

Masculinities, the Metrosexual, and Media Images: Across Dimensions of Age and Ethnicity

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Abstract By inviting two generations of ethnically diverse men to define *masculinity*, this study makes visible ways men conform to, negotiate, and resist forces of hegemonic masculinity in the 21st century. Masculine gender role conflict theory provides underpinning for a textual analysis of empirical evidence gathered among U.S. young college men ($N=80$) in focus groups and their fathers/uncles ($N=27$) during interviews. Findings suggest that masculinities predominantly are defined in non-physical terms. Perspectives offered by African-American/Black, Asian, Caucasian/White, and Hispanic/Latino men offer nuanced cross-cultural constructions and meanings of masculinities and influences that shape their sense of self. Reported overall was anxiety, confusion, and frustration—especially with regard to the metrosexual and (in)ability to measure up to media-promoted male body images.

Keywords Body image · Masculinities · Age · Ethnicity · Media · Metrosexual · Masculine gender role conflict theory

Introduction

This study was designed to expand masculine gender role conflict (GRC) theory and to provide empirical findings that make a significant contribution to male gender role and body image research by interrogating rarely-explored intersection-

alities with age and ethnicity factors. Consistent with goals to discover ways men are “socialized to restrictive gender roles” (O’Neil et al. 1995, p. 165), it is relevant to consider how generations of men perceive masculinities and ways that ethnicity interacts in their discursive constructions. Gender role and body image research must resist universalizing trends that focus almost exclusively on Caucasian/White men’s experiences by also including voices of African-American/Black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino men. Moreover, investigating men’s standpoints by encouraging self-reflection at various points along the life cycle enhances gender role and body image research. Such research supports efforts to keep pace with increasingly heterogeneous populations in the U.S. and globally, for it promotes understanding of exercise and uneven distribution of men’s power. Findings tell less about *what* to think of masculinities and male body image and more about *how* to think about them through the voices of men studied.

Since the 1980s, outcomes of women’s movements in the U.S. are blamed for pressing men against the limits of traditional masculinity and leaving them conflicted about their role in society. Today men no longer own breadwinning identities and, like women, their bodies are objectified in mass media images. Even though social construction of gender is widely accepted in academic circles, many still tend to think about it in essentialist terms—as if differences are some natural dichotomy between men and women. Coltrane (1994) posited that the distinction between sex (biological) and gender (social) deserves frequent repetition. What we know far less about is how men now define *masculinity* for themselves and internalize gendered body image messages. *Body image* is individuals’ inner conceptualizations of their outer physical appearance (Thompson et al. 1999). The current project inspired two generations of ethnically diverse men living in the U.S. to talk about topics

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they may remain silent on due to conflict, embarrassment, or their perceived invisibility.

Masculinities Defined and Masculine Gender Role Conflict Theory

In exploring how men define masculinities in the 21st century, it is useful to examine how the concept has: (1) evolved over time, (2) been theorized, and (3) been problematized.

First, *masculinity* is a slippery notion of what is expected of men that varies throughout the life course. In the 1930s, gender role researchers studying juvenile delinquency focused on “what makes men less masculine than they should be” (Pleck 1987, p. 22). During 1970s social movements, men reported confining masculine stereotypes (Farrell 1986) and a 20-year-old gender role socialization model was deemed an oversimplification (Carrigan et al. 1987). Being masculine has meant having “a particular psychological identity, social role, cultural script, place in the labor force” (Stimpson 1987, p. xi). Women’s expanded presence in the post-World War II labor force destabilized the *breadwinner role* as a basis for male identity (Tolson 1977) and now men must accept working wives and a more active parental role (Sherman 2009). Indeed, men’s realities encompass a range of interconnected identities, so the plural *masculinities* is more accurate (Kimmel 2001).

Second, a general theory of masculine gender role conflict (GRC) is used to explain “how sexism and gender role socialization interact to produce oppression” (O’Neil et al. 1995, p. 166). GRC is a complex, multidimensional construct describing an unconscious phenomenon produced when perceptions of masculine gender roles deviate from, restrict, devalue, or violate norms (O’Neil 2008). GRC’s four components are: success, power, and competition (SPC); restricted emotionality (RE); restricted affectionate behavior between men (RABBM); and conflict between work and family relationships (CBWFR; Schwartz and Tylka 2008). Effects may include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem (Zamarripa et al. 2003), and interpersonal and abusive behavior problems (Schwartz et al. 2005). “Gender role journey” phases are: (1) acceptance of traditional roles, (2) anger, ambivalence, confusion, and fear; and (3) personal-professional activism (O’Neil et al. 1993).

Masculine GRC theory researchers have found that learned gender roles are individualized, generational, and contextualized according to age, masculinity ideology, and ethnicity (O’Neil 2008). Intersectionalities of life stage with gender suggest that men experience more GRC at younger ages (O’Neil 2008), and college-aged men experience degrees of entitlement impacting relationships between GRC and body attitudes (Schwartz and Tylka 2008). Some have found mediating effects of “racial” identity on GRC (Carter et al.

2005), but O’Neil (2008) recommended that qualitative research may be needed for deeper investigations.

Of particular concern to GRC and gender studies researchers is how men use aggressive behavior or overdevelop muscles to achieve some masculine ideal. *Hypermasculinity*, or exaggerated musculature, may indicate anxiety about masculinity (MacKinnon 2003). Some gay men defensively react to stigmatization as unmanly through excessive bodybuilding which can result in muscle dysmorphia (Maida and Armstrong 2005). Ridgeway and Tylka (2005) found that college-aged men had concerns about muscularity at multiple body sites.

Third, beyond defining and theorizing about masculinities, researchers problematize the concept’s ideological roots. Two normative masculinity markers are stalwart rejection of femininity and homosexuality so that binary dualisms couch masculinities in oppositions (Hegarty et al. 2004). As Gutterman (1994) explained, identity formation is relational so that “what I am or claim to be is rooted in making distinctions from what I am not” (p. 221). Men are socialized to use physical force for conflict resolution (Brod 1987) and *machismo* is associated with asserting dominance over that which is considered weak, i.e., feminine. Traditional ideas of masculinity inhibit emotions, relationships with men, and intimacy with women and children (Gardiner 2002).

Masculinities, Age and Ethnicity

Too few studies investigate the interplay of masculinities with age (McCabe and Ricciardelli 2004)—an important arena for discovery since Harris (1995) found *generational difference* to be the strongest variable among conceptions of masculinity, as compared to class, “race,” sexual orientation, and family background variables. Masculinities are learned; transmitted from older to younger men “by the force of personal example” (Nye 2005, p. 1951) and a rigid boy code to keep emotions in check (Pollack and Shuster 2000). In the early 1900s in the U.S., organized sports were popularized and Boy Scouts of America was founded so that men could instill *true manliness* in boys (Hantover 1978). An older man still subscribes to traditional gender roles (Scott et al. 1996), yet notes his own flaws (Messner 1987). Young men may eschew the male breadwinner role (Scott et al. 1996), but traditional masculine gender ideals remain intact among those who watch beer ads (Strate 2001). Noticeably absent are comparisons of men’s perceptions of masculinities across generations.

