

Investigating Masculinity at St. Olaf College:

A Study of Perceptions and Identities of College Males and Male Behavior

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Soc/Anth 373: Ethnographic Research Methods

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May 2013

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Abstract

This study examines conceptualizations of masculinity from a sample of male and female students at St. Olaf College who serve as representatives of the unique St. Olaf Community. In this investigation sought the answer to the overarching question: what are the St. Olaf community's perceptions of masculinity? This question is often overlooked at St. Olaf. Gender discussions often focus instead on the roles, status and perceptions of women and femininity. Individual interviews were conducted with both men and women from a wide range of background, including different majors, racial/ethnic identities, family dynamics, and sexual orientations. We were interested in whether or not there was a masculine norm within the campus culture of St. Olaf. We found that traditional stereotypes of masculinity are recognized, but many participants did not see these stereotypes as forming a current modern perception of masculinity on campus. Our results suggest that what defines masculinity is somewhat fluid, and both male and female participants are still coming to terms with its definition.

Setting

St. Olaf College was founded by Norwegian Lutheran immigrants in 1875 as a non-secular, post-secondary school. It is located in Northfield, Minnesota, about a forty-five minute drive south of the Twin Cities metro area, and contains just over 20,000 residents. A majority of residents are white (88%), but there is also a significant Hispanic population (9%). Northfield is home to both St. Olaf College and Carleton College. Many of our participants found St. Olaf to be a very accepting community, welcoming them regardless of their origin, gender, sexual orientation, and family background.

St. Olaf College is a residential college with more than 95% of its 3176 students living in campus housing (dorms and honor houses). Dorms have been co-ed by floor since the founding of the school. Currently women make up 56% of the student body. Eighty-one percent of students identify as white, with the second largest group identifying as Asian (5%). The school attempts to meld traditional Norwegian/Lutheran identity with international perspective and a

focus on promoting mind, body, and spirit. Popular traditions such as Traditional Christmas Fest and weekly chapel services, as well as required Biblical and Theology courses, speak to a sense of Scandinavian Lutheran tradition on campus. At the same time, 80% of students study abroad while at St. Olaf, and recent years have seen a rise in international students and students who do not identify as white.

St. Olaf's liberal arts curriculum draws from many different disciplines. Physical sciences make up the most popular majors. Popular programs also include math and music. In total the school offers forty major programs, twenty concentrations, and eighteen pre-professional programs.

Methodology

Data Collection

The first method of data collection used in our investigation was a series of one-on-one interviews with St. Olaf students. Each of us conducted about ten interviews for a total of twenty-eight. Each interview lasted about twenty to thirty minutes. The interview style was semi-structured, allowing for open conversation. We used a set of fourteen questions which addressed the individual's construction of masculinity, perceptions of masculinity in society, and where each individual saw manifestations of masculinity on the St. Olaf campus. We also asked participants to share stories and give examples of their experiences with masculinity. All or most of the questions were addressed in each interview, but additional topics and questions were also discussed, depending on the individual interviewee's answers, interests and stories. Each interview was recorded, and the recordings were analyzed and coded afterwards.

The second method of data collection used was a series of two focus groups. Each focus group consisted of two to four participants, along with two to three discussion leaders, and lasted about thirty minutes. We focused discussions on topics that had not been thoroughly addressed in the interviews, such as sexuality. The purpose of the focus groups was to observe how participants approached the concept of masculinity in a group setting as opposed to the more confidential setting of an interview.

The last method of data collection was physical observation of behavior on campus. We each spent two hours observing behavior of both males and females at different locations across campus. We observed inconspicuously for a period of thirty minutes in a busy or popular location on campus where many students gather and interact (such as the Cage and the Pause). We observed both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, in order to gather information about the way that masculinity is transferred and reinforced through interaction. This kind of observation provided information that the interviewees were not able to verbalize.

Recruitment

We attempted to contact a wide range of individuals for our interviews in order to put together a more comprehensive idea of masculinity on campus. We used email aliases (with the permission of the professors, coaches and faculty members who led individual groups and departments) to contact students from different majors, sports teams and student organizations for the study. In all, we contacted the football, basketball and swim teams; Sociology/Anthropology, Math, Biology, Music and Gender Studies majors; Multicultural Affairs, International Students; and members of PAC and GLOW!. We scheduled interviews on

a first-come-first-serve basis as we received emails declaring interest. Using this approach, a total of twenty-eight students were recruited for the study.

