, gender role strain, and levels of self-compassion (Connell 1995; Neff 2003; Pleck 1995; Smiler and Gelman 2008). Due to this relationship being understudied and the call for deeper understanding into how men themselves conceptualize their own engagement with emotion, I also used inductive coding and remained open to emergent themes.
Before beginning participation in the interviews, individuals were given a letter that outlines the research project. It included the following information in addition to an option to confirm or deny participation. Any topic that deals with emotion work and managing painful emotional experiences, such as a traumatic childhood memory of being made fun of for not behaving “manly” enough, has the potential to cause distress in a participant. I ensured that all participants were fully aware they can stop at any time, refuse to answer any questions, and take whatever breaks they feel necessary. I provided them with resources that they can reach out to if they wish to get help with emotional distress, discomfort, or agitation. As for confidentiality, all data and recordings remained confidential and stored in a password protected laptop. Participants remained confidential throughout the research process and all analysis used pseudonyms.

**Table 1. Interview demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Pseudonyms</strong></th>
<th><strong>Age</strong></th>
<th><strong>Race</strong></th>
<th><strong>Class standing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Parental figures</strong></th>
<th><strong>Parents marital status</strong></th>
<th><strong>Parents Highest Degree</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Asian and Latino</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raj</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylo</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>High school degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateo</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Associates Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Latin and African-American</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS

*Conceptualizing Masculinity*

The first half of each interview consisted of questions regarding how the individual conceptualized masculinity and what influenced this understanding. There were four main findings from this section. Although masculine socialization was mostly consistent with previous literature, most participants disapproved of traditional masculine norms even though they still adhered to them. Participants described the different influencers in their change of opinion towards how they defined masculinity. There was no support of a solely essentialist explanation of gender differences. Lastly, participants described a strong “fit-it” mentality.

Socialization of masculinity were consistent with hegemonic masculine norms that promoted restrictive emotionality, never showing weakness, and isolation. Most brought up the influence of popular media, but some described the influence of their parents. A couple brought up the general apathy their parents had towards their emotional expression. Isaac describes how he learned to navigate his emotions in his upbringing:

> I guess it was hard sometimes because my mom and dad really didn’t…they were very focused on other stuff, so even though I showed them emotional pain, they said ‘Hey, we’re doing stuff right now, you gotta deal with that on your own.’

Jacob details a similar experience:

> My parents were pretty uninvolved, like when I would tell them about, like being bullied or something that would they wouldn't really react much. And I never really understood that. I think it might have led me to, say, think more in terms of like, what can I do and also try and act like I’m not relying on other people and just kind of start, just acting kind of unemotional. It's that definitely wasn't this thing like oh, you can come and cry to me or something like that.

Most participants did not have influential conversations with their parents about navigating emotion. At most it was statements such as, “You can always come to me,” without much follow up or direction on how to do that. For Mateo, the one conversation he had with his father about emotion has stuck with him ever since:
I remember, even when I was young, he was saying, like, it is okay to cry. But there is a time and place for everything, you know what I mean? …Like you got hit by a baseball, you can, you know, go in the dugout and cry. But when you're presenting your team, when you're representing who you are, you walk back to the dugout like a man and then you cry.

Mateo strongly agreed with his father and that emotion are something that needed to be dealt with, but only in private.

There was a lot of difficulty faced in getting men to comprehensively discuss their feelings and their understanding of their personal portrayal of masculinity. When asked questions such as how they define masculinity, how they portray masculinity, and what they learned about masculinity when growing up, a couple respondents had difficulty responding.

Diego was not able to answer a question asking what it means to him to be a man:

To be a man…I don't know. I guess, for me it's just me, I guess. I never really think about it. So.

Kylo had a similar response:

That’s really hard…. But that's all I can think of.

Many respondents had not previously considered what masculinity means to them and how it influences the decisions they make and the beliefs that they have. Those who gave these responses about masculinity gave similar responses when asked about their general emotional well-being which will be discussed in detail later on.

All respondents described at some point their understanding of masculinity changing, but the degree of that change differed greatly. Many respondents brought up changes in society, such as men dressing and behaving differently in public, representation in television portraying men and women with a wider range of roles and personality characteristics, and the beliefs held by friends changing alongside it all. Kylo describes this in his experience: “Because society changed, so have the people that I interact with. And so through my interactions with other people as I got older, that definition of masculinity changed.” Interestingly, there were a couple
respondents who brought up the societal conversation around “toxic” masculinity and issues that arose from the #MeToo movement.