In recent decades, ethnic differences among African-American/Black, Asian/Asian-American, Caucasian/White, and Hispanic/Latino men have revealed unique masculine identities in the U.S. Unfortunately, such studies are still small in number and while they make important critical

contributions to the literature, very few directly contribute to gender role theory building.

Findings among African-American/Black men have revealed *hypermasculinity* in sports, communities, and hardcore gangsta rap (Saddik 2003; Wolfe 2003), a *cool pose* ritualizing masculinities of toughness, pride, control (Majors and Billson 1992), and homophobia that is endorsed by some Black churches (Ward 2005). Narrow constructions of Black manhood are outcomes of racist, capitalist patriarchy (hooks 2004) and binationalism wherein Whiteness and homosexuality both signify weakness (Crichlow 2004). Constructions of Black masculinity in sports suggest that Black men's bodies are admired but controlled by coaches (Ferber 2007).

Studies of Asian-American men may be nonexistent, but studies of Asian men and masculinities provide important clues. Said (1978) argued that the Orient is feminized because it is "penetrated, silenced, and possessed" (p. 207). In China, masculinities are explained by a *wen-wu* model—where *wen* refers to cultural attainment (literary and artistic) and *wu* refers to martial valor (physical strength and military prowess; Song 2004). *Salary man masculinity* in Japan defines a loyal white-collar male employee (Dasgupta 2003).

For Caucasian/White men, Robinson (2000) coined the term *marked men* to describe their decentering in 1960s U.S. iconography and more recent recentering as "malicious and jealous protectors of the status quo" (p. 5). White men believe they have "the most marginalized identities around" (Newitz and Wray 1996, p. 62). Today's White man may embody masculinity that is anti-macho man, but stereotypes for the ideal male body fluidly coexist, change, and coalesce (Horrocks 1994). Most studies of Caucasian/White men fail to interrogate their ethnic identity—arguably, offering their experiences as universal and dominant.

Themes among masculinities of Hispanic/Latino men in North, Central, and South America include hegemonic masculinity, machismo, and homophobia. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a particular common sense version of masculinity that emphasizes male dominance (Hanke 1992). Efforts to understand *machismo* are inconclusive, but most suggest traditional masculinity ideology at work (Levant 1996). Some dimensions of Latin machismo include *caballerismo*; family-centeredness and chivalry (Saez et al. 2009), and pronounced homophobia (Vigoya 2003). Hispanic/Latinos may endorse more typically masculine behaviors than Black or White male counterparts (Abreu et al. 2000) so that masculine identity is embodied in the genitals; articulated with sexuality, power, and competition (Ramirez 1993).

Masculinities and the Metrosexual

Today's *new man* is domesticated, sensitive, expressive (Beynon 2002), while the *new lad* exudes stereotypical

masculinity that is mainly White, young, non-wimpish, self-mocking, and seeks to reclaim a conservative ethos of beer, women and sport without resurrecting macho masculinity (Benwell 2003)—making it difficult to discern whether they are complying with or resisting normative masculinity (Crewe 2003). *Guyland* is a delayed adulthood "stage of life" for White men ages 16-late 20s (Kimmel 2008, p. 6). Overall, men uphold a hybridized *bricolage masculinity* that is fluid and contextual; what Fiske (1987) called *telemasculinity* and Beynon (2002) likened to "channel-hopping across versions of the masculine" (p. 6).

Popular culture producers who consider change a destabilizing social force that undermines men's masculinity (Gardiner 2002) cash in by promoting hegemonic masculinity "fantasies" (MacKinnon 2003, p. 15) via Hollywood films, television programs, male lifestyle magazines, action toys, and sports. Idealized masculinity normalizes images associated with body dissatisfaction and promotes steroid use (Cafri and Thompson 2004). Promoted is an unrealistic branded masculinity as represented by increased muscularity in male action toys (Pope et al. 1999) and *Playgirl* centerfolds (Leit et al. 2001), organized sports as a "masculinity-validating experience" (Messner 1987, p. 196), and plethora of consumer goods (Schroeder and Zwick 2004).

A gift to advertisers, the *metrosexual* image-conscious man spends considerable resources on appearance and lifestyle (Simpson 2002). Dissonance results when a man's *real* body is compared to a sanitized body free of hair, sweat, and odor such as those depicted by bare-chested magazine images (Schooler and Ward 2006). Similarly, the *ubersexual* shops to enhance his fashion collection (Salzman et al. 2005). Such trends reflect how emergent gender and sexuality discourses shape masculinities and make them visible—as when feminism and gay culture combined forces in the 1990s, despite perpetual fears of both (MacKinnon 2003). Aldrich (2004) calls the metrosexual a heterosexual who "is nevertheless in touch with his feminine side" (p. 1733), but others consider him gay or bisexual (Coad 2008).

The fashionable male ideal has deep ethnic roots—in the European nineteenth-century *dandy* (Kaye 2009) of Beau Brummel and Baudelaire, and in African Americans' post-slavery reclamation of body (White and White 1998) as manifested in fashionable display (Majors and Billson 1992) and Black barbershop culture (Barber 2008). Yet, most researchers associate metrosexualism with U.S. middle-class urban Caucasian men who link personal appearance to career success (Luciano 2001). Korea's consumer society has featured the *kkot minam* ("flower-like handsome man" or "pin-up boy"), *metrosexual*, *ubersexual*, and *cross-sexual* (Lim 2008). Yet unclear is how men themselves perceive the metrosexual or how the concept meshes with masculinities and possibly contributes to GRC.

Summary and Research Questions

This inquiry is driven by a need to broaden masculine GRC theory and body image research to discover, empirically, how men of various ages and ethnicities living in the U.S. define masculinity today. The fluid nature of masculinities and consumer-driven trends are destabilizing traditional gender dichotomies. Yet, too often U.S.-centric perspectives and reliance on predominantly Caucasian/White research participants may have overlooked identity dimension intersectionalities and obscured our view—or at least revealed only part of the landscape of what it means to be a man today. Thus, this project demanded qualitative research methods of focus groups and in-depth interviews to facilitate rich, close examinations of words and tone used by men to describe their perceptions of and experiences associated with masculinities. Such methods are well supported by interpretive paradigm scholars for contextualizing phenomena (but results cannot be generalized) and as precursors to using quantitative techniques (which may be generalized) later on. In particular, this study explored:

- RQ1: How do two age groups of men (college-aged and fathers/uncles of college-aged men) discursively construct their perceptions of masculinity?
- RQ2: How does ethnicity play out in ways men consider masculinity?
- RQ3: What other factors shape men's perceptions of masculinity?

Method

This project was designed to place men—two age groups and four ethnic groups—at the center of analysis to examine ways they define *masculinity* and to reveal forces that shape their body image perceptions. Coltrane (1994) suggested that one way to integrate men's standpoints is to study them in groups and to get them talking about their emotional lives in some detail, pushing them for self-reflection. Hence, this project maximized qualitative methods of focus groups for young college men and in-depth interviews (one-on-one and telephone) for fathers/uncles. Both methods are well suited to: (1) gaining a simultaneously wide and sharp view of a phenomenon in context, (2) capturing data on perceptions “from the inside” (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 6), (3) collecting rich, textured data consisting of in-depth responses, (4) facilitating deep probes of participants' comments, and (5) serving as an initial phase in developing hypotheses to be tested in subsequent research. The focus group method is particularly useful in enabling participants to: (1) build upon and engage one another in opinion and story sharing, (2) link concerns

with possible solutions, and (3) openly relate to demographically similar people (Madriz 2000).