The sample included mostly sophomores and juniors, with very few freshman and seniors. Participants mainly came from social science and music majors, and had already established an interest in gender discussion. Both males and females participated in the study, although we had slightly more males (16) than females (13). Most of the participants were white, although we did have a few Asian, Black and Hispanic participants.

Because discussing the topic of masculinity might have been uncomfortable for some participants, especially amongst strangers, we understood the importance of selecting individuals who were acquainted for our focus groups. We decided to recruit individuals in the same courses. However, we wanted to have one focus group more homogenous and the other one slightly more heterogeneous; similarity and difference were determined by size of class and major. For the first focus group we recruited students from the Sociology/Anthropology Senior Seminar course as these students have all had several classes together. For the second focus group, we recruited students from an Intro to Statistics course required for a variety of majors including Sociology/Anthropology, Psychology, Economics, Statistics and Physical Therapy. Our intention for the focus groups was to explore more about the type(s) of sexuality that masculinity implies. This was a question that was not looked at as specifically in the interviews.

In our first focus group, four senior students (two males and two females) participated. All four were Sociology/Anthropology majors. For our second focus group, no one from the Statistics class showed interest in participating, despite several emails and an easy online RSVP, so it consisted instead of our own friends who were able to come at the last minute. Both participants were juniors, one a Math major and the other Pre-Med.

Analysis of Methodology

Our study had strengths in the variety of methods to conduct the study, including interviews, focus groups and observation, which were able to get a big picture idea about masculinity on campus. The interviews and focus groups provided a conceptualization of both individual- and group-thought about masculinity, as well as an understanding of the difference between how people responded to this topic in a one-on-one setting and in a group of peers. In the interview setting, participants were given a chance for more candid reflection. This was important because participants gave insightful information through accounts of their own experiences. We were also able to analyze the topic for ourselves through observational study, which was important because sometimes we were able to observe things that interviewees may not have been able to verbalize.

The weaknesses of our study were mostly in recruitment. For some men, we understood that the phenomenon of masculinity may not be recognized because it is generally an unmarked category. As discussed by Peggy McIntosh, the privileges received by those who are categorized as unmarked are rarely discussed because they are invisible to those who have them. Because society privileges masculine males and protects this privilege by disregarding it, many people who belong to this category either don't recognize their privilege or feel uncomfortable acknowledging the existence of the category because it might undermine their privilege. We had difficulty recruiting males to participate in this study. Many of the men who we interviewed were oblivious to the privileges of masculinity and didn't immediately have thoughts about those privileges. Additionally, the study attracted people who were quite enthusiastic about discussing the role of gender in society, and who did not necessarily represent the stereotypical masculine identity, and were involved in activities such as GLOW! or were music or social sciences majors.

Consequently there is also a type of person that this study repels. We contacted three men's and women's sports teams for recruitment in an effort to represent a wide variety of thoughts and opinions in our study. However, not one member of any of the three teams responded to our several emails. Most of the participants representing interests outside of music, gender studies and social sciences were our own friends and acquaintances who we recruited personally. Although many of the people who we interviewed were quite fluent in gender discourse, which provided us with intricate and interesting answers, the lack of diversity in participants was a gap in our data.

Problem & Literature Review

The traditional definition of masculinity refers to the dominant culture's normative definition of masculinity. Larger social constructions of masculinity still somewhat dominated our participants' perceptions of masculinity; however, each individual also personally defined masculinity in their own light. In the college context especially, the pressure to conform to being masculine in the traditional sense is often associated with how one looks, what social group one belongs to, and what sort of social activities and behaviors one partakes in, including parties, sex, drugs, and alcohol. These activities still largely define stereotypical masculinity at the average college and university. For example, recent inquiries have concluded that college men comprise the majority of students who are cited for non-academic violations of campus judicial policies and more than 90 percent of students who are accused of sexual assault, relationship violence, and sexual harassment on college campuses (Harper in III, F. H., 2010). Some female students interviewed reported that these crimes happen on campuses. They also reported that promoting awareness in order to stop these crimes is mainly geared toward men, even though awareness is

expected of everyone. Others report academic underachievement, disengagement from campus programs and activities, alcohol and substance abuse, homophobia, depression, and poor coping among college men (Harris, 2010).