On social media and in general, I've heard a lot of talks about toxic masculinity and inappropriate behavior as specifically perpetrated by men which I, at this point in my life, I understand is wrong and I, but I also understand that I haven't perpetuated any further back when I was a child.
– Raj

In Raj’s case, this exposure was deemed somewhat irrelevant, an issue only of importance to a past self. Others had taken courses in college that touched on issues of gender performance; Roger brings up a Global Issues class he took: “They discussed how [there are] multiple forms of masculinity and I think I did…fall into the stigma that men had to be one type of way.” These different influencers were not mutually exclusive either; Jacob discusses how his viewpoint on masculine norms, what they mean and what their impact is changed over time as well:

I had some friends around me, some very smart people who I talked to a lot about this sort of thing which initially got me thinking about it because, you know, we would just kind of argue about topics at hand in the news… I don't know, say about transgender people, that sort of thing. So that initially got me kind of thinking about it, and then you have classes at college, learning about these issues and then...Yeah, just mostly just talking about it thinking about it and then becoming more educated, seeing, seeing how it plays out.

Across the board, all participants have disagreed with traditional masculine norms in one way or another. Most mention a disdain for the emphasis placed on men to not show emotion or discuss their feelings with close friends and family; they described this as unhealthy, unattainable, and unrealistic. Nathan describes this below:

A lot of common beliefs are that you’re strong, that you put on this façade that you’re this big, burly man that can take on the world, kind of thing. But I think that’s pretty fake and no one really lives that reality, nor should anyone live that reality.

Even though that is not reality, the façade was held up by most participants, as will be shown later in findings on emotional expression. This extended to how they felt others should be taught to behave as well. Overall, they had much more acceptance of how others portrayed
masculinity, even if it went against what they were taught. Men who deviated from the norm were viewed positively, but rarely with an acknowledgement of how difficult it can be to act in opposition to societal norms. An example of this is Diego describing how he believes people should behave:

If a guy wants to be more feminine or more in touch with his feminine side and that’s fine. If a woman wants to be more in touch with her masculine side, then that’s fine too. I don’t really think there’s an issue with that.

Although the vast majority supported other engaging in behavior that goes against normative gender portrayals, many still conformed themselves.

I pretty much just fill the expectations mostly but… I don't reject anyone who's different from that. I try and be accepting, be open minded. But myself I still very much just follow the status quo pretty much. – Jacob

As for gender essentialism, all respondents disagreed with the notion of biology being the sole or main explanation for gender differences. Respondents brought up social influences such as family and societal values, as well as testosterone not being an adequate explanation for aggression.

I think it's based on society or society standards are. So it can change based on different societies, what how people view what man would look like. – Kylo

I really just think it depends on how you were brought up as a child and how you were exposed to stimuli. Like I never would have gotten into video games if it weren’t for my cousins always playing them. – Isaac

While none attributed gender differences entirely to biology, there were differing levels to which individuals disagreed with biology’s influence. Some felt it still played an important role. Here, Jacob attributes some, but not all gender difference to differences in biology:

I think for some of them, there's a grain of truth. Like, you know, testosterone, you know, does make people a little more aggressive but in the end it's not like we're hardwired to be like that. So, yeah, I don't really believe in that.

Raj acknowledges that biology is not the sole explanation, but does not have an issue with people pointing to biological explanations:
I do not believe that it is necessarily an issue for people to believe that it is due to biology because in essence that statement is saying it's not just limited to biology, I would say it's limited more to just people's upbringings and factors that they weren't able to control…. All these factors like they come together to shape part of your identity.

Lastly, when talking about both what entails being a man as well as how to navigate emotion, many respondents talked about an emphasis on fixing things. Whether it be because as the man of the house, that is what is expected:

Just because I think that sometimes you just do need to be manly. Like for example if there's like a spider in the house and nobody wants to kill it, usually the guys going to have to kill it. So in situations like that where it's just like little things, I think you do have to kind of step up and be manly. – Roger

Because I feel like the way our society works, it's kind of like you're expected to do certain things. Like when it came to like me learning I should be the bigger, older brother, even though I was younger sometimes, I should take care of other people. – Elijah

or if it has more to do with regulating emotions and remaining in control:

It's more like, oh you can do better, or how can I get better, or what am I doing wrong…. Like, why is this happening? – Kylo

or how to respond to making a mistake:

I'll kind of just think about… being a better person, like, why did I do that? I think like, how could I be a better person? Like, fix the situation, I guess? And like, how can I not make the same mistake again? – Mateo

It was common across participants to describe this method of responding to failure or mistakes by doing whatever possible to fix it.