Research Participants

Participants were “young men”—80 college students (ages 18–26, mean age 22.6) attending one of two large North Florida universities, and 27 of their “fathers or uncles” (ages 42–71, mean age 52.48) also living in Florida.

Among young men, 18 were African American/Black, 16 were Asian, 27 were Caucasian/White, 17 were Hispanic/Latino, and two were “mixed ethnicity.” One participant was Nigerian and another was Austrian. Asian participants described their ethnic heritage as rooted in China and Korea. Hispanic/Latino participants linked their ethnic background to Bolivia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Philippines, and Puerto Rico. Young men were junior or senior status and one was married.

Among fathers/uncles, none were Asian, four were African American/Black, 17 were Caucasian/White, and six were Hispanic/Latino. None were “mixed ethnicity.” Hispanic/Latino participants described their ethnic heritage as rooted in Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Occupations reported were: accountant, artist, banker, business owner, civil engineer, dentist, elevator technician, financial advisor, high school principal, janitor, laboratory researcher, librarian, mortgage broker, professional land surveyor, software designer, realtor, salesman (three), sales manager, small business owner, teacher (three), and veterinarian. Two were retired. All but one graduated from high school and 26 held a graduate school degree. All were married. Internet websites listing male names according to ethnicity were consulted for pseudonyms to protect identities.

Procedures

Data Collection

Among young men, 60 were recruited at a university International Center and 20 were recruited in a large-lecture mass media class and in journalism classes. Among fathers/uncles, 27 were recruited by asking young men to provide contact information for their father or an uncle and also by intercept at a North Florida university's student orientation event attended by parents. All were invited to participate in studies “about masculinity and male body image.” After agreeing, participants completed a brief demographic form and signed an informed consent form.

Three male graduate students were trained by the researcher to gather qualitative data: (1) a Hispanic/Latino male (Integrated Marketing Communication major) con-

ducted all father/uncle in-depth interviews and for focus group sessions of young men, he conducted three of Caucasian/Whites, six of Hispanic/Latinos, and four ethnically diverse focus group sessions; (2) an African-American/Black male (Journalism major) conducted three focus group sessions of African-American/Black young men; and (3) a Korean male (Communication doctoral student) conducted three focus group sessions of Asian young men. A focus group/interview topic guide of 10 items queried participants' perceptions of masculinity. See Appendix. Both guides and the brief demographic form were tested with slight modifications before use.

Nineteen focus group sessions among young men were hosted in comfortable, windowless university conference rooms with a closed door for privacy. Light snacks, soft drinks and water were provided. Extra credit was offered to participants recruited from the mass media class, and a financial incentive (\$20) was offered to Asian participants because no volunteers were forthcoming among a comparatively small population within the sampled domain. Each focus group session with young men lasted about 2 hrs until little new information was obtained. This technique is consistent with the goal of theoretical saturation necessary to obtain relevant information (Krueger 1988). Each session was audiotaped. Focus group data were produced from 199 pages of verbatim transcribed audiotapes. This study was not funded.

One-on-one in-depth interviews (10; conducted in a private courtyard area convenient to the new-student orientation event) and telephone interviews (17) with fathers/uncles lasted about 30 min. No financial incentives were provided. Data for analysis from interviews were derived from 53 pages of verbatim transcribed audiotapes.

Data Analysis Technique

A hermeneutic phenomenological theme analysis was performed on transcript data (Van Manen, 1990). First, the author (Caucasian/White female; School of Communications), another academic (African-American/Black male; School of Communications), and one of the graduate students (Hispanic/Latino; College of Communication) who helped collect data carefully scrutinized raw data by reading all transcripts repeatedly—independently and at five data analysis meetings—to get a sense of the data. Men's voices, their perceptions and stories of their experiences in their own words, constituted the unit of analysis. Second, inspired by Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach to qualitative data, we then independently transferred notes, the beginnings of emergent patterns/themes, to index cards that were categorized in piles and reshuffled as needed with anomalies noted. Third, during multiple-hour sessions, we used Van Manen's

(1990) selective technique of pondering statements and phrases throughout transcripts that seemed particularly revealing, essential, or remarkable by first using colored markers on sentences and often by making margin notes on transcripts. This method of theme analysis promotes identification of patterns or themes of meaning embedded in data sets. Identifying themes is best handled when they emerge from participants' voices (Van Manen 1990).

Overall, the study's research questions served to navigate readings of transcripts, but not to the degree that larger patterns/themes became invisible. Also, reducing and consolidating the vast amount of data (and number of index cards) down to an essence, with proposed labels was ongoing—with some rejected, resurrected, and modified along the way. Fourth, data analysis team members shared independent findings with one another, discussing rationales for piles of categorized cards. Finally, multiple readings of the data from which patterns/themes emerged were discussed extensively, with some collapsing of categories and renaming, until all agreed 100% that data were adequately organized and explicated for responding to research questions.

Verification

Verification is a valuable step and quality standard for the qualitative research process. Three forms of validity checking were used for the current study's findings (two forms are recommended by Creswell 2007). First, a member checking technique was used (e.g., Dougherty and Drumheller 2006). The author and a graduate student who participated in data collection re-contacted participants, asking them to play a role in this phase. Among young men, 42 (68.9%) who were contacted agreed to examine and provide feedback on how closely the findings captured their perceptions (according to age group and ethnicity). Among fathers/uncles, 25 (92.6%) also participated in verification steps. Via email attachment, the project's abstract and an early draft of findings (26 pages) were sent to participants. Nearly all research participants who participated in verification steps agreed that findings captured their perceptions accurately. Exceptions were two college-aged men who questioned the *Shaped by Ethnic Culture* theme, explaining "I'm White" and "I'm not ethnic," as well as a father/uncle who reacted to the *Fear of Losing Privilege* theme with "I've never considered myself privileged because I'm a man." Second, we used a constant comparative technique (Lindlof 1995) that involved developing alternate themes in order to arrive at the most parsimonious themes for participants' definitions of masculinity and its forces. Third, we followed the advice of Miles and Huberman (1994) and closely attended to anomalies (rather than ignoring them) and integrated them into findings for enhanced understanding and nuance.

Results and Discussion

Analyses of qualitative focus group and interview data patterned into eight essential themes. The themes address ways fathers/uncles and their sons/nephews discursively construct their perceptions of masculinity at a specific age—or point in the life cycle (RQ1), address interplay of ethnicities in shaping perceptions of masculinity (RQ2), and identify other factors (beyond age and ethnicity) that shape perceptions of masculinity (RQ3). The eight themes are: (1) *Mental over Physical Masculinities*, (2) *Fear of Losing Privilege*, (3) *Shaped by Ethnic Culture*, (4) *Consumed by Media Images*, (5) *Meet the Metrosexual*, (6) *Can't be a "Pussy"*, (7) *Homophobia and Fear of the Feminine Endures*, and (8) *Anything to Attract Women*. Five of the eight themes were expressed by all participants of both generations. Two themes (*Can't be a "Pussy"* and *Anything to Attract Women*) emerged only from young men's voices. Also, all participants except Caucasian/White participants discussed the *Shaped by Ethnic Culture* theme. Overall, data underscore how men's fears, anxieties, conflicts, and attempts to control uncertainty intersect with age, ethnicity, and other factors. Attention to these important features has several implications for masculinities and body image research, as well as GRC theory building.