Despite the scholarly attention towards male behavior, college educators still know very little about the gender identity development process for male college students. One reason for this discrepancy is that scholars must rely on frameworks that were not designed for this purpose (III, F. H., 2010). Frameworks that are available are related specifically to the identity development of women, African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and the LGBTQ community (Josselson in III, F. H., 2010). In addition, many scholars and college educators mistakenly believe that they already understand men and do not need to further study the male perspective. (Edwards, K. E. & Jones, S. R., 2009). There is a body of literature on masculinity and men's studies, yet models that seek to explain college men's gender identity development are largely absent in these studies (III, F. H., 2010).

Social Constructions of Masculinity

The social construction of masculinity emphasizes the influence of social interactions, social structures, and social contexts in producing and reinforcing normative expectations of masculine behavior. Masculinity would not exist without social interaction to create and reinforce it, and discourse and language are important contributors to its production and maintenance in a social context as well. As Reeser (2010) states, "language defines the reality that we experience because we cannot experience reality without using language. We understand masculinity through the ways in which it is talked about."

Masculinity is referred to as a performance by poststructural theorists such as Judith Butler. Gender identity is created over time through a series of “stylized actions” that may or may not conform to societal expectations of what is understood to be masculine (Butler, 1988). This theory stems from the belief that “one is not born, but rather becomes a [man]” (de Beauvoir, 1953). Scholars who examine forms of masculinity from a social constructionist perspective are fundamentally concerned with the consequences of traditional patterns of male gender socialization and of performing masculine acts according to prevailing societal norms. Another key assumption of this perspective is that no one dominant masculine form persists across all social settings but rather *multiple masculinities* that are situated in sociocultural contexts (Harris, 2010).

Gender Role Conflict

Gender role conflict is a concept that examines masculinity, gender roles, and their negative effects on men (Shek, Y. L. & McEwen, M. K., 2012). This concept restricts a man’s capability to actualize his potential by the pressures larger social expectations put on men. The concept of gender role conflict examines the ways in which men may struggle with gender roles. The four roles that produce the greatest stress are: (1) Success, Power, and Competition; (2) Restrictive Emotionality; (3) Restrictive Affectionate Behavior Between Men; and (4) Conflict Between Work and Family Relations (Shek, Y. L. & McEwen, M. K., 2012). Studies on the relationship between gender roles and psychological health have shown that lack of self-esteem, psychological stress, and help-seeking behavior have increased in correlation with the pressure to conform to these roles (Shek, Y. L. & McEwen, M. K., 2012).

Gender Roles in Higher Education

Literature on gender in an educational context suggests that academia is entirely male-centered, favoring masculine-associated traits such as competition, individual work and rationality (Wolgemuth, 2007). The privilege that expression of these traits accords is largely unrecognized, given the invisibility of masculinity in society due to its aforementioned status as unmarked. There is little information about the extent to which these traits are limited strictly to males. Additionally, provided that there are many kinds of masculinity, certainly some types are more valued and rewarded than others in an educational setting.

Multiple Dimensions of Identity: Race and Sexual Orientation

The social construction of masculinity as described above recognizes that there are multiple dimensions of masculinity across all social settings. These include race/ethnicity, class, religion, and sexual orientation, which interact and influence the development of multiple masculinities. These multiple dimensions have challenged dominant and traditional social constructions.

As Reeser (2010) mentions, discussion of the relationship between gender and race is exceedingly complex because they are so intertwined; their meanings and experiences cannot easily be separated from one another. Much discourse about masculinity is from the white perspective, which rarely takes race into account because of the normativity of whiteness. Therefore, perceptions of masculinity are connected to perceptions of race in a way that makes it difficult to talk about one category without discussing the other as well. Each racialized group has its own unique relation to and experience with masculinity. With that, males who identify as a race and/or sexual orientation other than heterosexual white must contend with how these

identities mix with masculinity. Some male participants identified themselves of a specific race and explicitly believed that race and masculinity are inseparable. Being of a certain race challenged their masculinity and their identity as a whole.