**Difficulty Expressing Emotion**

Most participants struggled with positive emotion regulation strategies and positive self-talk. Participants talked about having difficulty expressing their emotions to those they were close to even if they felt they would not be judged. For Diego, this had a lot to do with how he felt he would not be able to express himself and that the conversation would be unproductive because of that:

I think I can show it in front of my family, but I just don't, wouldn't want to. Because I just wouldn't want to go through the questioning, them trying
to fix me when the I can't even express myself in a good way or anything like that.

Roger also felt that engagement would be unproductive, but more so because others would not be able to understand:

But sometimes I think I'm just worried that they're going to judge me, or not, not… not like be in my shoes or not see it from my perspective. But kind of just generalize it and say it doesn't matter and that I should just get over it. And that's why I'm like kind of just afraid to tell other people or really talk to people because I feel like sometimes they just don't understand. It's just I feel like it's a waste of time trying to explain something that usually, they probably won't be able to help you with.

In some cases, they described a lack of understanding towards the emotions they felt, and because of that, they felt they would not be able to receive the help or advice they desired. Even participants who did talk to friends described not having a very extensive network, at most just one close friend or a significant other that they only went to them when the situation was dire. Raj explains when it is deemed okay to talk to someone: “Keep a clear head and think through all the options that can still work things out in your favor. And seek help if you truly, truly believe that this is a scenario where you will need it.”

Most often, participants would say that at some point they would cry or break down, but only in the privacy of their bedroom, or somewhere else they knew no one else would see them. After crying, it was split between individuals who felt shameful or embarrassed like Diego,

I mean, I definitely cry, but in my own space—not to other people, or something that I've ever told other people…. I feel embarrassed about it, or ashamed.

or those who were aware that releasing emotion was an important step towards feeling better, like Mateo describing his process of getting through difficult moments:

I look at myself in the mirror, even crying and understanding like… this sucks but, you know, just let it out, like let it out once it's been bottled up. I just kind of like wash my face after and like, just feel the coldness and become refreshed, I guess.
This split was not correlated with adherence to hegemonic masculine norms, but it did appear to coincide with whether the individual had a critical understanding of their own portrayal masculinity with an understanding of the potential negative effects adhering to masculine norms may have. Elijah points out that what is often expected of men can have negative impacts on relationships as well as the individual:

Because I feel like to be a man, …you don't need to not express yourself and be less emotional. I think that's actually very needed, especially in relationships and friendships. Because if you don't thoroughly explain how you feel, there's a high chance that you won’t get past whatever is affecting you.

Sometimes when describing general well-being, participants would describe their most common state as neutral. While not necessarily a cause for concern at first glance, this was elaborated on as a lack of feeling emotion altogether. Raj gives an example of this, “I'm typically in a neutral emotional state.... I don't become very emotionally invested in a lot of things and I have a very narrow emotional range.” Other participants described finding difficulty in experiencing a wide range of emotion and remained limited to feeling either annoyed or entertained, with strong positive and negative emotions seeming out of reach.

I don't think I'm happy all the time. I'm not either, like, sad all the time either. So I think it's just neutral for the most part. – Roger

Most concerning was Kylo’s account of how he used to cry and express emotion fairly often in high school but learned to keep it bottled up. He did not see it as a negative:

Back then it was, it used to be crying. Because like, even when I was angry I would cry… I didn't know how to control that. Now it’s—I do de-escalate the situation pretty well. I haven't been like really upset with anything lately and I haven't been really sad about anything lately either. So, I think I tend to de-escalate the situation pretty well.

Later on, Kylo expresses often not knowing how to respond to or what is causing difficult emotions. He learned to not engage with his emotions and lost the connection with himself that he used to have.
In regard to self-compassionate practices, no participants seemed to practice all three aspects, those being self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. What seemed most common was mindfulness, or the practice of not overidentifying with any particular emotion. Raj explains how he avoids getting too caught up in negative emotions:

I don't ignore the impact of negative things, but I do my best to consider that there is more than just a simple negative thing that is bothering me currently. And I do my best to try to keep that in mind a lot. That there's just simply more than whatever has to me annoyed or has me disturbed at the current moment. And I feel that that's really helped me keep a generally positive outlook.

Mateo describes the mindfulness he practices when he skateboards or goes on a walk outside:

Yeah, just kind of being one with the environment, like literally just where you're at, you know, just putting away technology and kind of just being more aware of your surroundings. I think, yeah, I am kind of an aware person. So...physically being aware of my surroundings kind of tones down all like those negative stresses.