Mental over Physical Masculinities

This theme directly responds to this study's RQ1: "How do two age groups of men (college-aged young men and their fathers/uncles) discursively construct their perceptions of masculinity?" All men detailed insights about masculinities by sharing thoughts and anecdotes contextualized by their identity as part of a specific age group, or point in the life cycle. Both young men and their fathers/uncles predominantly associated masculinities with mental, non-physical inner qualities which cluster into four subcategories: (1) *Character*, (2) *Attitude*, (3) *Responsibility*, and (4) *Confidence/Assertiveness*. Exceptions were a few who called up the traditional breadwinner role and referred to the physical male body as housing for masculinities.

Primarily, masculinities were described among both age groups as an interior quality linked to (1) *Character*, as captured in these sentiments: "who you are inside as a man," "personal integrity," "personality," "way that you carry yourself, charisma," "someone that acts like a man; it has nothing to do with looks," "posture," and "it's a state of mind, really—you can be the smallest guy in the world and still be a masculine motherfucker." (2) *Attitude* also was expressed, especially among African-American/Black and Caucasian/White participants: "I equate masculine like when you walk into a room and your presence is felt," "caring, more an attitude rather than appearance, self

worth," "a certain type of swagger," and "giving off the impression that nothing can harm you." (3) *Responsibility* resonated most among fathers/uncles and Asian and Hispanic/Latino young men: "work without complaining," "being responsible for your actions," "protecting your family," "to be a stand up person—one who faces and meets responsibility," "I believe that society would conceive you as a man if you're in a good-standing job," and "advocating non-violence." Tito, a El Salvadorian-born young man said: "Being masculine means you are able to take care of your family. Being able to look at your wife, and say 'I got it'. To be able to look at your kids and say 'I got you'. That to me is the epitome of masculinity. It's not about how much you bench or how many women you got. For me it's being able, at the end of the day, to tell your family 'Get on my back, I got you the rest of the way'." (4) *Confidence/Assertiveness* also emerged, mostly among fathers/uncles and Caucasian/White young men: "strong willed, assertive," "holding your ground," "willing to take charge," "looking someone in the eye as they talk to you," "confidence, not shy or timid," "secure in self, strength, and self sufficient," and "calm, cool and collected under pressure when the shit hits the fan; it separates the men from the boys," and "mentally, it's like survival in competition."

Some anomalies noted were traditional gender-role qualities expressed by those who still associate masculinities with physicality of genitalia, muscles, big chest, strong back, and firm jaw—as well as protecting women and children as expressed in terms like "head of household" and "breadwinner." Comparing across age and ethnic groups, Hispanic/Latino fathers/uncles were quickest to define masculinities in physical terms. Justo, a Hispanic/Latino father/uncle, explained: "You can't *consider* being masculine. It's a fact. Buddy, we were born with male stuff, so we are masculine." Jaime, a Hispanic/Latino father/uncle, said: "It's very animalistic. The larger the penis, the more masculine." Dae Sub, a Korean young man, also shared a traditional view of masculinity: "A man can drag a truck and a man can help women. Women are just, you know, doing housework, but men are doing the construction work; using power." Sang-ho, a Korean young man, added: "Historically, it's not been about how our physique looks. It's about how healthy we are to make money, to make living, bring the bread home, to support the family." Rob, a Caucasian/White young man opined: "It's almost like derived from like the cavemen . . . masculine means to go and put the food, and then go and beat her over the head." Tom, a Caucasian/White young man added: "Society says the man is the breadwinner. The man is the one who takes care of the woman and the man is the one who has to be strong for the woman because women in the society are not emotionally strong."

The *Mental over Physical Masculinities* theme contributes valuable new evidence to support the contextual domain of masculinity ideology in GRC theory building because it suggests that while some traditional ideas of masculinities may endure into the 21st century, overall views may be shifting. The few men who qualified masculinities in physical terms went into great detail about its non-physical qualities as well. Nearly all men who participated in this study perceive that masculinities' defining features are located internally in terms of *Character, Attitude, Responsibility, and Confidence/Assertiveness*—features that underscore ongoing salience of success, power, and competition (SPC) in GRC theory. That a few older Hispanic/Latinos maintain conservative views is consistent with earlier studies (Lazur and Majors 1995). Participants' overwhelming use of non-physical descriptors might suggest that a broader definition of masculinities may reduce incidences of internal strife or conflict, for holding less rigid views could be more accommodating of what once was considered a deviation, restriction, devaluation, or violation due to narrow constructions of masculinities.

Fear of Losing Privilege

This theme addresses RQ3: “What other factors shape men's perceptions of masculinity?” because it illuminates some men's resistance to social influences reshaping masculinities and gender roles in the 21st century—perhaps inspiring them to cling to some aspects of traditional masculinities as they travel on their “gender role journey” (O'Neil et al. 1993). All men expressed anger, anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion when discussing masculinities in terms of social change; what many participants characterized as traditional norms being redefined by women and mass media images—all of which results in *Fear of Losing Privilege* and concern about GRC theory's components of success, power, and competition (SPC). Though research on how perceptions of gender role change over time is minimal, gender role transitions triggering anger, ambivalence, confusion, and fear seems to be supported here (O'Neil et al. 1993).

Caucasian/White young men were most emphatic when discussing *Fear of Losing Privilege*—for this group of men talked longer about the issue and spoke in more excited tones. Brian declared: “I want to be in control doing what I want!” Allen said: “I'm not gonna sit with a girl on a Saturday and make fucking potpourri.” Sean shared resentment: “Men are doing all the work. I think that every guy feels like it's his place *not* to be the stay home Dad.” Mike explained a push-back technique: “I also feel like a component of being masculine would be always being right—having the last word in everything and not having the female having the last word. That's just something that I

picked up over last couple of years being in college hanging out with other friends and being in a fraternity.” Some Caucasian/White young men openly criticized as “un-masculine” friends who are “whipped by their girlfriend.” Bill shared: “Today a woman is empowered and could chop your balls off!” Joe suggested that women use physiology as a weapon: “Penis size is a huge factor. . . We can call them a million things to offend them. The only thing that they have against us, is ‘You have a small dick.’” Ja-hoon, a Korean young man, said: “Under Confucianism, with arranged marriages, our Dads' generation didn't need to be looking all masculine because they didn't have to hook up with girls . . . They didn't have to have muscles. Now, girls not only look at man's money, they also look at man's body, face.”

Anomalies that deviate from this pattern of responses were participants who apologized for resisting social norms, for fear of appearing politically incorrect. For example, Peirce, an African-American/Black father/uncle said: “We live in a society in which there are so many different orientations, but for me it's a male acting like a male. But society holds me back from commenting on this. Men have a mission. We have to keep the world going on.”

Unmistakably, both young men and their fathers/uncles experience GRC resulting from what they perceive to be diminished social status—also explained as the GRC factor, conflict between work and family relations (CBWFR). Sons/nephews tended to exhibit greater degrees of excitement and anger, which are negative consequences of GRC. Among responses that contributed to the *Fear of Losing Privilege* theme is dissonance—as when Caucasian/White young men shared stories of feeling pressured to relinquish control, acknowledge others' needs/desires, and admit insecurities about their body.