Media and Masculinity

Media plays a key role in development of conceptions of masculinity. Images of the so called “perfect man”, or the “manly man” are prevalent in all forms of media. Particular emphasis is placed on movies, TV, and music. Through study of modern media, we have come to understand masculinity as “both a product and process of representation” (de Laurentis, 1987, 5). In other words, the representation of masculinity in the media is both a product of society and a process through which the representations are forged or reinforced. This phenomenon has been studied in depth as it relates to women and body image, but it is becoming more commonly utilized in the study of male body image (Ricciardelli, 2010). With the constant barrage of media in the lives of today’s college students it is virtually impossible to avoid exposure to influential images, lyrics and writings. Many articles refer to the prevalence of consumer culture and its influence over popular images of men. Body images are particularly powerful influences. Objectification of the body by media is traditionally directed towards the female body, however increasingly the effects of objectification of the male body are being documented. Image heavy sources, such as magazines targeting male audiences show idealized male bodies and state that every man should aspire to look the same. Multiple studies have shown that extensive exposure to these images is tied to many negative outcomes, including low self esteem, depression, body dysmorphic disorder, eating disorders, excessive exercising, and use of unhealthy supplements like steroids (Barlett, 2008). Many other examples have been documented showing the direct

connection between media and masculinity. Beer commercials provide a wealth of examples, such as “man laws” and “bro code”, which both originated in such commercials and have developed into slang often heard on campus.

Findings

Masculinity

Larger social constructions of masculinity dominated the initial reactions from our participants. Many students attributed masculinity to specific physical qualities such as muscular build, handsome/good-looking features, and facial hair such as a beard or a mustache. Masculinity was also attributed to personality characteristics like confidence, ambition, and competitiveness. Most participants initially described masculinity in the same way, but throughout the interviews their definitions of masculinity diverged.

One female participant in particular explained that there were two extremities of masculine behavior she noticed among her male peers: 1) males who are not expressive, shy, and quiet and 2) males who are outspoken, and overconfident. She found both forms to be masculine in different ways despite one being reserved and the other outgoing. According to Shek (2012), this can be due to the conflicting roles men are expected to uphold between restricting their emotions and maintaining success, power, and competition. Other female students described a spectrum of masculinity in similar ways. This spectrum allows for overlaps with behaviors traditionally considered more feminine. According to many of our participants masculine behavior cannot be defined as simply male behavior, but rather as a set of behaviors that both males and females exhibit. They stated after some thought that masculine and feminine behaviors were not as black and white as they were often portrayed.

Surprisingly some males reported that there is a difference in masculinity and “being a man”. As reported from a male student, “being a man” deals more with taking on responsibility and becoming an adult. It is more associated with thoughts versus physical dominance, which is what masculinity asserts. “Being a man” can however also refer to the traditional sense that a man is able to work and provide for his family, which is also considered masculine. The terminology here often is made confusing by mixed meanings, but males clearly made distinctions between actions and thoughts. Male participants reported that “being a man” was often set by examples from their fathers and grandfathers. In situations that dealt with emotions, a male reported that males should not cry or show emotion at a funeral because you had to be strong for the family and others. This can also be seen as a masculine quality because they reserve their emotions, however, it was the matter of upholding support for the family during this grieving time, which the participant referred to as behavior necessary for “being a man.”

Campus Culture

All participants generally agreed that St. Olaf was a very accepting environment. The sense of community is strongly present on campus and students are encouraged to explore and find their niches. However, some students would describe St. Olaf more as a passively accepting community. One participant stated that one would be accepted upon acquaintance by default, but differences would not be celebrated. They referred to this as a “don’t ask, don’t tell” sort of acceptance. A few of the participants made remarks about how St. Olaf is comprised of many students who are politically liberal, but come from socially traditional and conservative backgrounds.

One of our most enigmatic question was what it meant to be male on campus. We had a range of responses, but one common factor we found in all of our interviews was that participation in social activities such as drinking alcohol socially, doing recreational drugs, and sexual relationships were still strong determinants of being a male on campus. Interviewees also mentioned that masculinity was often expressed in the classroom, through “intellectual masculinity”, or masculine traits that are highly valued in an academic setting and can lead to success.

An interesting trend that we discovered was that the majority of male participants were unaware of male privilege on campus. After considerable thought about our question “what does it mean to be male on campus?”, many men replied that they don’t think it means anything significant. One male participant mentioned that he had never really thought about that question before. However, female students strongly felt that there was a difference to being male on campus. As Reeser discusses, this is most likely the result of masculinity as an “unmarked category”. People who fit easily into the norm don’t usually notice that there is a norm because it applies to them. People who don’t fit the norm--such as women and homosexual or asexual men--are hypersensitive to what the norm is and how they don’t fit it, whereas for heterosexual “masculine” men, understanding gender roles is not an integral part of their lives.