Elijah gives an example of how he makes light of the situation in order to make himself feel better:

I'll make fun of myself too. I'll be like “Man I just got smacked.” Like I would be like “OK, I got tossed”. I literally clown myself sometimes because it makes it more funny and it makes me deal with it better.

More common was negative self-talk in response to mistakes or difficult emotions, or a lack of engagement altogether. Roger talks about wanting to move away from his habits of self-blame:

Sometimes like when I am angry or mad or something, I think that I kind of blame myself and I feel like I need to move away from that and not do it as often. But I think it's just so habitual to just do it regardless.

For Diego, he brings up avoiding dealing with his emotions, a practice he knew would not serve him well:

I don't really, you know, it's just, I guess, I’m just bottling it up, so it's kind of just releasing it little by little. But it's still going to be bottling it up, you know, because I don’t really vent or talk to my friends or anything like that.

But perhaps Nathan’s response to the theories behind self-compassion most accurately expresses the consensus of these participants: “I feel like I definitely engage in [common
humanity and mindfulness]. I feel like I should definitely be less hard on myself.” He then continues to describe how when he does not do as well in a course as he believes he could have, he attributes this as a failure of who he is as a person. Overall, most participants described having the most difficulty being kind to themselves. Whether it be like the example Roger describes above, it was more common to fall into patterns of self-blame than the other tenants of self-compassion. All participants responded positively to the tenants of self-compassion and were interested in implementing self-compassionate practices into their daily lives.

DISCUSSION

The men who participated in this research project are in a unique societal moment. Critical discussion about masculinity and hegemonic norms are beginning to infiltrate mainstream media sources as growing dissent arises from the lack of acknowledgement of the masculine issue of mass shootings, the treatment of sexual violence as a women’s issue, and the growing disdain for the masculine performances given by those in highly visible positions in society, such as the performance given by Donald Trump. The #MeToo movement could be credited by starting off the conversation by bringing attention to such a widespread social problem and pointing the blame entirely on the perpetrators, those most often being men in powerful positions. With the releasing of the Gillette commercial on January 13th, just three weeks before this data collection began, that showed examples of men holding other men accountable for aggressive, predatory, and demeaning behavior, a new conversation around how “toxic” masculinity often promotes personally damaging and outwardly dangerous behaviors began. While not all participants in this study were aware or engaged with this dialogue, it is important to note the changing climate around what is expected of men and how that may be changing and influencing the young men of today.

Difficulty Navigating Emotion
Going against what was expected, participants who conformed to masculine norms were not less likely to be self-compassionate. Previous research on men’s self-compassion found that men who strongly conformed to masculine norms, such as emotional restrictiveness, stoicism, and isolation had lower self-compassion; however, when there were high levels of internalized shame, self-compassion was low regardless of masculine norm adherence (Reilly et al. 2014). The findings of my research support the complexity of the relationship between men and self-compassion. There was a split between participants able to articulate how they felt about their own masculinity portrayal and those who could not; for those that could, they were also more likely to be able to understand and navigate difficult emotions. Men who self-identified as falling in-line with hegemonic norms such as dominance, stoicism and strength, but had self-reflected on how to portray that without demeaning themselves or others more often described healthy coping strategies such as mindfulness practices and kind internal dialogues. In research done on men’s pathways to practices of meditation, participants described feeling that the methods of coping that they were taught, i.e. limiting emotion expression both internally and externally, were inadequate and sought an alternative method that encouraged emotional engagement (Lomas et al. 2012). Likelihood of engaging in self-compassionate practices then appears to transcend whether or not the individual conforms to hegemonic gender norms and relate more to individual practices such as self-reflection and self-betterment. This implies that while various hegemonic masculine norms can promote unhealthy behavior, it may not always be the case that those who conform will be condemned to emotional inhibition. As individuals become more aware of the impact of emotional suppression, they can work towards a healthy practice of emotional engagement. Future research should look further into the relationship between engagement with alternative dialogues around masculinity, self-betterment practices, and the effects that those have on men’s emotional well-being.
Nevertheless, participants overall still had difficulty defining emotions and knowing healthy response strategies. Some participants described difficulty navigating how to alleviate negative emotions, others talked about not being able to identify and understand how they felt, and some simply did not feel much at all. This limited emotional range impedes engagement with healthy emotion regulation strategies; the foundation of self-compassion is considered to be a practice in being open to and touched by one’s pain, not avoiding or disconnecting from it (Neff 2003). Hegemonic pressures teach men to be emotionally tough—not only to show this externally, but to embody this inwardly as well (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Lomas et al. 2012; Pleck 1995). Men are often not seen as emotional beings and the findings from this research show that they have less dialogue growing up around how to navigate difficult emotions and what these difficult emotions are. If anything, the conversation they do have only focused on how to hide negative emotions and the importance of not letting others see weakness (Green and Addis 2012; Lomas et al. 2012; Reilly et al. 2014). All participants supported this by either talking about not having many conversations growing up about how to adequately handle emotions or describing conversations that actively promoted damaging stoicism and disengagement.