Shaped by Ethnic Culture

This theme provides an answer to RQ2: “How does ethnicity play out in ways men consider masculinity?” as evidenced by how all African-American/Black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino participants rooted perceptions of masculinities in their ethnic heritage while some simultaneously criticized ways masculinities play out in the U.S. No Caucasian/White men overtly referred to their ethnic culture. Pride was a key ingredient in stories of men of color. For example, Ralph, an African-American/Black father/uncle said masculinity in his community means “nobody should step to you without standing up for you and your people, your family.” First- and second-generation Asian young men and Hispanic/Latino young men were most disparaging of U.S. ideals and standards with regard to masculinities.

Asian young men in focus groups stressed that they do not consider masculinities in physical terms. In fact, they

mocked images of bodybuilders and criticized American culture for emphasizing male muscularity. Seung, a Korean young man, explained: “Masculinity is stupid, an old concept only in America. It makes me think about the muscle man, macho things.” Several Asian young men opined that American men are “obsessed” with developing muscles. Chen, a Chinese young man explained: “We don’t usually think about muscles. That’s only the American perspective. White and Black men all want to have big muscles, but for Asian men, skinny is normal.” Some Asian young men expressed concern that American body image ideals are negatively affecting their culture. Gui, a Chinese young man explained: “I have a roommate who is also from China, but he is younger than me. He very much works on his body and we grew up in the same culture!”

Like Asian young men, Hispanic/Latino young men’s discussions of defining masculinities also involved critique of U.S. culture. For example, Ruben, a Colombian young man said: “Masculinity here [in U.S.] is look at the size of your wallet.” Pedro, a young man born in the Dominican Republic added: “Everywhere else it’s based on your moral values and what you are as a person. But here in America, it’s more geared towards your physical qualities more than your mental abilities.” Uniquely, Hispanic/Latino young men couched views on masculinities in terms of taking responsibility for their community’s image. Felipe, a Mexican-Filipino young man explained: “Cursing in Spanish disrespecting his woman, that makes us look bad—because they reflect on me, so I’ll say something to him in private. It’s gonna make my job harder. . . I don’t want to be thought of as a gangbanger.” Similarly, Jorge, an El Salvadorian young man said: “When I look in the paper and I see a Hispanic male that just robbed a liquor store, it pisses me off. . . because damn, the bastard’s representing me! The next time I go into that liquor store, the guy is gonna be looking at me through the bubble mirror the whole entire time I’m in there.” Carlos, a Bolivian young man added: “You’ve got to be master of your emotions, man. . . When the shit hits the fan, you gotta fight, but if you could, be a big enough person. That’s another important quality. Masculinity gets confused with stupidity.”

An anomaly in this theme were the words of a Nigerian young man, Akins, who found transitioning to life in the U.S. challenging because in his homeland, masculinities are defined by behaviors such as answering the door and by walking a few steps ahead of women and children on the street to anticipate any oncoming danger. He explained: “I learned that is disrespectful here. Now I walk alongside women.” On the other hand, Akins avoids using gender when defining masculinity: “There are some ladies that are ready to face the music if anything happens, whereas some men with big muscles start crying and say ‘mama’.”

Regarding this study’s second research question, men shared perceptions of masculinities that are, indeed,

Shaped by Ethnic Culture—particularly with regard to community influences and rejection of Angloized ideals. As addressed in the *Mental over Physical Masculinities* theme, non-physical aspects define masculinities for most men studied—especially Asian young men. Among voices of men of color were stories of ways their perceptions of masculinities and male gender role are steeped in ethnic heritage earmarked by pride, responsibility, and sometimes conflict. To shed light on how this finding brings to bear on GRC, it is useful to invoke anthropologists’ finding that acculturation is negotiated and resisted by ethnic groups living in the U.S. who are conflicted by fear of showing disloyalty to their group and its culture by adapting to new ideas. Perhaps the most vocal Asian and Hispanic/Latino men who participated in the current study are critical of how masculinities are defined in the U.S. because they want to avoid displaying too many out-group characteristics (Aguilar 1981, p. 21).

Consumed by Media Images

The *Consumed by Media Images* theme provides one response to RQ3: “What other factors shape men’s perceptions of masculinity?” for mass media are salient factors contributing to perception processes. Even though fathers/uncles and sons/nephews emphasized masculinities in non-physical ways, all were quick to blame mass media producers for depicting masculinities in terms of some physical ideal in advertising, infomercials, feature films, magazines, video games and television programs, as well as social media’s emphasis on posting personal photos. Also criticized was an omnipresent celebrity culture in the U.S., including images of sports heroes (who may or may not abuse steroids). Participants called most media-produced male body images “false,” “fantasy,” “illusions,” “unattainable,” “too perfect,” “unrealistic,” and “overdone.” Particularly damaging, they said, are ways women use the images as benchmarks for what men should look like “in real life.”

First, fathers/uncles noted increased attention to media images of men over their lifetime—with negative consequences. Explained Lou, a Caucasian/White father/uncle: “There are a lot of people paying attention to what’s in magazines or athletes on television; more than when I was a kid. Think of all those infomercials for all the health machines. That didn’t exist 20 years ago.” Leon, a Hispanic/Latino father/uncle also said: “It’s the way you see people today are spending more time in gyms.” Curtis, a Caucasian/White father/uncle said: “Basically they are selling all these exercise equipment which has taken these guys 5 years to get this way, and they show these guys getting like this in five days. They build you up and burn you down.” Andrew, a Caucasian/White father/uncle resolved: “They get the bar up of what you won’t be.”

Second, young men across ethnicities noted influences of media and celebrities in shaping perceptions of masculinity in physical terms. Ra'aed, an African-American/Black young man explained: "In 1862 you didn't have dudes saying, 'I want a body like Lincoln'. He wasn't being shown Lincoln's picture all day and all night—even though he was masculine. Now that we have the MTVs and everybody's seeing the 50 Cents, they want to be like them." Tavis, an African-American/Black young man added: "Even though Pac [Tupac Shakur] was skinny, by him being cut and his attitude toward society, people looked at him as the masculine man." Ron, a Caucasian/White young man said: "I grew up watching Indiana Jones in the movies and thought that's what you gotta do and look like to be a man. Then I also started playing sports in high school to look like football players on TV." Among those who criticized airbrushed physical images of men was Sal, a Dominican young man: "Like in Calvin Klein advertising, you see this guy with a huge cock and you are like 'Wow, how can I look like that?'" Similarly, Ricardo, a Hispanic/Latino young man born in Venezuela said: "You can take a girl to the movie theatre and she's like, 'Oh my god, Brad Pitt is so hot' and 'Usher has the best abs'. You weren't looking for that!" Similarly, Stefon, an African-American/Black young man said: "I recently heard Beyoncé say, it's the shoulders. The way your shoulders are on a dude is what she likes. It's the preference of the young lady."