Volunteer Bias

As we were assessing our interviews we noticed that there was a lack of diversity amongst our participants. Our methodology was designed to gather a wide variety of participants and yet disappointingly we failed to achieve this. These discrepancies are findings in themselves. Although we contacted several male’s sports teams on two separate occasions, no male student

athletes volunteered to be interviewed. A majority of the males interviewed in this study did not identify as fitting into the stereotypical, or traditional “macho” masculinity. Most were not involved heavily in the activities associated with being masculine, such as exercising, and competitive activities. We had hoped to interview male athletes who stereotypically fall into those roles to gain their perspective for the study. The fact that none volunteered or even responded to our invitations could show that students of this group are uncomfortable about or uninterested in the topic of masculinity.

Expectation in Academics

Students recognized that there were more males in certain majors like chemistry and physics, which are also known as the “hard” sciences, whereas more women were majoring in so called “soft” science, such as psychology and biology. There were more men majoring in computer science and mathematics as well. In the “softer” sciences, more males were in the higher realms of social sciences such as economics while more women were majoring in sociology and women and gender studies.

Some participants also noted that there are some departments in which men would feel particularly uncomfortable, and might even be discouraged from taking a class because they would be so harshly judged. For example, many students suggested that they would never take a dance class for fear of being seen as gay. One female student remarked that she doubts that most females feel hesitant to take a class in a male dominated department to the extent that males feel that way about female dominated departments. One male participant told us that if a male student was a Women and Gender Studies major, then they would most likely be suspected by their peers of being gay.

With St. Olaf's high interests in music and natural sciences, these majors tend to develop stereotypes. Male students who were majoring in music felt that they were seen as the "lame" students on campus because of the association of music with femininity. Students also recognized the assumptions made by non-music majors are that they are gay or nerds. Even within the department one female music major stated that female music majors often complained that males in the music department "were typically considered gay, or effeminate or already involved in a serious relationship with another female student". The implication of this was that there was a shortage of masculine heterosexual males in the department. Surprisingly, another female music major told us that within the music department, membership in certain ensembles is considered more masculine than others and that even within an ensemble certain sections are typically believed to be more "manly". An example given was that the trombone section of the band is made up of all males and is considered a manly section, whereas the flute section is made up of primarily females and is considered more feminine.

Race

Race was mentioned as a factor that affected identification of masculinity. As previously discussed by Reeser, race and masculinity are inseparable. One of our black male participants reported that being a black male automatically made you masculine. He stated that this was the case because of the dramatized and over exaggerated stereotypes of black men in media. "Media portrayals of black men are affiliated with hip hop, gangsters, drugs, and sex--often which portrays aggressiveness." When asked if he fell into this norm, he disagreed and said that people upon acquaintance were surprised by him. "I don't fall into that category because I am obviously not muscular and I like to cook. With cooking, that is usually seen as a feminine trait. People

usually assume I'm gay, but when I tell them I'm not they are shocked." Being a black homosexual is not acceptable in the larger society, especially the black community. We did not intend to explore the sexual orientation of men in our study, but we came to find that mainstream masculinity implies heterosexuality. Sexual Orientation will further be discussed below.

One of our Asian male participants stated that Asian males are seen as the lowest and weakest masculine race. He believed that media dramatizes and over exaggerates Asian men being of small size and short height. Asian men are affiliated with intelligence, for example in the sciences and mathematics, which is not "masculine" in the physical sense. Asian men are also seen to be comedic. For example there are many comedy films in the U.S. with Asian male leads. The participant believed that the masculinity that is circulated in our society is "white masculinity". "People (The West) indirectly convert you to their ideals, they think masculinity is universal." He was raised with Chinese traditions in Hong Kong where traditionally masculinity is often based around kinship. Masculinity in the West is individualized and based on the physical attributes a man has. In Chinese and similar Asian cultures being masculine or being a man means that one is able to provide for their family. The traditional forms for the East and the West are ideally the same, but some students strongly believe that being of a certain race challenged your masculinity.

Sexual Orientation

Mainstream media implies that masculinity is heterosexual. This was apparent in the participants' description of what the ideal representation of masculine identity means to them. Many participants listed celebrities such as Hugh Jackman, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Ray Louis, and fictional characters such as Han Solo and Ron Swanson as examples of the ideal

representation of masculinity. All of these figures have many traits in common, especially being serious, independent, strong (both mentally and physically), and a lack of emotional involvement. They are also all heterosexual, and considered desirable by women.