Without healthy, positive models to base their emotion regulation practice off of, men are only left with what they know. Even in the cases of those participants that experienced fewer external pressures to not show emotion from friends and family, it was still a common theme in media, and the messages sent there were unavoidable. There is promising research on self-compassion intervention programs that teach participants a long-lasting practice of self-compassion that would be highly beneficial for men who are still inhibited by the messages of hegemonic masculinity (Bluth and Eisenlohr-Moul 2017; Coprew et al. 2014; Moreira et al. 2018; Neff and Germer 2013). As men cultivate self-compassionate engagement with their emotional selves and learn to understand and express how they feel, it is possible that those
participants who described fearing misunderstanding would be able to more confidently engage with others about what they feel. Further research should explore this relationship by looking into what conversations around mental health and healthy regulation strategies men grow up hearing.

Falling in line with the literature review, isolation has been a common response to emotional distress (Green and Addis 2012; Pleck 1995; Wester et al. 2012; Zeman and Garber 1996). Although men felt for the most part that there would not be any serious social consequences to showing emotion, they often expressed feeling uncomfortable, nonetheless. This could be the case for many reasons such as men rarely seeing peers expressing emotion, socialization in an environment that still strongly promotes hiding emotion, and ignorance of healthy emotion regulation strategies, to name a few (Green and Addis 2012; Pleck 1995; Wester et al. 2012; Zeman and Garber 1996). Respondents often talked about wanting to change this about themselves, as they were aware that this was negatively affecting them. Even those who did not feel the need to express their emotions to others often supported the idea of strangers or friends being able to. While it is clear from this study that men are still negatively being impacted by notions of restrictive emotionality, it seems to be that future generations may grow up with an entirely different dialogue around how men ought to manage their emotions.

*Self-Compassion as a Remedy*

Many of the participants brought up a “fix-it” coping strategy. When making a mistake or going through a difficult time, they talked about trying to find ways to make their situation better and ways to avoid the same problems in the future. For some, this was done with a heavy level of self-criticism, and for others, it was done with a gentler move towards self-growth. Most participants talked about holding themselves to too high of a standard and being unkind in the self-dialogue they would engage in. Others had a more proactive and self-compassionate
method of being understanding and patient towards their mistakes—although this was much less common. Though self-betterment itself is not inherently damaging, when achieved through self-criticism, it can lead to feelings of worthlessness and depression which then lead to underachievement and self-handicapping (Neff 2012). Self-betterment in conjunction with self-compassion gives individuals the safety to acknowledge weaknesses, placing them in a healthier, more productive position to change for the better (Neff 2012). One of the kindest things one can do for themselves is to reach one’s fullest potential; what matters is the methods one uses to reach this potential. This study shows that when struggling with negative self-talk, men need a way to compassionately lead themselves on the path of self-betterment.

Previous research on men engaging with positive emotion regulation strategies found that they had chosen practices of meditation as an alternative to the practice’s society imposed on them (Lomas et al. 2012). It was an active decision to respond positively in spite of what was expected of them. Participants of the current study that had actively engaged in critical thought surrounding norms expected of them had often come to the realization that ignoring and distancing themselves from their emotions was not a healthy solution. Some had developed mindfulness practices, some had an understanding that everyone, even men, struggle with negative emotions and difficult times, but most still struggled with treating themselves kindly. Common humanity, or the understanding that pain is a part of the human experience and no one is alone in that, is shown by this study to have improved as men are becoming more aware that just because their peers are not expressing it, everyone feels pain (Neff 2003). They described having exposure to prominent men talking about their depression, anxiety, and the periods of struggle they have gone through, and that it does not make them less of a man to experience that. That being said, even though there were statements that expressed an understanding of the common human experience, Neff describes the other end of the spectrum from common humanity being isolation, which, as mentioned earlier, was very high across
participants (2003). Men do not yet have the tools necessary to use that understanding of others’ pain to navigate emotional connection with themselves and their peers. Based on this understanding, what is needed is the promotion of positive regulation strategies for men, or an alternative dialogue that goes against emotional restrictiveness and isolation (Coprew et al. 2014; Lomas et al. 2012; Reilly et al. 2014).