Undoubtedly, pervasive mass media-generated images of an ideal male body converge into a significant factor affecting perceptions of masculinities—creating conflict, anxiety, and dissonance. Some GRC researchers have found that men who viewed muscular images reported significantly lower body esteem than men in the control group (Hobza and Rochlen 2009). At its core, the GRC concept and ways it is theorized are charged to expose and reduce oppression caused by sexism and gender role socialization (O'Neil et al. 1995). Being *Consumed by Media Images* means that men and those whom they seek to impress are routinely exposed to body image representations of what masculinities *should look like*—clearly at odds with non-physical ways that men who participated in this study define masculinities.

Meet the Metrosexual

Like the *Consumed by Media Images* theme, *Meet the Metrosexual* also directly responds to this study's RQ3: "What other factors shape men's perceptions of masculinity?" All men expressed varying degrees of confusion and frustration due to ambiguous relationships between masculinities and the *metrosexual*. When participants mentioned *metrosexual*, they were asked to define it. Inevitably, participants invoked what they consider feminine behav-

iors—or those popularly ascribed to non-heterosexualities. Such included: straightening, coloring and styling hair; facials and cosmetic surgery; manicures and pedicures; visiting day spas; massages; dressing up; being clean shaven; plucking eyebrows; using lotions and wrinkle cream; and shaving chests and arms. Others described it as being: "a pretty boy," "image conscious," "fashion oriented," "carrying a manpurse," and "showing your feminine side."

The metrosexual has not escaped older men's notice, even though they emphasized during interviews that they are married and, as compared to their sons/nephews, no longer try to "seduce women" with their personal appearance. Paul, a Caucasian/White father/uncle explained: "I think society has made a turn. Masculine used to be hairy, muscular and now we are going the other direction. Everyone is trying to get rid of hair. We have this androgynous look. The concept of being pretty is being more accepted amongst my peers. Maybe this is the new look of masculine?" Peirce, an African-American/Black father/uncle, said: "Media presents feminine men to have society accept them." Joe, a Caucasian/White father/uncle, agreed: "It's what they want the public to think is masculine."

Among young men, the metrosexual received mixed reviews. Blake, an African-American/Black young man said: "Metrosexuals try too hard to be pretty and I really don't agree with that. That's not masculine." Jarmal, an African-American/Black, young man disagreed: "While they may be just as masculine as the next man . . . they got half the sweet side but at the same time they got half the masculine side." Luis, a Cubano, said: "I think that they [media] go to the extreme of being a little too metrosexual, which I guess is what the girls want." Caucasian/White young men seemed the most conflicted about the metrosexual. For example, Joe said: "I don't like meeting a guy who I feel is lowering the standards of women's perceptions—because they meet one guy and he is like a little metrosexual and they're going to ruin it for all of us." Jonathan lamented: "I just want men to be men." Yet, some like Steve were more accepting of the metrosexual: "Still at the base of what masculinity really is doesn't change over time. I just think we are allowed to do more shit now—as long as you are still masculine about it. 'You get a pedicure?' 'Yeah, I did. Fuck you, got a problem with that? Let's go outside'. I think it all falls into not succumbing to anybody. Like, masculinity is being able to stand your ground no matter what. Yes, I got a facial. Yes, I wear pink. Yes, I wear a *skirt!* You know what, that looked good, motherfucker!" Other Caucasian/White young men explained that looking metrosexual is acceptable, but men must conceal their degree of interest in it. For example, Gregg said: "You look at yourself in the mirror, but you don't want people to think that you care that much

because as a man, you are supposed to be like ‘I don’t care, you know, this is the way that I look.’”

At the outset of the 21st century, the metrosexual may reign as the “face of masculinities” for advertisers, but men who participated in this study offered mixed reviews—perhaps because nearly all defined masculinities in non-physical terms. This is not to say that they ignore the metrosexual trend; for they *cannot* given ubiquitous media images. On the contrary, they are conflicted as to how and to what degree to attend to it. Clearly, both the *Meet the Metrosexual* and *Consumed by Media Images* themes underscore challenges that men experience relative to the success, power, and competition (SPC) component of GRC. Some men consider the metrosexual too far afield from the more conservative and traditional notions of masculinities characterized by physical qualities. Yet, perhaps those who may have experienced GRC for conforming to restrictive gender roles in the past now appreciate flexibility and more widespread acceptability of men who are fashion conscious and visit spas and salons.

Can’t Be a ‘Pussy’

This theme directly responds to this study’s RQ3: “What other factors shape men’s perceptions of masculinity?” Consistent throughout young men’s focus group sessions was talk that benchmarked masculinities against a definitive insult in the male world: being considered a “pussy.” The notion of “pussy” has supported traditional masculine gender roles by serving as the antithesis of masculinity, as well as possibly epitomizing what O’Neil et al. (1995) qualified as GRC resulting from deviation, restriction, devaluation, and violation.

Jeff, a Caucasian/White young man explained the salience of this factor: “You see a straight guy walking down the street and if you got people telling him 24/7 that he’s a pussy, or acts like a wuss, or a woman, you can’t tell me that’s that not gonna bother him. I don’t care who they are on the planet, that’s bullshit if they tell you that that is not gonna bother them at all.” Roberto, a Hispanic/Latino young man born in Nicaragua shared: “It’s important for me to be masculine. I don’t want to be a pussy. I want to express to my girlfriend that she is with a strong guy, not some weak kid.” Ron, a Caucasian/White young man said: “If you’re like a metrosexual, then no one’s gonna believe you’re not a pussy.” Two Caucasian/White young men explained how they learned this lesson during childhood. Andy said: “My baseball team’s t-shirts had DBAP in capital letters. Our team made into an acronym. It meant Don’t Be a Pussy. I was raised like that . . . Men don’t cry.” And Jim added: “We used to have all my football buddies over at my house, like six or seven of us. And if my dad wanted us to do something all he had to say was one word,

‘What are you guys, pussys’? Yeah, the word pussy would make you do almost anything. We could be shoveling shit, but we were not gonna be considered pussys.”

On the other hand, John, another Caucasian/White young man, explained how his conception of masculinity can stand up to the jab: “I think, if you are some big motherfucker and you can beat everyone’s ass in the room, that ain’t masculine. That’s being an asshole. That’s being a piece of shit. If you are a big motherfucker and some guy comes up to you and starts talking shit and you know you can beat his ass, and you’re a black belt in Taekwondo and you walk away and everyone calls you a ‘pussy’, and you’re like ‘Fuck you man’. *That’s* being masculine! I ain’t got to beat your ass to prove I’m a man.”

GRC may occur within oneself, be caused by others, and be expressed toward others (O’Neil 1981). Findings here offer evidence that it is possible for one universally-accepted idea—the “pussy” factor—to extend across all three events. This was evidenced in young men’s stories about how they self-regulate so that they will not appear to be a “pussy,” ways others (e.g., fathers) use “pussy” to socialize sons, and how “pussy” serves as the benchmark for gauging others’ masculine gender role displays. Even though the *Can’t be a ‘Pussy’* theme did not emerge among data from interviews with fathers/uncles, future research could probe this to discover if and to what degree older men socialize young men by invoking the term.

Homophobia and Fear of the Feminine Endures

Defining masculinities as opposition was prevalent throughout all data gathering sessions with two generations of men across ethnicities—another factor that responds to this study’s third research question. Well recorded in the GRC literature is men’s fear of femininity as qualified by homophobia—“fear of homosexuals, or fear of being a homosexual including beliefs, myths, and stereotypes about gay people” (O’Neil et al. 1986, p. 340). Current findings contemporize investigations of this pattern with important nuances gained by probing, in conjunction with male gender, intersectionalities of age, ethnicity, and other factors.