Many participants described “flamboyance” as a non-masculine trait and referred specifically how flamboyance was associated with gay or feminine men. They implied that it is not masculine to be homosexual (and that therefore homosexuality is feminine). Several participants who identified as gay however, claimed that they saw themselves as having many masculine traits and did not identify with being feminine.

In one specific case, one student identified themselves as asexual. They explicitly stated that they were not interested in men or women. There are social assumptions that asexuals are not interested in sex or sexual activity but can still have and maintain monogamous relationships with males or females. However, this participant reported that they were not interested in any sort of relationship. They also stated that they did not identify as male or female, though they were physically and biologically male and they are still coming to terms to define that. They expressed that identifying themselves as an asexual allowed them to see people as people instead of seeing people through the gender binaries. They also noted their behavioral changes depending on what male or female social group they were with. When asked about what their male peers think, the participant said “they said to me that I’m just still figuring out my sexual orientation and I haven’t met the right person yet.” In addition, this participant stated that everyone is “surprised by my identity either with curiosity or hesitance.” With this, there is still the social pressure to identify yourself as either of the gender binaries regardless of your sexual orientation. In general, there seems to be a lot of pressure to act in a certain way sexually in order to be

perceived as masculine, because sexuality is such an integral part of what it means to be masculine.

In a sort of reverse of this concept several people interviewed also mentioned that the term “Gay” had come to mean feminine when used as a derogative term. We observed the use of this term as an insult on campus in the interactions of groups of males. One male interviewed told us that even males who are very supportive of gay rights will sometimes “slip up” and use gay as derogatory slang when a male behaves in a feminine manner. In this case, he told us, the insult may not even refer to sexuality at all, but merely to female behavior. Another male participant said that especially at St. Olaf, the term has been severed from its original meaning. He believed that many people used the word as part of a so-called “arsenal” of derogatory words, which can be used in a multitude of situations. He referred to several other swear words and insults which have taken on a number of meanings. So in the case of the derogatory use of “Gay” the meaning can depend on the situation. In our observations and interviews this almost always meant feminine in an insulting manner.

Metrosexuality

One of the topics that came up frequently was metrosexuality. Metrosexuality is an interesting concept because its name suggests that it is a ‘third sexuality’, but usually has less to do with sexuality than with fashion and appearance. It was described by participants as a male fashion style or lifestyle that is generally accepted as masculine, but incorporates various aspects widely recognized as feminine. Examples that the participants offered of metrosexual individuals were characters from the television show Jersey Shore: Pauly D and ‘The Situation’, as well as movie stars such as Ryan Gosling. The participants stated that their reason for labeling these

individuals 'metrosexual' was because they are visibly concerned with their appearance, to the point of doing stereotypically feminine things to maintain it (such as tanning in tanning booths). This is interesting because metrosexuals are often described as fit and good looking males (something masculine), but the obsession with achieving this is seen as more feminine. Additionally, individuals that identify as metrosexual generally dress in clothing that is tight or revealing. One student suggested that it is often hard to distinguish between metrosexual style and stereotypically homosexual style. These findings are interesting because they indicate that metrosexuality is perhaps blurring the line between the continuums of gender and sexual orientation.

Participants generally did not describe metrosexuality as being un-masculine. In fact, one participant suggested that perhaps metrosexuality is the ultimate representation of the masculine identity, because metrosexuals are so confident in their masculinity that they are able to incorporate feminine behaviors into their persona. Another participant labeled himself as a "pretty boy", which is basically along the same lines of metrosexuality in terms of being aware of one's appearance. However, this participant also talked about how being a pretty boy is commonly associated with being attractive to women and a lot of sexual activity. Although this concept of a male who is obsessed with his appearance seems feminine in many ways, it is offset by the masculine action of dominating women through the act of sex.

Family Dynamics

We found a great range of family backgrounds that influenced our participants' perceptions about masculinity. Many participants experienced atypical gender roles growing up, such as a stay-at-home and/or slightly effeminate father or a mother who was the breadwinner of

the family. There were also many students who talked about the sharing of household responsibilities between their parents which led to a more open understanding of gender roles.

There were also a few participants who stated that they were conditioned to act in a masculine way by family members, who teased them for acting in any way that was deemed feminine. These participants were so distressed by these interactions that they made a point to be more accepting of non-traditional gender roles.