**Alternative Masculinities**

Many participants adopted patriarchal thinking that the only way to get ahead is to adopt restrictive emotionality and to be calm and collected (Coprew et al. 2014; hooks 2004; Pleck 1995; Wester et al. 2012). The options that were given to them: A. be girly and cry or B. man-up, have left them without the tools and knowledge necessary to maintain a healthy emotional well-being (Coprew et al. 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Zeman and Garber 1996). The overwhelming majority of participants when asked to describe their general emotional well-being said that it was fine or mostly positive, then later on in the interview would describe emotional neutrality, feeling disconnected from themselves and others, and/or not knowing how to engage with those problems. It is as though their pain was normalized to the point where they do not even see it (hooks 2004). For those that go along with the hegemonic notions of how to regulate emotion, they described feeling disconnected from how they felt and depressed at times. The few that mentioned active discouragement of or apathy toward emotional expression from parents were typically more disconnected from the emotional parts of themselves, which falls in line with previous literature (Levant et al. 2018; Green and Addis 2012; Moreira et al. 2018; Wester et al. 2012). Most expressed that they wished they were more connected to how they felt, even those that were more comfortable with showing emotion. There is a definitive need for a change in the way that men are taught to navigate difficult emotions, and this has been the case for a long time (Berke and Zeichner 2016; Coprew et al.
2014; Pleck 1995; Reilly et al. 2014; Wester et al. 2012). Only now, men themselves are beginning to call for it.

The participants of this study were, for the most part, interested in and receptive of the changing conversation around masculinity and other strict gender norms. There were a wide range of influencers that were described as paths toward a better understanding of self. Courses that included critical discussion around hegemonic masculinity, informative debates with friends, and even the changing media landscape that is continually incorporating more comprehensive, authentic male experiences have all been mentioned as having a notable influence on how masculinity is conceptualized. Exposure to and normalization of alternative forms of masculinity will encourage men to engage with and portray a wide array of personality traits without the fear of not conforming to norms (Coprew et al. 2014; Green and Addis 2012; Moreira et al. 2018). Dialogue that challenges what men are typically told in regard to emotional expression will provide them with other responses to consider when confronted with difficult to navigate emotions such as depression and anxiety (Coprew et al. 2014; Green and Addis 2012; Moreira et al. 2018; Rice et al. 2016). At the end of our interview, Mateo expressed gratitude at being given the opportunity to discuss what he thinks about this topic because it helped him understand more about himself. Giving men the space and opportunity to work through their struggle and talk about what is or is not working for them can help with opening up the boundaries dictate what behavior is deemed appropriate for men. Especially in a time when there is a growing range of masculinities that are accepted and embraced (Coprew et al. 2014; McDermott and Schwartz 2013).

Pressure to conform was described as mostly coming from within; for those that felt this way, external pressure from family and friends was described as either no longer present or had never been there to begin with. Even for the participants themselves, they described being accepting of alternative forms of masculinity and claimed they would not judge another
man for breaking down and showing emotion. The truth of those statements being put aside, it is clear that young men are growing up in a different time. Gender essentialist beliefs were always discounted by participants as they explained how much socialization informs understanding of masculinity and perceptions around how to behave. This was drastically different than the literature which showed significant levels of gender essentialist beliefs among men attending university (Smiler and Gelman 2008). This could speak to the influence location has on hegemonic beliefs, as California is known to be a more progressive state with its college campuses being especially progressive spaces. There was no wide variance across demographics except that Asian participants, roughly forty-five percent of my sample, rarely brought up the negative impacts of hegemonic masculinity; if anything, they were those who advocated for conformity the most. A majority of studies on hegemonic masculinity do not provide in-depth analysis of racial differences because of the cross-cultural impact of hegemonic masculine norms. Studies that have specifically analyzed racial differences do find significant dissimilarities in levels of adherence and acceptance of norms with Asian men more often holding ambivalent feelings toward traditional gender norms (McDermott and Schwartz 2013; Wester et al. 2012) As for other racial categories in the present study, there were either not enough individuals to conduct a genuine comparison, or there was too much variance within groups to draw a pattern.