Views such as Ray’s, an African-American/Black father/uncle were common: “A *real* man is a man, not a woman. He’s a pillar of strength, not no soft dude . . . Some of those guys in magazines are real feminine.” Mario, a Hispanic/Latino father/uncle agreed: “A lot of the guys in magazines don’t seem masculine. I have seen some who have looked really flaky, gay.” Tito, a Hispanic/Latino father/uncle said: “Any man who doesn’t consider himself masculine is a queer.” Bill, a Caucasian/White father/uncle said: “Media, all they are pushing are six packs. I see them on television and fashion magazines. My wife runs Saks Bal Harbor and

all these shirts are made to fit these fucking muscular fags.” Said Peirce, an African-American/Black father/uncle: “If men becomes feminine, the world will fall apart.”

More than any other ethnic group, African-American/Black young men most frequently invoked binary dualisms in defining masculinities, with comments such as: “masculine is not gay” “masculine is the opposite of what people may associate with homosexuality,” “you can look at a way a guy walks and can tell that he’s flaming; not masculine,” “in *GQ*, sometimes that stuff is a little too left for me.” Some African-American/Black young men defined masculinities in terms of gender ambiguity and seeming contradictions. Darrell, explained: “A woman with an Adam’s Apple is a man whether she is a woman or not. You got men with what they call child bearing hips, so regardless of what your sexual orientation may be, you see a man with hips that look like they’re ready to let loose a child, you automatically can say he’s not masculine as far as his appearance.” Rashed said: “People who you may consider masculine may turn out to be gay. All this time you could’ve thought they were masculine but when you find out they’re gay, you automatically have a different idea about what masculine is. Because now you’re confused because you’re like he’s gay and he’s masculine and I consider *myself* masculine.”

Comments from Asian and Hispanic/Latino young men also contribute to the *Homophobia and Fear of the Feminine Endures* theme. Kang-dae from Korea explained: “Man should be man. I think man should act like man. If you act like girl, you are not man.” Chen from China said: “Sometimes there are people that don’t want to be treated like guys, you know, homosexuals. I just want to be looking like a man, but I don’t need the big muscles.” And Gi from Korea added: “There are men who like to be girls, girly. I hate that kind of behavior.” Seung, a Korean young man who is married and a father said: “It used to be that men shouldn’t change diapers. That was my philosophy before I got married. I had to change. It’s not shameful anymore and now I think it’s natural. I cook, too! Unmarried guys might think I’m not a man, but I don’t care.” Arturo, a young man from Colombia, said: “Masculine is unless you’re trying to shoot not to be masculine and swing the other way.” Similarly, Julio, a young man from Puerto Rico, said: “Masculine is to not look feminine, especially when it comes to girls.”

Bruno, a Caucasian/White young man who moved to the U.S. from Austria explained a cultural difference factor: “I personally ran into some funny incidents coming from Europe. You usually see me more dressed up compared to the usual college student. So, immediately all the guys thought I was gay. It started to bother me, because then I was thrown in the whole feminine area, and I was never into that. Definitely over there I would wear a suede jacket

that looks nice and it was like ‘He’s the pimp’. Over here it’s like ‘Oh, he’s gay’.”

Among both generations of men who participated in this study, a binary dualism that pits masculinities as opposite of femininity and homosexuality prevails to support traditional male role norms that emphasize avoidance of anything deemed feminine. Interestingly, the *Homophobia and Fear of the Feminine Endures* theme shares with the *Can’t be a ‘Pussy’* and *Fear of Loss of Privilege* themes what O’Neil et al. (1986) called “fear of femininity”—as well as restricted affectionate behavior between men (RABBM) which is one of the four GRC factors. The current study’s finding attests to the stronghold of traditional male gender norms that resist change along the “gender role journey” (O’Neil et al. 1993). That young African-American/Black men most ardently couched perceptions of masculinities in terms of its opposites is not entirely unanticipated. However, this finding should not be generalized to fuel social and racial stereotypes that imply Black men may be especially susceptible to GRC (Pleck 1981). Of particular note is the dissonance expressed by those surprised to discover that men with muscles also can be gay. Earlier studies have established associations between the drive for muscularity and perceptions about masculine gender role socialization (e.g., McCreary et al. 2005). There were enough instances of men bucking the binary dualism tendency to suggest that traditional male gender norms are losing ground—as when the young Asian man proudly shared his homemaking story. Another stand-out anomaly were the words of Justo, a Hispanic/Latino father/uncle, who said: “Even if you are gay, you are still masculine.”

Anything to Attract Women

A distinctive pattern among all young men of all ethnicities in focus groups (but not fathers/uncles) was an overarching desire to do whatever it takes to appeal to women under the influence of media-promoted male body and physical masculinity ideals. *Anything to Attract Women* is the fourth factor to answer RQ3: “What other factors shape men’s perceptions of masculinity?” In addition to age and ethnicity factors, men shared ways that they *perform* masculinities by using their body in order to attract women—a message exploited by advertisers. This theme also resonates with the success, power, and competition (SPC) aspect of GRC theory.

Hispanic/Latino young men seemed particularly flexible in using their bodies to appeal to women across ethnic communities. For example, conflicting tastes with regard to male body hair leave the young Hispanic/Latino in a quandary. Luis, a Cuban young man explained: “Usually Hispanic girls like guys a bit more hairy, more tanned and less into themselves. But American girls, I have to shave

my chest for them. They hate hair to the bone!” Julio, a Puerto Rican young man said: “Back in the day I don’t think that the mothers of these girls cared about hair. Now they see guys with no hair on TV and then when they see it in person they are turned off by it.” Felipe, a Mexican-Filipino young man added: “I shave my chest. That’s something that you see freakin’ models and stuff always shaving, and using these type of creams. Sometimes I do my eyebrows. If the media says that this is the way it’s supposed to be, then it affects me indirectly because if the girl is looking for that type of guy that is on TV, of course I’m gonna do it!”

Likewise, African-American/Black young men in one focus group used the 2002 duet by rap artists R. Kelly and Jay-Z, “P-u-s-s-y” from the album, “The Best of Both Worlds,” as an analogy for explaining how heterosexual men work out and dress fashionably to attract women. Blake explained: “It’s the Power of the P. Basically they [women] call the shots. You going to work out, you going to try have a nice car, all for that P.” Ra’aed added: “If you play certain sports, you know that you’re trying to impress women. . . you work out to get that build the women want to see.” Darrell said: “Males look like dudes on TV because they want girls to holla [talk to them with physical interest] at them.” Tavis added: “Well if they’re happy, you want to keep them that way. You don’t want her to fall off so you gotta keep yourself up a little.”

Caucasian/White young men also related frustration in trying to satisfy women in light of mass mediated male images. For example, Bill said: “I don’t think girls understand *what* they want!” Ron added: “Yeah. I think a lot of guys are very bad at hiding insecurity, and girls will pick that up real quick.” Allen said: “To a degree, I don’t think that we would be as worried about our own personal image if we didn’t see it reflected through the words of the female race. All you hear girls talking about all the time is ‘that guy’s good looking’ or ‘that guy’s hot’. And the guys they are looking at is that typical media image.” John said that social networking media also emphasize physical qualities: “Look at online networking, all these online communities like Facebook.com. I think when they go on Facebook they definitely think ‘Ok, I gotta look like this guy, because he has all those friends and he gets poked all the time’.”