Most participants suggested that the way that their parents addressed the concepts of masculinity and femininity had a significant effect on their openness about gender roles. This was discussed both as parental reinforcement of gender non-conformity, but also as a reaction in the opposite direction to their parent's adherence to traditional gender roles. However, it seems that for the majority of the participants, the greatest impact on their perceptions of masculinity came not from their familial upbringing, but from the media. Although most of the participants have flexible perceptions about masculinity, their ideals remain more or less traditional.

Major Influences

Many people interviewed on campus seemed very willing to talk about the perceived influences on gender identity development. While biological/hormonal/physical attributes were often mentioned to begin with a vast majority of participants recognized that the traits of masculinity and femininity are primarily based upon environment. This is consistent with de Beauvoir's statement, "one is not born, but rather becomes a [man]". Most people began with referencing their families as the first influence on perceptions of both masculinity and femininity. Parents and older siblings served as the first role models of male and female behavior. Lots of interesting examples of this were brought up by participants with "non-traditional" family

situations. Both female and male students interviewed agreed that being raised in a household of primarily female members led to certain formations of masculinity that differed from the norm. Male students that grew up in primarily female families mentioned feeling more able to relate to women than some of their peers. Female students mentioned that their male friends that grew up in these situations often behaved in a certain manner. Words used included, sensitive, introverted, creative, and various others typically associated with femininity. Many students said that although family was an initial strong influence, peers quickly became the most significant factor in identifying what is masculine and what is not. Male participants described experiences with dealing with strong gender stereotyping in grade school through high school. Youth sports leagues were referred to by one participant as one of the strongest factors in his developing understanding of masculinity.

Another major influence on the development of perceptions of masculinity is mass media. This term covers the wide range of music, TV, movies, video games, magazines, etc. Our participants were quick to identify media portrayals of masculinity and femininity as powerful influences on their personal perceptions. This is consistent with the findings of de Laurentis et al. (1987). Similar to the findings of that study several participants mentioned the give and take relationship between mass media and society. One female participant said that mass media often portrays a specific style of masculinity, but that this style is generally in line with the accepted views of the target audience. As an example, she referred to different portrayals of males during sporting event commercial breaks on TV and commercial breaks during dancing and singing talent shows. St. Olaf males interviewed generally acknowledged the power of images in the media over male body image and defining masculinity.

Summary and Conclusion

Perceptions of masculinity on campus seem to be undergoing a major change. Many students could quickly list the traditional traits that defined historical masculinity, but took great effort in giving descriptions of what contemporary masculinity is like. Our study does not provide any conclusive synopsis of the “typical St. Olaf male” or even the typical behaviors attributed to “being masculine.” What we have been able to show, however, is that most of our male participants had never given much thought to such topics, nor were they previously interested in discussing them. We had a very difficult time recruiting individuals who fit the traditional stereotype of masculinity (for example, male students on sports teams or in majors such as Math and the “Hard” Sciences). We believe that this lack of interest and participation from certain males is a result in itself. It shows that masculinity is a topic that many of these males currently are uncomfortable with or uninterested in discussing, demonstrating that the topic of masculinity is contentious.

We feel like there is a need for more open conversation about masculinity on campus and hope that this study can serve as an icebreaker to begin dialogue. Our findings show there is no unified consensus on campus as to how students perceive masculinity. The variety of answers we received, as well as the manner in which they were presented, led us to believe that masculinity is going through a shift, both in definition and in the manner in which it is acted out. We hope that the results of this study lead to new discussion on campus.

The questions asked in this study are still in need of further exploration. We identified that many participants could quickly define “traditional masculinity,” but struggled to give clear answers to questions about modern forms of masculinity, or the role it plays on campus. There is

a need to conduct a similar study in the coming years, as we predict that some of these answers will solidify given time. Future studies could also attempt to negate “volunteer bias,” which was the biggest flaw of our study as we had trouble achieving the wide diversity of participants we hoped for. In our study we depended entirely on volunteer participants for raw data. While this left us with enthusiastic participants, it also left us with a relatively homogeneous group. Of the volunteers, a vast majority were involved in the social sciences or had extensive experience talking about issues like gender and sexuality in groups such as GLOW!. No student athletes volunteered for our study, despite the fact that we explicitly contacted sports teams to ask for volunteers. Future studies of this nature will need to try out new strategies to attract more diverse volunteers. Such diversity would allow for a more conclusive investigation of masculinity on campus.

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In-depth study of 5 male graduate students that explores how male graduate students make sense of what it means to be a man, and illuminates links between higher education and the production of masculinity.