Some of the men in my study were raised with parents encouraging them to express emotion if they needed to, yet they still did not feel comfortable. Research is increasingly showing that gender role socialization is less overt than previously theorized; understanding comes from subtle language and behaviors rather than explicit endorsement (Else-Quest et al. 2012). Changes in familial and peer expectations are clearly important and necessary, but until there are cultural and institutional changes in narrative, men will continue to live emotionally stunted lives (hooks 2004). Future research should look into what conversations and dialogues
men engage with regarding emotion regulation strategies and how that influences their emotional well-being. Additionally, research on how men engage with public critiques of masculinity and what influence that has would provide critical insight into how to best create an environment that promotes disengagement with hegemonic masculinity.

Limitations

As mentioned earlier, there was difficulty in getting participants to provide in-depth answers regarding masculine performance and engagement with emotions which resulted in short interviews and therefore, less data. Additionally, due to the small sample size relative to the population, the results of this research will have low generalizability. Interview responses should always be considered with a critical perspective knowing that an individual may not tell the entire truth. While it is not possible to entirely compensate for this, I minimized this risk by focusing on themes that came up across participants and checked for consistency within individual interviews. Qualitative studies also provide less insight into correlational relationships, let alone causational relationships. However, considering the breadth of quantitative studies in the field of masculinity studies, this study provides much-needed insight into the nuances of these relationships.

CONCLUSION

Although the expectation of masculine norm adherence significantly influencing levels of self-compassion was not supported by interview responses, interview responses provided important insight into how these men understand their personal masculinity portrayal and emotional engagement. Based on the results, what seems to be crucially important is the continued critical conversation around masculinities and societal expectations of men. As men self-reflect and work towards internal self-betterment instead of simply external, they will achieve a healthier, stronger, and more stable emotional well-being. By providing men with a wider range of behaviors that are socially acceptable to engage in, they will be able to conduct
emotion regulation practices that promote healing and improve emotional well-being. Conversation around masculinity must not condemn masculine traits, just like women who enjoy being feminine are not condemned, but to provide alternatives and encourage men to express their most authentic self.
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

Consent To Participate in Research
An Analysis of the Emotional Well-Being of College-Aged Men

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Student Researcher Keelin Dunn under faculty guidance of Professor Varisa Patraporn and Professor Kerry Woodward from the Department of Sociology at California State University, Long Beach. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you identify as a cisgendered male, attend California State University Long Beach, and because you are between the ages of 18-25. You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

A. Purpose and Background

The purpose of the study is to understand the well-being of university-aged men and methods of coping with the stress of university.

B. Procedure

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete a detailed demographic survey and participate in one face-to-face interview with a researcher that will last approximately 1 to 2 hours. The location of the interview will be in a room on-campus for convenience and comfort. The interview will be audio taped with your consent to preserve the integrity of your responses. If you do not wish to be audio taped, your responses will be recorded in writing by the interviewer. If desired, you will have access to your audio tape for personal review upon request.

C. Potential Risks and Discomforts

The interview entails minimal risks. Some of the questions may contain sensitive information. The interview may include personal questions pertaining to health and past experiences which may possibly cause discomfort or distress. At any time, you may refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the research project. To mitigate any risk of pressure, you can withdraw from the interview at any point and still receive your gift card.

D. Potential Benefits to Subjects and/or to Society

Participants will be given a $10 Starbucks gift card regardless of completion of interview. Additionally, participants may find the opportunity to share information about personal experiences in interviews to be beneficial. Findings from this study may lead to a better understanding about emotional well-being of university-aged men, who have dealt with increasing levels of stress.

E. Confidentiality

All information you provide in the interview is completely confidential unless required by law. The consent form, demographic survey, interview form, and the audio file will be kept separately in a secure location during analysis. A portion of the interviews will be transcribed through a third-party service, but any identifying information will be omitted beforehand. Only the research investigator will have access to your responses. No individual
identity or identifying information will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. After the study has been completed and all data have been transcribed from the tapes, all research materials and tapes will be held for three years and then destroyed. You will be allowed to review, edit, and erase the audio recording file that will be sent to you by email.

F. Participation and Withdrawal

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Participation or non-participation will not affect your employment status or any other personal consideration or right you usually expect. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which in the opinion of the researcher warrant doing so. If you agree to an interview, you can refuse to answer any question to which you do not wish to respond, and you may request that the recorder be turned off at any time. You may also terminate the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

G. Identification of Investigators

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Keelin Dunn at keelin.dunn@student.csulb.edu or Varisa Patraporn, Dept. of Sociology, CSULB at (562) 985-4607 and varisa.patraporn@csulb.edu.