Interestingly, even though men who participated in this study most often defined masculinities in non-physical terms, they underscored effects of experiences themed here as *Consumed by Media Images*, *Meet the Metrosexual*, and *Anything to Attract Women*. In other words, young men cannot seem to escape images that compel them to perform masculinities in physical terms for sexual gratification—even if it means conforming to norms they disagree with. A logical extension of this finding is to further investigate

implications of the social media trend, with its visual focus, for ways it perpetuates traditional masculinities and gender roles.

Conclusions

Recently, O’Neil (2008) recommended that qualitative research may be needed to identify situations wherein men violate or conform to masculine norms. The current research project was designed to address this need by adding age, ethnicity, and other factors to the conversation about ways masculinities are interpreted in the U.S. Regarding how *masculinity* is defined by two generations of men (RQ1), research participants framed their sentiments in terms of (a) *Mental over Physical Masculinity*—with four subcategories (a) *Character*, (b) *Attitude*, (c) *Responsibility*, and (d) *Confidence/Assertiveness*. While unmistakably, ethnic culture infused all participants’ comments (RQ2), they were most pronounced in the theme (c) *Shaped by Ethnic Culture*. Other factors shaping men’s perceptions of masculinities (RQ3), were most evident in six themes (b) *Fear of Losing Privilege*, (d) *Consumed by Media Images*, (e) *Meet the Metrosexual*, (f) *Can’t be a “Pussy,”* (g) *Homophobia and Fear of the Feminine*, and (h) *Anything to Attract Women*. Importantly, data suggest how men conform to, negotiate, and resist forces of hegemonic masculinities in the 21st century. Perspectives offer nuanced cross-cultural constructions and meanings of masculinities and influences that shape them. These qualitative findings offer valuable contributions to GRC theory building by providing rich insights into how men think about masculinities and the factors that affect their perceptions. Indeed, the eight themes offered here are rife with opportunities for future hypothesis testing.

Limitations and Future Directions

Strengths of the focus group and in-depth interview methods for gathering rich data must be balanced against their limitations. Primarily, comments expressed by participants are not generalizable and instead should be regarded as a point of departure for future study. Grouping by age and ethnicity risks assertions among readers that findings are complete and universal. Risks of essentializing and improbabilities associated with deeply probing for intra-group differences also exist. Importantly, masculinity and femininity are global, higher order constructs and cannot be measured directly (Spence, 1984).

Future opportunities to use these findings and to continue building GRC theory include closely scrutinizing mental masculinities’ interplay with clinging vestiges of patriarchy fueled by traditional hegemonic gender role norms, using quantitative methods and larger samples,

adding additional ethnic groups (including older Asian men) and gender identities, including boys and grandfathers for greater age group comparison simulating a longitudinal perspective, probing faith/religion as an identity dimension, and expanding probes of masculinities and ethnic culture further beyond U.S. shores. Future studies also should consider ways men negotiate masculine GRC as they travel and encounter cultural differences.

On Valuing Mental over Physical Qualities in Defining Masculinities

Clearly, the two generations of men consulted have very definite ideas about what masculinity means and experiences with how it plays out in their daily lives. Masculinities, in terms of mental qualities of character, attitude, responsibility, and confidence/assertiveness, differ from conceptions expressed two or more generations ago when masculinity was deeply entrenched in the physical (and/or was invisible). Beynon (2002) had posited that gendered physiological difference was losing ground as a defining feature of what it is to be a man today and the current study provides empirical evidence that supports the claim. The *Mental over Physical Masculinities* theme, in particular, should inspire body image researchers to reconsider operationalizing the concept as individuals' inner conceptualizations of their *outer* physical appearance. Importantly, dimensions of age and ethnic culture, as it intersects with gender and perceptions of masculinities, lends new texture to and broadens the gender roles literature and GRC theory development. Structuring research projects to ensure attention to diverse groups concurs with the work of critics who support the plural, *masculinities*—for masculinity is not a singular concept (neither one distinct experience, nor a unique perception). Moreover, considering Caucasian/White as a distinct ethnic group and removing it from center of analysis also advances identity intersectionalities research.

Tensions with Hegemonic Masculinities

Overall, findings reveal tensions that exist within men on their “gender role journey” (O’Neil et al. 1993)—as if many are at the second phase of a transition from traditional hegemonic norms to thinking of masculinities in non-physical ways, but experiencing some degree of dissonance in struggling to deal with conflicting views. In particular, men are challenged to resist the powerful visual images of the male body and masculinities promoted by mass media—not only their own consumption of them, but the images’ influences on women whom men view as potential sexual partners. As noted in a few anomalies, hegemonic masculinity still has a foothold in ways men define

their sense of self, as evidenced in themes that characterize homophobia, fear of the feminine, the enduring breadwinner role model, and association of metrosexualism with homosexuality. Indeed, these patterns mirror several of the dimensions included in Levant’s (1996) operationalization of traditional masculinity ideology, such as avoiding all things feminine, restricting emotional life, emphasizing toughness and aggression, and hatred of homosexuals. Findings of masculinities discussions among age-and-ethnically diverse men in the current study seem to have little in common with outcomes of Anderson’s (2009) ethnographic studies of exclusively Caucasian/White heterosexual men who rejected homophobia, violence and misogyny; the basis of his “inclusive masculinity theory” designed to explain contemporary normative masculine discourses and inclusivity of gay men.

Fears Old and New

Many factors threaten any comfort or certainty men feel in their masculine identities—as expressed in fears, anxieties and sometimes flashes of anger when men discuss mass media influences, homosexuality, and branded masculinity of the metrosexual. In particular, media images of male physicality threaten to trump and destabilize advances in moving masculinities beyond their hegemonic physical body roots. Also, fears associated with loss of privilege—especially among young Caucasian/White men—may give cause for celebration among some pro-feminist scholars; yet building a gender-neutral future on a foundation of fear and anxiety among men is not ideal. MacInnes (1998) posited that “masculinity can be seen as the last ideological defense of male supremacy in a world that has already conceded that men and women are equal” (p. 59), but just how equal are men who conform to old media-induced standards that have fueled insecurity and inspired harmful behaviors among women?

Appendix: Focus Group and Interview Topic Guide Questions

1. What does “masculinity” mean? If you were asked to define this word for a new dictionary, what would you write?
2. What specific characteristics do you consider to be masculine?
3. How important do you think it is to other men your age to be considered masculine?
4. What about men your (Dad’s/uncle’s) (son’s/nephew’s) age? How important is it to them to be considered masculine?
5. How important is it to you to be considered masculine?

6. Where do people's perceptions of masculinity come from?
7. (If media are mentioned, follow up). How would you describe the relationship between the media and ways people think about masculinity?
8. What role does your ethnic background play in how you define masculinity?
9. If you moved to the U.S. at some point, what are the differences between ways masculinity is considered there as compared to here?
10. What else would you like to tell me about how you or others think about masculinity?

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