H. Rights of the Research Subjects

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office of University Research, CSU Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840; Telephone: (562) 985-5314. email: ORSP-Compliance@csulb.edu

I. Signature of Research Subject

I understand the procedures and conditions of my participation described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I agree to have this conversation audio tape recorded as a requirement for participation. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject

__________________________________________________
Signature of Subject or Legal Representative

__________________________________________________
Date

On Campus Resources:

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):
(562) 985-4001 – 24 Hour Access to Counseling
Brotman Hall, Room 226
http://web.csulb.edu/divisions/students/caps/
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

Introduction:

Hello. Thank you for participating in my study. For this study, I will be researching well-being among men on campus. I will be asking you questions about your upbringing as well as any stress you may have been experiencing lately. We may touch on emotional topics, so if there are any questions you do not want to answer, you do not have to, and if you want to pause or stop at any point feel free. I also have resources available that I can provide for you if you may need any assistance after this interview. I may be taking notes throughout the interview, so don’t mind me.

I encourage you to go into as much detail as you would like. My goal is to fully understand your experience and how you perceive and understand different things that have happened to you. So without saying more than you’re comfortable with or feeling pressure, just know that this is a judgement free process and everything you say will be confidential.

- **Probing questions to be used at any point**
  - What did you mean by that?
  - That’s very interesting. Can you elaborate a bit more on that?
  - How did that make you feel?

- **Demographic Survey (Completed prior to interview)**
  - How old are you?
  - Where were you born?
  - What gender identity do you identify with?
  - What is your racial/ethnicity?
  - What level of education have you achieved so far?
  - What is the education background of your parents?
  - Did you grow up with siblings? Two parents?
  - What was your general childhood experience?

- **Conceptualizing masculinity**
  - What does it mean, in your own words, to be a man?
  - What would you say are common beliefs about masculinity? How do you feel about these?
  - Some people will say gender differences are based on biological differences and that men are naturally more aggressive, and women are naturally more emotional. What do you think about this?
  - Do you think it is important to be masculine? Why?
  - Do you think men can comfortably disengage with these norms you described around “being a man”?

- **Gendered situations**
  - Think back on a male role model in your life and tell me about them. How were they manly? What did they teach you about being a man?
  - Think back to moments in your life when you remember learning about what it meant to be a man (media, family, friends). Describe those for me.
    - Who was involved with teaching you to be a man? Male role models.
    - How did you feel about those situations then? And now?
  - When do you feel most manly? Describe situations.
  - In what situations do you think it is most important to be a man?
Feeling masculine
  o Has your definition of what it means to be a man changed over time?
    ▪ Did anything in particular influence that change?
  o In what ways do you feel masculine?
  o When do you feel the most masculine?
  o How do you feel about the way you portray masculinity?
    ▪ Do you fall in line with societies definition of masculinity? How do you feel about that?
    ▪ How do you think others feel about the way you portray masculinity?

Transition:
  o We will now be shifting to questions regarding your overall well-being.

Emotion work
  o It is often said that men can’t cry or show strong emotion. What are your thoughts on that?
    ▪ Do you feel that you can show emotional pain in general? In front of your friends? Family? Significant other?
    ▪ Are there certain emotions you feel more comfortable sharing?
    ▪ If not, is that an external pressure or an internal pressure?
  o Tell me about your connection with your emotions.

Stressful situations
  o How would you describe your general emotional well-being?
  o What type of negative emotions do you typically feel?
  o How do you destress?
    ▪ How do you maintain a strong/healthy well-being?

Self-Compassion
  o Can you provide an example of how you typically handle making a mistake?
  o Describe how you typically handle going through a difficult time.
  o When you in a moment of intense emotional strife, such as experiences of panic, anger, or a type of meltdown, how do you typically respond?
  o Would you say that you have more understanding towards yourself or more frustration/impatience?
  o How has this worked for you?
    ▪ How might you want to respond differently?

Are there any particular norms that have been taught to you that influence how you navigate emotions?
  o What did your parents tell you?

Have you ever heard of the practice of self-compassion before?
  o If so, what does it mean to you?
  o If not, [give basic explanation]. What are your thoughts on that?

Closure
  o Is there anything else you want to add about what we have discussed today?
  o These are my main takeaways from what we have discussed. Does this seem correct to you? Is there anything I may have mistaken or something you would like to clarify?
  o Is it alright if I contact you again if I have any follow-up questions?
  o Is there anyone you know who fits the criteria that may be interested in participating in this study?
Reference List


